

GRACE *in* FOCUS

Believers and the Bema

Also in this issue...

*The Day of Wrath | What Does 2 Corinthians 5:17 Mean? | The Book of Job
Look, The Virgin Is With Child! | Beware of Calling Good Men Bad and Bad Men Good
What on Earth Is God Doing? | Father, Son, and Spirit
Plus Many More!*

In This Issue...

Letter from the Editor Bob Wilkin	3
Believers and the Bema Earl Radmacher	4
The Day of Wrath Ken Yates	7
What Does 2 Corinthians 5:17 Mean? Bob Wilkin	10
What's Been Happening at GES?	12
Look, The Virgin Is With Child! The Direct Prophecy of Isaiah 7:13-15 Philippe R. Sterling	13
Beware of Calling Good Men Bad and Bad Men Good Kathryn Wright	16
What on Earth Is God Doing? Psalm 110 Geoff Stevens	19
Does the Greek Word for Believe in the Gospel of John Mean "Continue to Believe"? Mike Lii	22

Father, Son, and Spirit - The Key to John 3 John H. Niemelä	26
More of What's Been Happening at GES?	29
The Bookstore	30
The Book of Job: Ancient Wisdom for Today's Believer Ken Pierce	35
You and Your Teaching 1 Timothy 4:16 Art Farstad	38
Must You Recognize That You Are a Sinner in Order to Be Saved? Ken Yates	41
What Does Praise the Lord Mean? Bob Wilkin	44
Most Popular GES YouTube Videos of 2024	47
2025 GES National Conference	48

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Letter from the Editor

In the March-April 2024 issue of our magazine, I wrote that Israel was still at war with terrorists. A ceasefire began in January. But how long will it last?

Antisemitism has been on the rise around the world.

Yet God has not forgotten His chosen people. One day soon, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to save His people from the Gentile armies that will surround Jerusalem at the end of the Tribulation.

Has the time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) ended? Zane Hodges thought it ended in 1967 after Israel took control of Jerusalem. He might be right. I am inclined to the view that the time of the Gentiles will end when the Lord saves Israel at the end of the Tribulation. Either way, He will deliver His people from the world's efforts to destroy them.

The Free Grace movement represents a very small segment of professing Christians. In a sense, we are like Israel—a small group that is opposed by great numbers of people.

We do not seek the approval of men (Gal 1:10-11). We seek God's approval (1 Cor 9:27; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 John 2:28).

The aim of *Grace in Focus* is to help you, the reader, gain and maintain the Lord's approval until He returns or you die. If we keep grace in focus, then we remain well-positioned to hear, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17).



Remember, the Free Grace position is much more than the promise of everlasting life to the believer, apart from works. It is also the call to follow Christ so that we might inherit His kingdom and rule with Him in the life to come. Grace is no license to sin. It is the liberating message that we can live the abundant life that God desires for His children (Galatians 5-6). ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wilkin". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Robert N. Wilkin

Believers and the Bema^{*}

By Earl Radmacher



**This article originally appeared in the May-June 1995 issue of *Grace in Focus*.*

The Lord Jesus Christ became sin for me. I owed a debt I couldn't pay. He paid a debt He didn't owe.

There are many people today who are right-fully distressed by the level of living of many of their fellow Christians, at least of those who profess life in Christ. They see them coming to the Lord Jesus, claiming Him as Savior, but showing little or no change in their lives. That is not only the observation of fellow Christians; that is the observation of such a neutral observer as the Gallup Poll, for when the Gallup Poll evaluates the lifestyles of all people, religious and not religious, it frankly sees little difference in the lifestyles and ethical systems of those who profess to be born again and those who do not. That is disconcerting, to say the least!

PROPPING UP THE GOSPEL

Consequently, there are many people today who, I think, are in danger of corrupting the Gospel of Grace because they want to keep adding to what is necessary in order to be a Christian. They talk about the fruits that are necessary or that must be evident if you are *really* a child of God.

Many wise pastors have insisted that the basis for knowing that I am a Christian is not what I do but what God's Word says about what *Christ* has done and continues to do for those who have believed (John 1:12; 1 John 5:13). I know I belong to Christ because I have believed in Jesus Christ as my only Savior and Redeemer from eternal destruction. It's not the evidences of my life that are my basis for knowing that. It's the Word of God. God said it. That settles it. I am fearful of those today who, because of a genuine, valid concern about the lack of growth and the lack of evident Christian lifestyle, are willing to try to prop up the gospel by adding to it.

Having said that, am I less concerned than some others about the failure of believers to move on to maturity in Christ? No, I am not uncon-

cerned about that. I am desperately concerned about it, for I believe that America probably has the largest spiritual nursery that it has ever had in its history, and that can be a real drain on our spiritual resources. We desperately need to move people out of the nursery and into the infantry. I believe that there is a missing note in evangelism that can be a legitimate corrective and a powerful motivator in place of what is being used in the compromise of the gospel today. And that is to move on in our thinking from justification, through sanctification, to glorification: What is going to happen to me in the life to come?

TRAINING FOR REIGNING

In 1 Cor 4:2, Paul tells us that "it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." What is a steward? A steward is a manager of somebody else's property or equipment. When I came into the family of God, He gave me a sovereign deposit and said, in effect, "Now take it and trade with it. Use it. Show Me what kind of commitment you have got. If you do nothing with it, you will get nothing." That's the gist of 1 Cor 3:12-15. Another illustration is wood, hay and stubble versus gold, silver, and precious stones. Everyone's work will be tried of what *sort*, right? The wood, hay, and stubble will be burned up, but the believer will be saved, "yet so as through fire" (v 15).ⁱ Why? Grace! Not by what he did. He will be in heaven because of what Jesus Christ did.

As I write these words, I stand in God's sight faultless and perfect because God Almighty sees me through Jesus Christ. There is no compromise to that. No one who knows Jesus Christ will ever appear at the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20. Believers "shall" appear, however, at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the *Bema*ⁱⁱ) and will be judged by their works (2 Cor 5:10).

It is significant to note that both the unregenerate and the regenerate will be judged by their works. The *unregenerate* will be judged by their works at the Great White Throne Judgment, and the result of that judgment will be degrees of eternal punishment in hell. The *regenerate* will be judged by their works at the Bema, and the result of that judgment will be either reward or the lack of it.

I know I belong to Christ because I have believed in Jesus Christ as my only Savior and Redeemer from eternal destruction.

I can never be judged for my sins because my sins have been paid for. The Lord Jesus Christ became sin for me. I owed a debt I couldn't pay. He paid a debt He didn't owe. Christ, who knew no sin, became the epitome of sin for me in order that I, who knew no righteousness, might become the righteousness of God in Christ. What a transaction that was! What an exchange! All of my sins traded in for His righteousness.

Don't compromise that. Don't try to motivate the person to good works by adding to that. No, the motivation to good works is the Judgment Seat of Christ. And if we would have people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ focus more on the Judgment Seat of Christ, on their glorification, on their manifestation in the life to come, they would be able to agree with Paul that these light momentary afflictions are producing for them an eternal and exceedingly heavy weight of glory (see 2 Cor 4:17).

GETTING READY FOR THE BEMA

Today I am becoming what I will be in the life to come, and that motivates me. I don't feel like I want to hold back. I want to give it my all. I don't need to live a *long time*. What I *do* need to do is live *qualitatively* because a *short life* of that kind on earth will have a long effect through all eternity—a weight of glory, a kind of manifestation where I shall reflect the glory of Jesus Christ forever and ever. If you don't know Christ, come drink of the water free of charge (Rev 22:17). Don't start talking about what you will have to do; you haven't got the grace to do it. He doesn't come asking you to bring something. God comes saying, "I have something for you. Come and receive it. Come and get it." Then when you have received it, when you've been made new in Him, when you've been given life, you will recognize that it's not only your privilege to have life but it's also your possibility to faithfully use the resources He gave you to help set up your position of service with Christ in the life to come.

But reader, if you know Him as your Savior, do a progress check. Where are you in the process of becoming? Do you like what you see? If you don't, you have time to make some changes that will affect you in your position and privilege with Christ in the life to come. Become a believer who's ready for the Bema. ■



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¹ Editor's note: Dr. Radmacher understood *saved* in 1 Cor 3:15 to refer to salvation from eternal condemnation, as nearly everyone did thirty years ago. Since then, another view has emerged. *Saved* there may refer to being *spiritually healthy* at the Bema. Those who, like Paul and Apollos, built up the church (1 Cor 3:5-15) will be spiritually healthy at the Bema. See "Saved, Yet Through Fire, Part 1" (<https://faithalone.org/blog/saved-yet-through-fire-part-1-1-cor-315/>) and "Saved, Yet Through Fire, Part 2" (<https://faithalone.org/blog/saved-yet-through-fire-part-2-1-corinthians-35-17/>).

² *Bema* is the Greek word for the tribunal judge's bench, or judgment seat.



The Day of Wrath

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

In the first two chapters of Romans, Paul speaks of *the wrath of God*. When they hear that phrase, most Evangelicals assume that it refers to the lake of fire. Unbelievers, it is thought, will be cast into hell and experience God's wrath forever. Unbelievers will spend eternity in the lake of fire. But is that what Paul meant by *the wrath of God in Romans 1-2*?

WRATH IN ROMANS 1-2

A closer look at Romans 1-2 leads to the conclusion that *wrath* in these chapters does not refer to a fiery hell. In Rom 1:18, Paul says that we can see the wrath of God in the *present* age. The verse reads, "For the wrath of God is revealed

from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." It is not something we will see in the future when unbelievers are judged at the Great White Throne. Paul says it is seen when men act unrighteously. Sin in the life of a person brings the wrath of God in this present world.

That is the way we should understand *wrath* in Rom 2:5 as well. Paul writes, "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath..." *Wrath* in 1:18 and 2:5 refers to the same thing. In 2:2-5 Paul says that people are storing up wrath now by their sinful actions. If sin results in God's wrath in this present world (1:18), the "day of wrath" is the time in this life when God's judgment falls upon a person because of his deeds. Our

sins have negative consequences here and now. If we are living in an ungodly manner, a modern-day idiom expresses our situation: “The hammer is about to fall.”

Hodges gives a great summary of what Paul means by “the wrath of God” in Rom 1:18 and 2:5. He writes:

The fundamental truth expressed in this unit (1:18–2:5) is that all men... are subject to God’s wrath as a result of their sinful behavior. This wrath is not eschatological, but a distressing present reality (Hodges, “Romans,” *GNTC*, 305).

But many disagree. Evangelical tradition is strong. It maintains that *the wrath of God* must refer to eternal punishment. One writer admits that *wrath* in 1:18 speaks of the habitual conduct of the unbeliever. However, the same writer says that in 2:5 it speaks of a future judgment when each person will receive what he deserves. The good works a person does reveal whether he will be saved from hell or not. Witmer comments, “A person who continually does evil and rejects the truth shows that he is unregenerate, and therefore will be an object of God’s wrath” (“Romans” in *BKC*, 445).

In this world,
obedience to
the Lord will also
allow us to avoid
His wrath and
gain His blessings.

Mounce says that the wrath of God in Romans 1–2 is a present reality, but is “primarily eschatological.” *The wrath of God* describes the eternal destiny, or experience, of the unbeliever in the lake of fire (Mounce, *Romans*, 77, 90).

These writers disagree with Hodges and maintain that one’s works determine his eternal

destiny because they indicate whether he is a believer or not. The ungodly unbeliever will receive God’s wrath in the lake of fire. He will find that out on the “day of wrath” when he is cast into hell.

But *the day of wrath* does not refer to the time when unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire. Many OT writers speak of that day and say that it occurs in this present life. They agree with Paul: People can experience God’s wrath in this world because of their unrighteous deeds.

THE DAY OF WRATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Prov 11:1-4, Solomon speaks of a dishonest businessman who uses his scales to cheat people out of their money. He is proud because he thinks he is clever in his deception and can pull the wool over his customers’ eyes. Solomon describes these actions as perverse.

No doubt, such practices will often result in momentary wealth. The proud, sinful, dishonest businessman thinks that his money will save him from any adversity. But Solomon says these riches will be of “no profit in the day of wrath” (11:4).

Solomon sees the day of wrath as something that comes upon a person in this present life. He says that a righteous life will deliver a person from wrath (11:6). Solomon’s point is that when trouble comes into our lives, righteousness is much more valuable than riches, especially those gained by deception.

A Christian businessman who is dishonest cannot be cast into hell. He has eternal life that can never be lost. But he can experience the wrath of God. That wrath can come in various ways. Perhaps his customers will figure out what he has been doing, and his reputation will be ruined. This will crush his pride. He might lose his business and a way to make a living. Perhaps his actions will result in huge fines or even imprisonment. Perhaps wrath will be experienced through a guilty conscience or the constant fear that he will be found out.

Evangelical writers basically agree. One says that “the day of wrath” here is physical death. Wealth cannot save one from such a fate. Another

holds that it is more general and can refer to the different ways God can judge a person in this life, whether he is a believer or not (Buzzell, “Proverbs,” *BKC*, 928; Ross, “Proverbs,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 116).

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In Ezek 7:19, the prophet predicts a coming “day of the wrath of the Lord.” All agree that this day was experienced by the people of Judah when Babylon defeated them and took them into captivity. Ezekiel mentions their empty “stomachs,” which describes how famine killed those inside Jerusalem when the city was destroyed in 586 BC. All of this happened because of their “iniquity” (Alexander, “Ezekiel,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 686). At that time, the Lord repaid them for their sins.

The book of Zephaniah has a very similar passage. The prophet speaks of a coming “day of the Lord’s wrath,” when the whole land will be devoured (Zeph 1:18). It will come against Judah because of her sin of idolatry (Zeph 1:4-5). Baker points out that this day of God’s wrath fell on God’s people during Zephaniah’s lifetime when Judah fell to the Babylonians (Baker, “Zephaniah,” *New Bible Commentary*, 852).

Job also mentions a “day of wrath” (Job 21:30). It is in the context of suffering. He is going through great difficulties and complains to his friends. Why are so many wicked people not going through the things he is going through? *The day of wrath* does

not refer to the time when unbelievers are cast into hell, but to a time of suffering calamity in this life (Alden, *Job*, 227). Job’s friends were saying that he was experiencing the wrath of God because of his sins.

CONCLUSION

Many Christians see Romans as an evangelistic book that tells unbelievers how to be saved from the lake of fire. As a result, when Paul speaks of “the wrath of God” in Romans, they see it as a description of hell. The context, however, argues against that view.

There is widespread agreement that in the writings of OT prophets such as Solomon, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and Job, *the wrath of God* and *the day of [that] wrath* do not refer to the lake of fire but to the calamitous effects that sin can have in the lives of both believers and unbelievers.

That is what *wrath* means in Romans as well. Lopez is correct when, in an understatement, he comments that it is highly questionable whether God’s wrath should ever be understood as eternal judgment (Lopez, “Romans,” *GNTC*, 628).

Eternal life is given free when a person believes in Jesus Christ for it. Works play no part in receiving that gift. Our works neither prove that we are saved nor keep us eternally saved.

But works play a very important role in the life of a believer. They will determine his rewards in the world to come. In this world, obedience to the Lord will also allow us to avoid His wrath and gain His blessings. Sin can cause some devastating consequences in a person’s life. On that point, Job, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Solomon, and Paul all agree. ■



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, *Mark: Lessons in Discipleship*, is a wonderful explanation of Christ’s call to discipleship. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.

What Does 2 Cor 5:17 Mean?

By Bob Wilkin

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (NKJV).

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **the new creation has come**: The old has gone, the new is here! (NIV).

So if any one [be] in Christ, **[there is] a new creation**; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new (Darby).

Was Paul saying that when a person is born again, all his sinful desires have ceased? Was he saying that at the moment of faith, one is spiritually mature?

Hardly. See Paul's own testimony in Rom 7:13-25 about his early Christian experience of fighting fleshly lusts.

Also, read Paul's two letters to the Corinthians. Was their behavior suddenly and radically changed? Or did they need to grow? See also Paul's letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians. Growth takes time and is not guaranteed.

The Greek of the first part of 2 Cor 5:17 is this: *Hōste ei tis en Christō kainē ktisis*. It's important to note that there are no words for *he is* or *there is* in the original text, which can significantly impact our interpretation.

The NIV and Darby translations suggest inserting the words *there is* before "a new creation." So does *The New Geneva Study Bible*.

Paul is saying that our worldview changes when we are born again. We suddenly realize that we are



part of a new world. Some have everlasting life and are part of God's forever family. We will all be together forever. Others lack everlasting life, and unless they come to faith before they die, they will spend eternity separated from us and from God's kingdom and family.

It is not that our behavior or desires change when we are born again. It is that we realize that God is bringing in something radically new. While the kingdom is not yet here, citizens of that kingdom are here, and the Lord Jesus is soon to return to establish it.

The verses before and after 2 Corinthians 5:17 support that interpretation. In verse 16, Paul said that we no longer regard anyone according to the flesh. People are not primarily viewed as Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor, or male or female. People are

Was Paul saying that when a person is born again, all his sinful desires have ceased? Was he saying that at the moment of faith, one is spiritually mature?



either in God's family, or they are not. In verse 20, Paul says that we plead with unbelievers to be reconciled to God.

Did you have that experience when you came to faith? Did you become concerned for the salvation of your friends and loved ones? Did you begin to pray that they would come to faith? Did you look forward to the soon return of Christ? If so, you were experiencing part of this new creation worldview.

Furnish makes this excellent comment:

The Greek has only *kainē ktisis* (a new creation), so a subject and verb must be supplied; either "he is" (as in most English versions) or there is (as in Mof., NEB, JB). The latter is preferable because the context, as well as the background of the expression *kainē kti-*

sis in apocalyptic Judaism, suggests that something more inclusive than the new being of individual believers is in mind. In Paul's letters, *ktisis* virtually always refers to the creation in its entirety (Rom 1:20, 25; 8:19, 20, 21, 22; the one exception is Rom 8:39), and it is wrong to follow the Vulgate in translating it here as "creature" (so, e.g., KJV, ASV, Wey.). Paul uses the same phrase, *a new creation*, in Gal 6:15, and he appears to have been the one who introduced it into the vocabulary of the Christian church (*II Corinthians*, pp. 314-15).

Garland agrees, saying, "In the context, he is talking about changing one's way of looking at things; and this change, which occurs at conversion, is a subjective experience" (*2 Corinthians*, p. 286). I think by *subjective experience* he means that individual believers comprehend this new creation differently. And our grasp of the new creation that has invaded our world can and should grow over time.

Lenski comments, "'Creation' leads us to think of what God did when he created the world" (*1-2 Corinthians*, p. 1039). The new creation is not yet complete. It is just the beginning. Yet to unfold are the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the new heavens and the new earth. All of that is part of the new creation. What God began in the Garden of Eden is in the process of being restored in the new creation.

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. That is good news. There's a new world coming.

Keep grace in focus. ■■■



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

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Ken Yates, Ken White, and both Marinos with GES Conferees in the Dominican Republic



Marino Martinez, Marino Monegro, Ken White, and Ken Yates in the DR at the church



Marino Martinez, Dylan Robles, Marino Monegro, and Ken Yates in the mountains of the DR



Bob debating OSAS with Steve Gregg. Donnie Budinsky was the moderator.



Kathryn teaching at the Coppel Bible women's retreat (with seventy-seven attendees)



The women Kathryn spoke to at the Coppel Bible Women's Conference in Oklahoma



Ken with Brenda Schwarzkopf, daughter Jessica, and family friend Corey at Bayside. What an honor to meet them.

LOOK, THE VIRGIN IS WITH CHILD!

The Direct Prophecy of Isaiah 7:13-15

By Philippe R. Sterling



The virginal conception of Jesus was one of the signs that confirmed Him as the messianic son of David. God enabled a young Jewish virgin to have a baby in accordance with what He had revealed to the eighth-century BC prophet Isaiah.

The messianic prophecy of Isa 7:13-15 continued the thread of the Gen 3:15 prophecy of the seed of the woman. It was a direct prophecy of the virginal conception of the Messiah. The Messiah would be the seed of the woman.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Crisis and Fear (Isa 7:1-2)

The international and domestic crises of our day cause people to fear. In 734 BC, the threat of attack by enemies caused great fear in the king and people of Judah.

Rezin was king of Syria, whose main city was Damascus. Pekah was king of Israel—also called Ephraim, the name of its leading tribe. Israel's capital was in Samaria. Rezin and Pekah formed a coalition to attack Judah and its capital, Jerusalem.

Ahaz, the grandson of Uzziah, was on the throne of Judah in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 16:1-2; 2 Chron 28:1). He was a wicked king who worshiped false gods and burned some of his children in sacrifice.

News of the impending invasion came to “the house of David.” The danger to the house of David indicates the messianic significance of the passage. The threat terrified Ahaz and his people. He appealed to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, for help. He did not appeal to Yahweh.

MESSAGE TO BELIEVE IN YAHWEH FOR DELIVERANCE (ISA 7:3-9)

Yahweh sent Isaiah to reassure Ahaz concerning the threat. He told Isaiah to take his young son, Shear-Jashub, and meet Ahaz at the aqueduct of

the upper pool where he would be preparing for the attack. The presence of Isaiah's son would be significant.

The reassuring prophetic word to Ahaz was that he need not fear the two burnt-out logs of Rezin and Pekah. They had plotted to conquer Judah and replace Ahaz with the son of Tabel. Had they been successful, it would have put an end to the house of David and the messianic hope.

The Lord assured Ahaz that nothing would come of the plan to replace him and divide his land. Within sixty-five years, Israel would not even exist. Tiglath-Pileser would conquer Israel in 732 BC and send captives back to Assyria (2 Kgs 17:23). Assyria would eliminate the nation altogether in 721 BC, deporting its people to Assyria and repopulating the land with other peoples (2 Kgs 17:24). Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal would continue population transfers so that by 669 BC, sixty-five years after Isaiah's prophecy, the land of Ephraim would be wholly inhabited by other nationalities (Ezra 4:2, 10).

Yahweh warned Ahaz through Isaiah: "If you will not believe, surely you will not be established." Two forms of the Hebrew verb *'aman*, "belief or trust," form a word play in the sentence. The first verb is in the causative form and means "to believe," or to consider something reliable. The second verb is in the passive form and means "be confirmed" or established. The negative conditional statement may have been a way of encouraging a positive response: If Ahab would believe, Yahweh would keep him safe and secure. It may have also implied that the king would not rely on Yahweh.

OFFER OF—AND REFUSAL TO ASK FOR—A SIGN

The Lord encouraged Ahaz to believe by offering him any sign he desired (Isa 7:10-11). It could come from "either in the depth or in the height above." That was a way of saying he could ask for any sign, natural or supernatural.

A little over twenty years later, Yahweh gave Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, a supernatural sign: The shadow on Ahaz's sundial went backward ten degrees as confirmation of a fifteen-year extension of Hezekiah's life (Isa 38:7-8, 22). In stark contrast to his father, Hezekiah had prayed to Yahweh.

Ahaz cleverly avoided asking for a sign by saying that he would not test Yahweh (Isa 7:12). Deuteronomy 6:16 had instructed God's people not to test Him. That did not apply here, since Yahweh Himself had offered a sign to elicit belief. Ahaz was an idolater who had already called upon Assyria for aid. If he asked for a sign, he would be relying on Yahweh. If he did not ask, it would be an indication of unbelief. He faked devoutness with his statement.

FAR PROPHETIC SIGN

Syria and Israel wanted to replace Ahaz with the son of Tabel, thereby getting rid of the house of David. Yahweh would not let that happen; He had promised David an eternal house and throne (2 Sam 7:16).

Yahweh, through Isaiah, directly addressed the house of David (Isa 7:13a). There is a change from singular pronouns and verbs to plural ones. Isaiah

Immanuel
came just as
Isaiah had
predicted eight
centuries
earlier. He came
to take away
the sin of the
world and
guarantee
everlasting life
to all who
simply believe
in Him for it.

had used the singular when addressing Ahaz. He now used the plural to address the house of David.

Ahaz had tried God's patience by refusing a sign, so Yahweh would grant the house of David a sign of His choosing (Isa 7:13b-14a). It would be a miraculous sign.

He promised that a pregnant *almah* would bear a son (Isa 7:14b). Isaiah foresaw *the* specific woman (*ha-almah*).

The Hebrew word *almah* referred to a young woman who had entered puberty. This would be a young maiden in the purest sense (compare Gen 24:43 concerning Rebekah and Exod 2:8 concerning Miriam). The LXX used the Greek word *parthenos* ("virgin") in its translation of *almah*. Matthew quoted the LXX passage to indicate its fulfillment with Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt 1:23).

That virgin would be with child! It was a miraculous sign. Isaiah foresaw the specific pregnant virgin from the house of David who would bear a son.

The virgin mother would give her son the title *Immanuel*, which means "God [E] with us [*im-manu*]" (Isa 7:14c). Isaiah identifies the land as belonging to Immanuel (Isa 8:8). Additionally, the child would receive other divine throne names such as "Mighty God" (Isa 9:6). This future king would have a supernatural birth, secure the line of David, and be God with us.

The child would eat "curds and honey" as he grew up. In this passage curds and honey represent the food of oppression (Isa 7:15). The coming Assyrian oppression would leave fields uncultivated and livestock roaming. However, bees would pollinate the flowers and produce honey in abundance, and the livestock would produce milk. The people remaining in the land would therefore have to live on dairy products and honey (Isa 7:21-22). The virgin's son would be born and grow up during a time of oppression of the Jewish people. The expression "know to refuse the evil and choose the good" means that the son has grown to an age of accountability.

NEAR PROPHETIC SIGN

After giving the house of David the far prophetic sign of the virgin conception of the Child to (Isa 7:16), Isaiah used his own child to give Ahaz a near prophetic sign.

Yahweh had instructed Isaiah to bring Shear-Jashub with him to his encounter with Ahaz. Isaiah pointed to his young son and said, "For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings." Isaiah's son functioned as a sign to the king (see Isa 8:18).

Isaiah was once again addressing Ahaz. He returned to the use of the singular pronoun and verb. Before Shear-Jashub reached an accountable age, Syria and Israel would no longer be a threat. Tiglath-Pileser would defeat them in less than two years.

The Assyrians would also invade Judah (Isa 7:17). They would so ruin the land that people would have to live among briars and thorns and survive on curds and honey (7:18-25).

CONCLUSION

Isaiah's prophecy of the divine Child's throne titles (9:1-7) and of His identity as the Root of Jesse (11:1-10) would follow his direct prophecy of the Child's virgin conception. Micah, Isaiah's contemporary, would affirm the Child's pre-existence and foretell His place of birth (Mic 5:2-5).

The far prediction given to the house of David was fulfilled in the virgin conception of Jesus (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Immanuel came just as Isaiah had predicted eight centuries earlier. He came to take away the sin of the world and guarantee everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it. He will come again to establish the messianic kingdom. ■



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A MEAN MAN

Over the Christmas holiday I heard an interesting story about the ill-tempered character Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's novella *A Christmas Carol*. According to some historians, Dickens was visiting Edinburgh, Scotland, in the early 1840s when he stumbled across a tombstone in Canongate Kirkyard. The stone read "Ebenezer Lennox Scroggie, a meal man," since he was a grain merchant. However, Dickens misread it as "a mean man." Dickens assumed this must have been a particularly terrible man because of the engraved inscription. The character of Ebenezer Scrooge was born.

What an unfortunate legacy for poor Mr. Scroggie!

Research suggests that this story is likely apocryphal. There is no record of anyone by that name living in Edinburgh at that time. Dickens himself implied two other possible sources for Mr. Scrooge, John Elwes and Daniel Dancer.

Whether this story is true or not, the fact is that good men can be defamed. The inverse is also true: Bad men are sometimes praised and go down in history with respected reputations.

A FOOLISH MAN

When I heard the story about Mr. Scroggie, I was reminded of the prophet's words in Isa 32:5:

The foolish person will no longer be called generous, Nor the miser said to be bountiful;

In this passage, Isaiah is describing what the coming age will be like when the Lord returns and establishes the millennial kingdom. In v 1, Isaiah says that there is a coming King who will rule righteously—an obvious reference to the Lord. Isaiah then describes three groups of people in this coming age. First, alongside the King, there will be princes who rule with Him. It is said that these princes will rule *with justice* (v 1). This reflects the language of the NT (2 Tim 2:12; Luke 19:17-19) and the doctrine of rewards: Faithful believers will

Beware of Calling Good Men Bad and Bad Men Good

By Kathryn Wright

rule with the Lord, serving alongside Him during His reign (Rev 20:4) and then into eternity.

This description of the co-rulers stands in sharp contrast to the princes and rulers described earlier in the book of Isaiah (1:23; 3:12-14; 5:8) who were greedy, self-seeking, and cowardly. While they might have had the reputation of being good rulers, they reflected the character of Dickens' Ebenezer. Due to their religious and political neglect of the people, those leaders ushered in Israel's ruin and ultimately brought about Jerusalem's fall at the hands of the Babylonians.

In contrast, Isaiah sees a future for Israel when Christ's co-rulers will mirror the caring character of the Good Shepherd. Unlike the rulers of Isaiah's



Paul said that when the Lord returns, all Christians will give an account of their deeds done in the body, both good and bad (2 Cor 5:10).

day, these co-rulers will act as a cover from the wind and storms (v 2). They will cultivate a government that provides for its people. The people, the second group in this passage, will be cared for by these princes. These co-rulers will be like rivers in the desert and shade in a weary land. Under the leadership of the King and His cohorts, the people of this coming kingdom will no longer suffer from

spiritual blindness (29:9; 31:1), for they will have eyes to see and ears to listen, guided by righteous spiritual leaders.

However, a third group of people is described in this passage: the foolish, who practice ungodliness. During the millennial kingdom, an ever-growing population eventually numbering in the tens

of billions will still be in the flesh and capable of sinning. While church-age believers will be in glorified bodies and incapable of sinning, there will be people born (Isa 11:6; 65:20-25) in natural bodies who will continue to sin and die until all things are made new after the thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev 21:1-4). During those thousand years, those who practice evil will suffer the consequences of their actions, which could include earning a bad reputation.

Isaiah says that there is a coming King who will rule righteously—an obvious reference to the Lord.

It is in this context that Isaiah says the foolish will no longer be *called generous* or *bountiful* (v 5). In other words, during the reign of Christ, a person's reputation will be a true reflection of his life and character. Fruchtenbaum comments:

It will be a proper evaluation of mankind. According to verse 5, there is going to be a cessation of all social cover-up...There will be certainty as to what is right and what is wrong. No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected (*The Book of Isaiah*: Ariel's Bible Commentary, p. 338).

This is not always true today. Often, people who live immoral and evil lives are praised by the world. Good men are slandered, and bad men are exalted. The promise that Isaiah proclaims is an encouraging one. In the coming age, evil people will no longer be called generous.

The passage concludes with another encouragement. In the coming age, not only will wicked men be known for their deeds, but the generous man will be known for his as well (v 9). The Mr. Scroggies of Christ's kingdom will not be defamed.

WHAT WILL YOU BE CALLED?

While Isaiah 32 is directed to the nation of Israel, there is an application for the church-age believer. Paul said that when the Lord returns, all Christians will give an account of their deeds done in the body, both good and bad (2 Cor 5:10). This judgment will determine our rewards and reputation in the coming age. On that day, there will be many surprises. Motives will be revealed, and things done in darkness will come to light. Those who have godly reputations according to men may receive a different review from the Lord, while many who have poor reputations according to the world (Heb 11:35-38) will be praised by their King. Social pariahs who faithfully served the Lord, such as sinful women (Luke 7:36-47; Heb 11:31; Jas 2:25) and tax collectors (Matt 21:31; Lk 5:27; 18:9-14), will be heralded as righteous by the coming King, while many self-righteous believers will be rebuked. On that day, the true character of each person will be tested and revealed.

People, both believers and unbelievers, call us many things during this life. Everyone has an opinion, and these are often aired. Sometimes, these opinions get the facts wrong. In some cases, a popular book paints a false picture.

Like poor Mr. Scroggie, many believers gain poor reputations and legacies. However, the opinions of men are irrelevant. In a future day, the Lord will give His review of our lives, and our eternal reputations will be accurately revealed.

As one poet wrote: "What will they say when you enter your grave? The opinions of men to praise or defame...Ah, but answer me this! The prize of the wise? What will HE say on the day you arise?" ■



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What on Earth Is God Doing? Psalm 110

By Geoff Stevens

Another school shooting. This time a Christian school. Many people are asking where God was. Why doesn't God do something about all the tragedy in the world? Doesn't He care?

Psalm 110 answers this question. Surprisingly, King David was invited to hear God the Father conversing with the Son, which is so significant

that NT writers quote or reference this chapter more than any other OT passage.

Three problems arose for God when Adam and Eve sinned:

1. How can God's kingdom be reclaimed?
2. How could God redeem rebellious humanity?
3. How can man gain everlasting life and be prepared to have dominion in the coming kingdom?

Psalm 110 shares the Father's brilliant plan for solving these dilemmas and helps us to understand His actions on earth. We will see why the Father invited King David to overhear the conversation and include it in the Bible. It is one of the most critical chapters in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The first verse has one of the few OT uses of LORD (Yahweh) that does not reference Jesus, but God the Father. David hears the LORD (God the Father) saying to his Lord (*Adonai*), that is, Jesus:

If we faithfully follow Him, one day we can rule alongside this great, noble King and Priest, ride into battle, and vanquish evil with Him!

“Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

In v 2, He speaks about His rule going out from Zion (= Jerusalem), therefore extending over His enemies.

Verses 5-6 form an *inclusio*, or bracket, so this psalm begins and ends with the promised victory the Father will bring about for the Davidic King, the Son. In veiled Hebrew poetry, we find this promised King, not an ordinary one, but the Seed of the woman promised in Gen 3:15, would ultimately have victory over Satan. He will come “in the day of His wrath” (the Tribulation), “judge the nations,” “fill the places with dead bodies” (the Battle of Armageddon), and execute the leaders of many countries. He will also defeat the devil and throw him into the lake of fire. This great coming King assures victory!

In the Davidic line, there were many kings; most were wicked. But humanity needed a king who would inspire them to follow willingly. We need a properly vetted King—One not like us—to whom we can give our allegiance.

We need a noble, entirely just, all-powerful King who will finally punish evil, do away with the curse and its effects, and destroy the devil forever. The drama of redemption further unfolds through the Davidic Covenant by alerting us that the “Seed

of the woman” would be a perfect human king, battle-tested and proven to be incorruptible.

What is currently happening in this aspect of God’s plan? After the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Davidic King, God the Father told the Son (Eph 1:20) to sit next to His throne (a place of great honor) until the Father destroys and subjugates (makes a footstool of) His enemies. Thus, God the Father’s plan of destroying evil and the devil and restoring the rightful King is on schedule, and the entire creation (Romans 8) awaits this great day. Jesus claimed that this verse spoke about Him (Matt 22:41-46) when He asked the Pharisees how David could call his son his Lord.

The third, probably biggest, problem the Fall created was how mankind can once again rule. The key to this passage, and why the Father included David in the conversation, is this fantastic concept of mankind’s voluntarily deciding to follow the Lord into battle: “Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power” (v 3).

Men avoid suffering. We want comfort and instant gratification. How can anyone motivate people to go into battle and endure suffering and even death? We have difficulty doing difficult things without immediate payoff. However, this all-inspiring King will change the human heart.



“In the beauties of holiness” (v 3) speaks of the imputed righteousness of Christ that these warriors will have at the Second Coming. They will be “clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (Rev 19:14).

In v 4, the Father promises the Son that He will be the much-needed priest of humanity “according to the order of Melchizedek.” This priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood because Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, who united both offices—the king-priest of ancient Jerusalem (Gen 14:18). He was a forerunner of Christ (Heb 5:6; 6:20; 7:17,21).

Blood is the currency of the spiritual realm. God’s justice required pure, innocent blood to pay the ransom for humanity. This extraordinary High Priest sacrificed Himself on the cross for all humanity.

The Father’s brilliant plan of the incarnation and the Son’s inspiring character fully solve our dilemma. This plan to defeat the devil stunningly through the incarnation inspires humanity to engage in freewill service to the story’s hero, the Descendant of David.

When human beings realize that in this King, they also have a High Priest who sacrificed Himself, who suffered for them, and who is understanding and compassionate, they cannot help but rush to volunteer their lives as freewill offerings (Rom 12:1-2) to this great King-Priest! Realize, of course, that even most born-again people today do not realize these things. Most are stuck in bondage to legalism and false theology.

God has everything under His control. He is building His Church and allowing us to earn the right to rule with Him (cf. Eph 1:17-23; 2 Tim 2:12; 4:7-8).

He invites us to suffer and to follow Him until every seat in His ruling entourage is filled (Rom 8:17b-30). Just as the King had to be vetted, so we, too, must be vetted. Will we endure suffering? (2 Tim 2:12). As we gain “wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1:17) of this great King-Priest’s Personhood, we will lay down our agenda and pick up His; we will serve the local church.

This King is entirely noble; righteousness will win over evil. His life of suffering is an example to follow; He walked in my shoes. He gave His life for us, compassionately understands our weaknesses, and prays for us! The brilliance of the Father’s plan and the awe-inspiring King-Priest are worth giving our all to! If we faithfully follow Him, one day we can rule alongside this great, noble King and Priest, ride into battle, and vanquish evil with Him!

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awaits this great day.

This encouraged King David to remain faithful, as it should all believers down through the ages. God is looking for a few good men and women to rule with the Lord Jesus Christ when He returns (Matt 22:14). ■



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Does the Greek Word for
Believe
in the Gospel of John Mean
"Continue to Believe"?
By Mike Lii

Have you ever heard someone who professes to know NT Greek teach that the Greek verb *pisteuō*, translated as “believe” in the Gospel of John, is in the Greek present tense, indicating continual action? According to these teachers, *believe* should really be understood as “continue to believe” throughout John’s Gospel. For them, “present continuous belief” means that a person not only remains persuaded of the truth until the end of his life, but also continues in faithfulness until the end of his life by surrendering to, committing to, and obeying Jesus, thereby persevering in good works.

Since most people are not as familiar with NT Greek as the teachers who make these claims, it can be intimidating and difficult to evaluate whether this continue-to-believe argument based on the Greek present tense has any merit. Ultimately,



these arguments rely on: “Trust me. I know Greek, so you don’t need to.” Thankfully, the greatest and perfect Evangelist, the Lord Jesus Christ, made it abundantly clear that this continue-to-believe teaching is incorrect. In the Gospel of John, His illustrations of the verb *believe* and of when the gift of everlasting life is received are clear. One does not need to know Greek in order to understand these illustrations and see the error of this continue-to-believe argument.

NICODEMUS AND BEING BORN AGAIN JOHN 3:1-21

In His conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus used the metaphor of being born again to illustrate what the reception of the gift of everlasting life is like: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless

one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Nicodemus was confused because he thought Jesus was referring to being born physically a second time, so he asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4).

*Everlasting life
that can never be
lost is received at
the very first
moment of belief
in Him for
everlasting life.*

Jesus clarified for Nicodemus that He was not speaking of a second physical birth, but of being born again in a spiritual sense: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:5-7).

Nicodemus needed a second birth. He needed to be born again.

How is one born again? Jesus gave Nicodemus the answer 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.”

In John 3, Jesus used the idea of being “born again” to illustrate what happens when one receives the gift of everlasting life. Physical birth is an irreversible event that happens at a specific point in time. Once one is born, the birthing process has ended. Once one is born, he cannot be unborn.

Being born again occurs the very moment one believes in Jesus for everlasting life. Jesus told

Nicodemus that he needed to be born again in a moment of time. Jesus did not tell Nicodemus to keep believing until the end of his life in order to be born again or to wait until the end of his life to find out whether he had been born again.

**THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AND ONE
DRINK OF THE LIVING WATER
JOHN 4:1-26**

In John 4:10, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that she needed to know two things in order to quench her spiritual thirst: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

*Jesus gave
Nicodemus the
answer in
John 3:16...
"whoever believes
in Him should not
perish but have
everlasting life".*

She needed to know 1) the gift of God, which is everlasting life, and 2) the identity of the One who gives it, Jesus Christ. The answer to her spiritual thirst was the “living water,” which is the saving message that whoever believes in Jesus for everlasting life has everlasting life (John 6:47).

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus illustrated the key difference between liquid water and living water in John 4:13-14: “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing

up into everlasting life.” In verse 13, drinking is a metaphor for believing (see John 6:35). Drinking ordinary, liquid water one time will temporarily assuage a person’s thirst. When the hydration wears off one will thirst and need to drink this water again. This pattern will recur over and over.

However, drinking living water—Jesus’ saving message—is quite different. One drink of living water quenches one’s thirst forever.¹ The very moment one believes the saving message, he has everlasting life (“fountain of water”) that can never be lost springing up in him. The question is not how long one has been drinking living water, that is, how long one has been continuing to believe the saving message. The question is whether one has ever drunk the living water by believing Jesus’ saving message.

It is self-evident that if one continuously drinks physical water, one will never be physically thirsty. If the Greek present tense implies continuous drinking (continuous believing) as some Greek teachers say, then there is no difference between the thirst-quenching properties of liquid water and those of living water. There would be no point to Jesus’ illustration. But because living water requires only one drink (not continual drinking) only one moment of belief in Jesus for everlasting life that can never be lost—Jesus, the perfect Evangelist, gave this illustration.

**ONGOING EATING OF MANNA
VERSUS ONE-TIME CONSUMPTION OF
THE BREAD OF LIFE
JOHN 6:26-35**

In John 6:26-35, Jesus likened receiving the gift of everlasting life to eating the bread of life. The illustration begins in verse 26, with Jesus’ referring back to the physical barley loaves and fish that He provided earlier in the chapter. When His audience focused on working the works of God, Jesus stated their need to believe in Him: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29).

Later, Jesus spoke of the “bread of heaven” (v 32) and the “bread of life” in contrast to the manna given to their forefathers in the desert. Jesus said:



“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

If one partakes of the bread of life by believing in Jesus for everlasting life, that person will never hunger. If one continually eats bread or even manna, then one will never be physically hungry. However, if continuous eating/believing is required, then there is no point in Jesus’ contrasting His bread of heaven with ordinary bread or manna. Jesus’ gift of everlasting life is unlike ordinary bread or even manna from above. Consuming one bite (one moment of belief in Jesus) satisfies one’s hunger for everlasting life forever.

CONCLUSION

Context drives the understanding of passages and the meaning of the Greek present tense. At times, context may imply the Greek continuous action present tense, but this is not the case with these passages from the Gospel of John. As the Lord Jesus, the perfect Evangelist, has clearly illustrated with being born again, never thirsting, and never hungering, continuous belief is not required to receive or keep everlasting life. Everlasting life that can never be lost is received at the very first moment of belief in Him for everlasting life.

As Zane Hodges aptly stated:

The Bible does not say that we are saved by continuing to believe but by believing. In the Gospel of John, all of the examples of getting saved or the way in which Jesus explains it, indicates to us that the experience of salvation occurs instantaneously at the moment of faith. When you’re born, you’re born. When you drink the water of life, you don’t have to drink again. If you eat the bread of life, you won’t hunger again. All of these things take place at the moment of faith. If they take place at the moment of faith, then the continuity of that faith is not the issue. the existence of the faith is the issue.ⁱⁱ



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ⁱ While the woman was thinking in terms of physical water, she understood that one drink of this living water would forever quench her thirst: “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (John 4:15).

ⁱⁱ Zane C. Hodges, “Do You Need to ‘Continue to Believe’ to Be Saved?” Filmed in 2006. YouTube Video. See <https://youtu.be/gVSHapWvUW4>.

Father, Son, and Spirit



The Key to John 3

By John H. Niemelä

John 3:16 is the most famous quotation from Jesus. Some would take issue with that statement. Some think the idea that Jesus said those words is an urban legend of the New Testament.¹

Actually, that charge itself is fake news. A veritable war exists between Bible translations (which generally treat John 3:16 as Jesus' words)² and commentaries (which typically view it as the words of the apostle).³

Some evangelicals punt by claiming that it does not matter whether these words originated with Jesus or with the apostle. One said, "Whether this verse was spoken by John or Jesus, it is God's Word and is an important summary of the gospel."⁴ Yes, it would be inspired and inerrant either way, but "Who said it?" matters much more than such writers can comprehend.

WHY MANY DENY THAT JESUS SPOKE 3:16

Three pretexts for the denial are:

1. the shift from dialogue with Nicodemus to monologue seems abrupt,
2. verses 16-21 lack first-person Self-references by Jesus (I, Me, or My), and
3. verse 16 seems redundant, repeating 3:15.

Some are skeptical about a shift from dialogue to monologue, but C. H. Dodd notes: "The transition from dialogue to monologue is characteristic of this writer's manner."⁵ Such a shift from dialogue to monologue actually happens in 3:10, so the "solution" does not solve the "problem," regardless of who says 3:16ff.

¹ David A. Croteau, *Urban Legends of the New Testament*, Leo Percer, consulting ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015), 43-44.

² Many do so by: 1) quotation marks (in versions that utilize them), 2) red letters (in red-letter editions), or 3) by both quotation marks and red letters. Some versions never use quotation marks (e.g., the *King James Version*), so only red-letter editions of such translations reveal an editor's view on John 3:16. Some versions that use quotation marks to show that Jesus spoke John 3:16 include: *Complete Jewish Bible*, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, *English Standard Version*, *International Standard Bible*, *Jerusalem Bible*, *New American Standard Bible*, *New International Version*, *New Jerusalem Bible*, *New King James Version*, *New Living Translation*, *New Revised Standard Version*, and *Revised English Bible*.

³ Most commentaries view 3:16-21 as the apostle's words. It is easier to list the occasional exceptions: Zane C. Hodges, "Coming to the Light—John 3:20-21," *BSac* 135 (October 1978): 319, n. 8; Robert N. Wilkin, "John," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed. R. N. Wilkin, ed. (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 186; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, ENG: University Press, 1953), 303; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, 2nd ed., vol. 29, W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman, gen. eds. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 149.

⁴ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 282.

⁵ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 303.

What about the absence of *I*, *Me*, or *My*? Would Jesus refer to Himself as *Him* (3:16, 18) and Son (3:16-18)?⁶ Actually, Jesus refers to Himself in the third person in thirty-nine verses of John.⁷ Furthermore, most who deny that Jesus spoke 3:16-21 believe that He spoke 3:13-15, verses in which Jesus refers to Himself as *He* (3:13), *Him* (3:15), and *Son* (3:13-14). The argument fails because its proponents spend more time theorizing than looking at how Jesus actually spoke.

What about 3:16 redundantly repeating verse 15? David Croteau says, "...if Jesus is continuing to speak in verse 16, then 3:16 becomes somewhat redundant with 3:15. Virtually everything that 3:15 says seems to be repeated in 3:16."⁸ The argument that verse 16 is redundant assumes that John 3:15 was sufficient for Nicodemus—that no repetition of 3:15 was needed. The next section critiques that presumption.

WAS JOHN 3:15 ENOUGH FOR NICODEMUS?

Yes, most of 3:15 appears again in the following verse, but verse 16's expanded explanation of the prior verse goes to the heart of the underlying issue for Nicodemus.

However, before discussing Nicodemus' central concern, consider the outline of John 3:1-21 proposed sixty-eight years ago by François Roustang:

Introduction (3:1-2)

Part 1: Born again of the Spirit (3:3-8)

Part 2: The mediation of the Son (3:9-15)

Part 3: The saving plan of the Father (3:16-18)

Conclusion (3:19-21)⁹ [emphases mine].

This is an important outline. Jesus starts with birth from above (via the Holy Spirit). Then He speaks of the necessity of believing the Son. Finally, He says the Father sent the Son. He discusses all three members of the Trinity.

Clearly, much can be said about the roles of the Spirit and the Son, but this short article focuses on the Father (verses 16-17). Jesus' punchline to Nicodemus is there, not in 3:15. Those denying that Jesus spoke 3:16 view verse 15 as the pinnacle of Jesus' words. It is not, because He has not yet mentioned the Father's role. Many interpreters fail to comprehend the whole passage.

A FULL ANSWER FOR NICODEMUS

Nicodemus' opening words assert that God sent Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher" (3:2a).¹⁰

Jesus offers an initial and partial affirmation of what Nicodemus asserts in 3:2: He came from heaven. John 3:13a says, "Now no one has gone up into heaven except the *One* who came down from heaven" (3:13a). Why is this only an initial and partial affirmation? Nicodemus speaks of Jesus' coming from God. That is, God sent Him. Theoretically, One might come from heaven without God's sending Him. Jesus' initial affirmation does not explicitly assert that the Father sent Him.

If Jesus' words were to end at verse 15, He would affirm less than Nicodemus' opening statement asserts. The only member of the Trinity expressly mentioned in verses 3-8 is the Spirit.¹¹ The only Member explicitly named in 3:9-15 is the Son. Thus far, Jesus is silent about the Father.

⁶ Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 100.

⁷ John 1:51; 3:13-18; 4:10; 5:19-23, 25-28, 38; 6:27, 29, 33, 40, 46, 53, 62; 7:18; 8:28, 36; 9:35, 37; 10:11, 36; 11:4; 12:23; 13:31-32; 14:13; 17:1-2. Jesus refers to Himself sixty-eight times in these thirty-nine verses with third-person forms. For simplicity, I refer to the pronouns *He*, *Him*, and *His* as they appear in the NKJV: renderings (or partial renderings) of Greek pronouns, participles, or third-person verbs. The NKJV translates Jesus' third-person Self-references as *He* (12×), *Him* (23×), *His* (3×) and *Son* (30×).

⁸ Croteau, *Legends*, 45.

⁹ François Roustang, "L'entretien avec Nicodème [The Interview with Nicodemus]," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 78 (1956): 338. The translation is my own. My own outline would close "Part 3" at 3:17; the "Conclusion" should be 3:18-21. Even so, Roustang's observation is outstanding.

¹⁰ Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the author's forthcoming Faithful Majority Translation, a translation of the Majority Text.

¹¹ The phrase *kingdom of God* (3:3, 5) does not clarify a specific member of the Trinity.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (3:16-17).

However, this changes in verses 16-17. Here Jesus affirms all that Nicodemus asserts in 3:2: "For God loved the world this way: that He gave His *One and only Son*,¹² so whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (3:16-17). Jesus affirms in 3:16 that God [the Father] gave His Son; verse 17 says that God sent His Son. It is when Jesus declares that the Father gave/sent Him that He has affirmed all that Nicodemus asserts in 3:2.

Those who imagine Jesus' words to end at 3:15 fail to perceive that 3:16-17 are the pinnacle. Without those verses, Jesus has not fully affirmed all that Nicodemus asserts.

However, there is more. Verses 16-17 implicitly address Jesus' own opening statement. In John 3:3, He said, "Amen, amen, I tell you, unless someone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Birth from above is an essential prerequisite to seeing [experiencing] Jesus' future millennial kingdom. Birth from above is how a believer receives everlasting life. Later in John, Jesus says, "The Spirit is the *One* who makes alive; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are Spirit and are life" (John 6:63). What Jesus says in John 3:3-8 about the Holy Spirit and in 3:9-15 about Himself are crucial in 3:16-17. The entire Trinity has a role in giving everlasting life to be-

lievers. Perhaps Jesus' revelation about the Trinity here might be His referent of the heavenly things that His hearers were (then) unprepared to believe (3:12).

That night, Nicodemus came out of the darkness to the light (the opposite: Judas forsaking the Light as he went out into the night in John 13:30). Strategic repetitions of the word *man* (*anthrōpos*) in John 2:25a, 25b, and 3:1 point to Nicodemus as one of the many who believed in Jesus during the eight-day Passover feast (see John 2:23).¹³ Nicodemus could not yet plumb the depths of what the Lord told him that night, but after each question from Nicodemus, Jesus simplified it further. That night, Nicodemus went beyond knowing that God sent Jesus. He believed the message of life from the One sent to give life eternal. On that night, Nicodemus would not have grasped what we can now see clearly from Jesus' words: Each member of the triune God has a role in providing eternal life to believers. ■



John is president of Message of Life Ministries. He and Diane recently moved to rural Knox County, TN to be near their son, George. John is working diligently on his forthcoming commentary on John's Gospel.

¹² The word *monogenēs* means "one of a kind," not "only begotten." If John wanted to say *only begotten*, the word would have been spelled *monogennēs*. The following examples from the NKJV underline its rendering of *monogenēs*. Psalm 22:20 (21:21, LXX) has "my precious life." Psalm 25:16 (24:16, LXX) reads "I [David] am desolate and afflicted." Hebrews 11:17 in the Holman CSB renders it as "his unique son [Isaac]." Neither David nor Isaac was an only child; neither were they the sole heirs of their fathers. In light of usage, this word should be treated as deriving from *monos* + *genos*, not from *monos* + *gennaō*. Robert N. Wilkin, "John," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed. Robert N. Wilkin, ed. (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 186, agrees.

¹³ Several lines of evidence point to Nicodemus as one of the many who believed in His name (John 2:23):

1. Immediately after John 2:25's use of *anthrōpos* (for humanity), 3:1 uses the same word to introduce Nicodemus.
2. John 3:2 refers to Jesus via a third-person pronoun (*auton*). Its referent ("Jesus") appears in 2:24.

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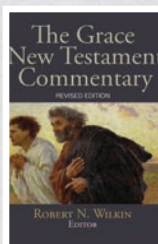


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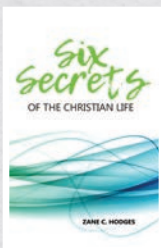


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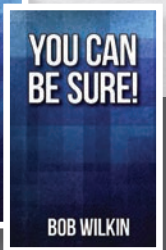
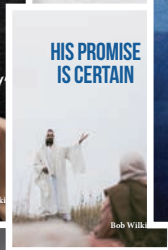
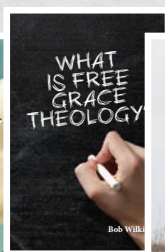
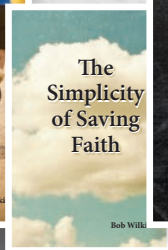
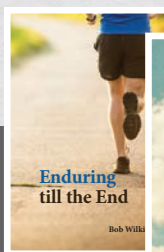


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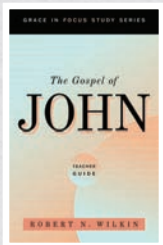
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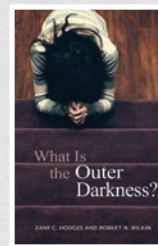
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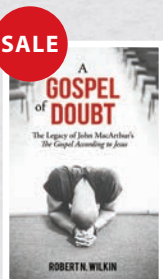
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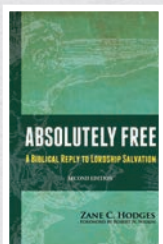
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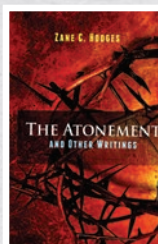
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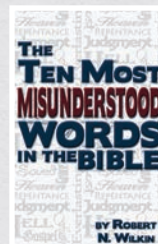
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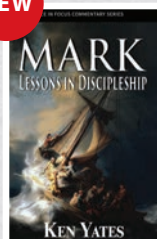
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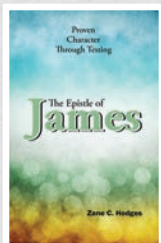
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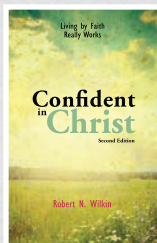
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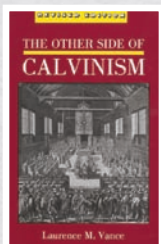
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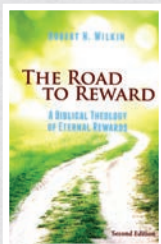
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angelology, anthropology, and hamartiology (the doctrine of sin), as well as the doctrines of eternal security, perseverance, faithfulness, and rewards.

Liberal commentators have theorized synthetic authorship from multiple sources, compiled and redacted at a late point in history (e.g., the Persian or early Hellenistic eras of the fifth and third centuries BC). But

several lines of evidence point to a much earlier date for this masterpiece of ancient Hebrew. Indeed, the text of Job likely preserves the earli-

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sovereignly affecting
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maximize His glory
while blessing His
people.

Circumstances and cultures change, but the trials, tragedies, and traumas afflicting believers remain very much the same.

est extant record of mankind's dealings with the Most High, significantly predating myths and legends preserved from other cultures. Indeed, the time frame in which Job's story unfolded probably falls within the early patriarchal era (Genesis 11:27–50:26; that is, around 1950–1500 BC). That range makes Job a possible contemporary of Abraham, and he may have lived even earlier.

One line of evidence favoring an early date for Job is the absence of any reference to the Torah, the Exodus, the tabernacle/temple, etc. Though an argument from silence, the lack of reference to those landmarks by five men (Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) familiar with the one true God opens the door to composition during an earlier period.

Another datapoint indicating early authorship is the fact that eight OT books (Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah) quote from Job. Job was therefore completed and proliferated early enough for the authors of later works to be aware of its contents and to be led by the Spirit to include portions in their writings.

Today, parched desert constitutes much of the geography in which Job's story took place. But at the time of his experience, the land of Uz was comparatively lush, sufficiently well-watered to yield abundant pastoral and agricultural wealth. That description aligns neatly with Lot's assay of the region east of the Jordan during the patriarchal period (Gen 13:10).

The book's multiple references to wisdom that stems from the antediluvian era and God's judgment via the Flood (Gen 7-8) likewise nest easily within a period when cultural memories were still shaped by the Flood. For example, to persuade Job to repent of a supposed sin, Bildad appealed to wisdom preserved from "the former age, and [to] consider the things discovered by their fathers" (Job 8:8-10). He perhaps reckoned that reflecting on the

wisdom of the few who survived the Flood might tip the scales and bring Job to his senses. Eliphaz went further, accusing Job of being like those who "had corrupted their way on the earth" (Gen 6:12), living by "the old way which wicked men have trod...whose foundations were swept away by a flood" (Job 22:15-17). Such references make sense coming from those who lived in times not so distant from Noah's disembarkation from the ark.

Lexically, Job contains more unique and obscure Hebrew and Aramaic terms than any other book of the Bible. No fewer than sixty words in Job are found nowhere else in Scripture. In addition to its many Aramaic words, Job also preserves several Aramaisms—that is, Hebrew word roots attached to Aramaic endings, and vice versa. Such content fits naturally within an earlier period in which men like Abram and Lot spoke in dialects that were mutually intelligible across the Ancient Near East, trading and blending vocabulary as they went. By the time Septuagint scholars gathered in Alexandria, Egypt, to translate the Tanakh into Greek (~ third and second centuries BC), they could only guess at the meaning of many archaic terms in Job. As early as the Ptolemaic era (305-30 BC), much of the vocabulary Job and his companions spoke had long since fallen out of common usage (somewhat like reading Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in Middle English today). While some have suggested that later author(s) purposefully inserted pseudo-archaic terms to lend vintage panache to the text, Occam's razor favors early authorship as the simplest and most likely explanation.

Another feature befitting an early setting is Job's performance of sacrificial rites on behalf of his family (1:5). Priestly service by heads of households became anachronistic in later generations (cf. Exod 28). Additionally, Job 42:16-17 reveals that he lived 140 years after God restored him to blessing. Though his final age is not recorded, the

fact that he raised ten adult children (Job 1:4, 13, 18-19) before his testing began suggests a lifespan fitting the patriarchal period (cf. Gen 9:29; 25:7-8; 35:28; 47:28).

Job's early authorship represents more than a point of academic interest. For the church-age believer, the timeworn character of Job's content affirms the unchanging nature of human beings and their need for God's saving grace. People have faced the same hardships, heartbreaks, and disappointments since Adam and Eve walked out of Eden—a reality contrary to postmodern culture's portrayal of ancients as backward dimwits sharing little in common with moderns. Job's ancient text preserves an authentic record of thoughts, words, and deeds that demonstrate unaltered human tendencies to self-righteousness, judgmentalism, and transactional religious thinking—important truths underscoring humankind's undiminished need for God's redemptive mercy.

Though a Gentile born many generations before Israel became a nation, Job knew Yahweh by name (Job 1:21; 12:9; 28:28). More importantly, the text reveals that the LORD knew Job by name and described him as “a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8; 2:3). Job's experience demonstrates God's unchanging purpose, from earliest times, of making the living hope for a future resurrection (Job 19:24-27) available to all of Adam's progeny (Ps 2:7-8; Isa 49:5-6). It also shows God's limitless ability to allow evil to have its way within boundaries, yet orchestrate outcomes that glorify His name and ultimately bless His servants (Gen 50:20). Job's righteous conduct at a time before the Torah affirms Paul's observation that, while God's image in mankind has been horribly marred, the instinctive sense of right and wrong remains written on the hearts of all (Rom 2:14-15).

Often overlooked after the second chapter of Job is the relentless, tormenting agency of the unseen adversary (1:9-12; 2:4-7). That point may

land close to home for all who are troubled by the rapid spread of evil across the face of the earth today. Sadly, the men in Job's periphery—men who knew many truths about God—proved eager to aid and abet his torment. Godly men who should have shown grace instead acted as willing agents of the evil one. Then as now, Satan delights in attacking and tormenting God's people (Eph 6:10-13)—particularly when he can invoke the help of other people in his sinister craft.

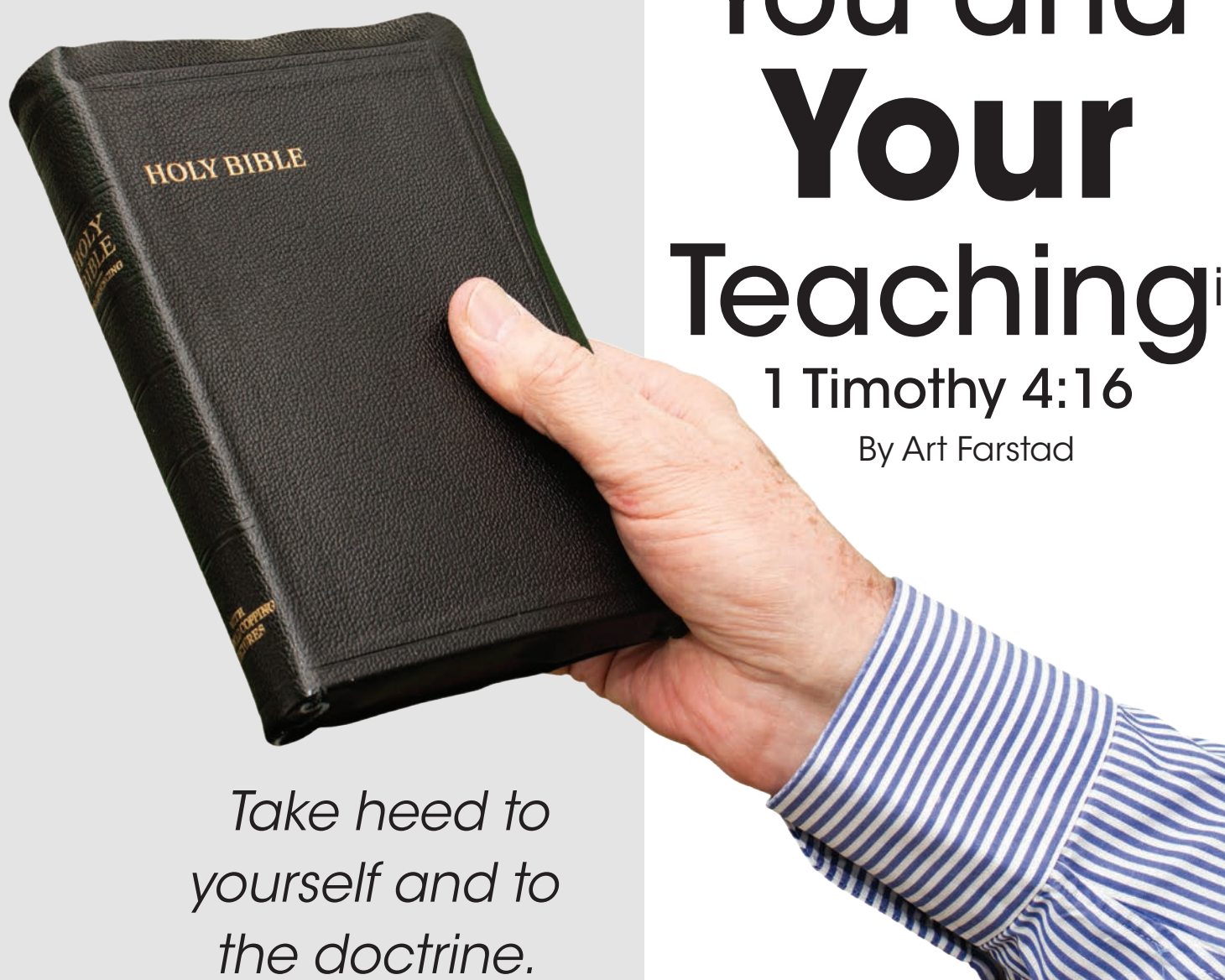
Then as now,
Satan delights
in attacking and
tormenting God's
people.

Times change. Language changes. Culture changes. But Job's experience shows that people today are the same as they have always been. The very good news is that a holy God has never stopped dealing with mankind in grace, in power, and in glory. He is ever-present, sovereignly affecting the seen and unseen

realms in ways that maximize His glory while blessing His people. When Yahweh chooses to use His servants—through their trials and testing—as instruments by which to both glorify His name and instruct elect angels, the ancient story of Job reminds us that He also unfailingly blesses and rewards those servants in disproportionate measure. Truly, Job's faith was well-placed when he said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15a). And without a doubt, he will one day testify before men and angels that the sufferings he endured in this life were not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in him, a believer who persevered (Rom 8:18; cf. 2 Tim 2:12). ■



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Voice from the Past
**You and
Your
Teaching**
1 Timothy 4:16

By Art Farstad

*Take heed to
yourself and to
the doctrine.
Continue in them,
for in doing this you
will save both
yourself and those
who hear you.*

During the hundreds of years in which the notorious Spanish Inquisition was in force to root out and destroy “heresy,” there was a ceremony called the *auto da fe*, which is Portuguese for “act of faith.” In Spain, Portugal, and their New World colonies, Protestants, Jews, and other religious nonconformists were frequently burned at the stake—often with massed choirs, clergy, “religious” processions, and incense to make it an impressive warning to others.

As one evangelical man, soon to be a martyr, was tied to the stake, a monk read aloud to him these words from his Latin Testament:

Now the spirit manifestly saith that in the last times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy and having their conscience seared (1 Timothy 4:1-2, Douay Version).ⁱⁱ

The monk paused, looking ahead to the next verse...

“Christianity is the only religion that is so concerned about *believing* the right thing.”
Rightly so!

“Read on, brother, read on!” shouted the Christian, who knew his NT very well.

Furious, the monk tossed his Testament into the flames! Verse 3 described two practices of not only his monastery, but of all others as well:

“Forbidding to marry, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful and by them that have known the truth” (Douay Version, italics supplied).

First Timothy 4 goes on to show how any of us can be rescued from the evil lifestyles and false teachings associated with the last times.

After he mentions giving “attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (v 13) and not neglecting one’s spiritual gift, Paul ends his exhortation to young Timothy by urging him to meditate and give himself to these things so that everyone will notice how he is progressing. It’s not enough to reach a

comfortable plateau and then rest on our oars. We must keep moving ahead (v 15)!

Then, he adds the twofold formula for spiritual success: *Take heed* (1) to *yourself* and (2) to *the doctrine* (v 16a).

TAKE HEED TO YOURSELF

Personal Christianity is first. Being doctrinally correct is excellent (and unusual nowadays!) but it’s inadequate if the teacher of Christianity isn’t carefully cultivating his or her spiritual life.

Arthur Pink put it this way:

Service becomes a snare and an evil if it be allowed to crowd out worship and the cultivation of one’s own spiritual life.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sadly, recent church history gives ample illustrations of church leaders who came from doctrinally sound homes, churches, and schools, but made shipwreck of their testimony through careless living, ending up in financial, moral, or some other type of disaster.

TAKE HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

Paul’s second point is extremely important in this day of compromise. In order to get along with the mainstream of Christendom, many Christians seem willing to soft-pedal such basic *doctrines* as justification by faith alone. Even some churches specifically founded to teach the Bible as the only reliable source of Christian faith and practice have compromised on increasingly important issues for the sake of (it would seem) prestige, money, acceptance, and “peace.”

There are some Christians who apparently lead commendably honest and decent lives but don’t give much attention to Bible doctrine. Some even treat *doctrine* as a dirty word. “Doctrine divides,” they say. “Devotion unites.” Sooner or later, if you continue in God’s Word, you will find that you cannot worship with people who teach, for example, some sort of works-oriented salvation. Whether Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Protestant, if they don’t teach the clear Gospel of Grace that Paul taught Timothy—and all his hearers and readers—they are in danger of ruin.



The last sentence is Paul's exhortation to Timothy to "take heed to yourself and to the doctrine [that]...you will save both yourself and those who hear you." Here *save* has the meaning

Being doctrinally correct is excellent (and unusual nowadays!) but it's inadequate if the teacher of Christianity isn't carefully cultivating his or her spiritual life.

"rescue;" no one can save himself or others eternally. Rescue from what? Probably, in this context, the evil lifestyles and false doctrines condemned at the start of the chapter.

So, to be balanced Christians it's crucial to pay close attention not only to how we live—to *ourselves*—but also to what we believe and teach—to *the doctrine*.

As someone has well said, "Christianity is the only religion that is so concerned about *believing* the right thing." Rightly so! Each false doctrine you embrace will somehow, somewhere, sometime, mar your spiritual life.

So, it's *you* and *the doctrine*. Pay attention to both! ■■■



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.

ⁱThis article first appeared in the May-June 1997 issue of *Grace in Focus*.

ⁱⁱThe Douay Version (NT by Jesuit scholars 1582, OT 1609) was translated, not from the original Greek, but from the Latin Vulgate, the official version of the Roman Catholic Church.

ⁱⁱⁱQuoted in MacDonald's *Believers Bible Commentary*, New Testament (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 2:910.

Must You Recognize That You Are a Sinner in Order to Be Saved?

By Ken Yates



Every one of us have heard a gospel presentation that started off like this: “You must recognize that you are a sinner.” I visited a church website recently that described how one could “have a relationship with Jesus Christ.” It said that “it starts with admitting that you are a sinner.” To make the case, it quotes Rom 3:23 and Rom 6:23 (<https://gracechurchmentor.org/abc>).

Neither of these verses says the unbeliever must recognize that he is a sinner in order to be saved. They explain why we are justified by faith apart from works. We cannot be justified before God by our works. We must believe.

Another popular way to present the gospel, very similar to saying that you must admit to being a sinner, is demanding that you repent of your sins. Once the unbeliever recognizes his sin, he is to repent of it. He will do so because he feels sorrow for his many sins.

A well-known website is one of many that take this position. It defines repentance as “turning from sin” and says that repentance is necessary to be saved from the lake of fire:

While repentance is not a work that earns salvation, repentance unto salvation does result in works. It is impossible to truly change your mind without changing your

Believing in Jesus for eternal life—faith—is how a person receives that gift.

actions in some way. In the Bible, repentance results in a change in behavior. Repentance, properly defined, is necessary for salvation (<https://www.gotquestions.org/repentance.html>).

There are a lot of theological hoops to jump through in that paragraph! It says that works are not necessary for salvation. Repentance, it claims, is not a work, but involves work and is necessary for salvation. I must admit, I am not smart enough to figure out what that means.

Even though I can't figure it out, the truth remains: Many gospel presentations say that before a person can receive eternal life, he must go through a two-step process. He must recognize that he is a sinner, then repent of his sins. It is usually maintained that without those two prior steps, one's faith is not real. It is a spurious faith and one that is only intellectual. That kind of faith will not save anybody from the lake of fire.

Of course, all of that is nonsense. While an unbeliever may see himself as a horrible sinner and feel deep regret over past actions, neither of these is required in order to believe the message that eternal life is a free gift by faith in Christ alone. The Lord said that the one who believes in Him has eternal life (John 5:24). He didn't add a series of requirements before faith can occur.

Recently, I read a sermon in which the preacher argued that these other steps are necessary. The message was from Luke 7:36-50. The preacher said that in this passage we meet an unbeliever who shows us what "real" faith looks like.

A SINFUL WOMAN

The passage deals with the woman who anointed Jesus' feet while He was eating in the home of a Pharisee named Simon. Luke tells us that prior to anointing the Lord's feet, the woman was weeping. She wept a great deal, because there were enough tears for her to wash the Lord's feet with them.

Luke refers to this woman as a "sinner" (v 37). This label, as well as Simon's mental comments (v 39), indicate that she was a notorious sinner. Many assume she was a prostitute, though the text does not say that. The Lord also speaks of her many sins (v 47). She had been forgiven much. I am sure that the woman herself would not have disputed the fact that she was a really bad sinner.

The woman felt unworthy to be in the presence of the Lord. Her actions toward the Lord seemed scandalous because in that culture she had no business touching a Man whom many thought was a teacher sent by God and who had the power of God working in Him. He had demonstrated that power by performing numerous miracles of healing and by casting out demons.

Not surprisingly, many look at this woman as an example of what coming to faith looks like. In the sermon I read, she comes to the Lord recognizing that she is a sinner. She realizes that her many sins make her unworthy to approach Him. Her tears are tears of repentance. She is profoundly sorry for her sins. If she was a prostitute, she was sorry for the life she had lived and the marriages she had harmed. Without recognizing her sins and feeling sorrow over them, she could not be saved.

The preacher of the sermon I read is not alone. Bible teachers routinely ask why the woman was crying. Some say that while we don't know why she was crying, it might have been due to remorse over her sins. If so, her tears were tears of repentance (Martin, "Luke," *BKC*, 224; Stein, *Luke*, 236). Many think her tears were a mixture of repentance and joy (Schreiner, "Luke," *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, 816). But this is a strange combination. How could she come with joy and remorse at the same time?

Others are more in line with the preacher whose sermon I read. They say the woman did not come with joy but came to the meal in need of divine grace. She needed forgiveness and eternal salva-

tion (Butler, *Luke*, 111). Her tears were tears of profound remorse (Liefeld and Pao, “Luke,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 150). One writer was perhaps the most direct. Her tears are said to be from one who cried out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner” (<https://sola.network/article/scandalous-gospel-woman-jesus-feet/>).

Many, then, see this woman as an example of what unbelievers need to do. They must come to the Lord recognizing that they are sinners. That recognition leads to sorrow and to turning from their sins (repentance). Without these steps, eternal salvation is impossible.

We are justified by
faith apart from works.
We cannot be
justified before God
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We must believe.

IS THAT WHAT THIS WOMAN TEACHES US?

Are the actions of this woman in Luke 7 proof that the unbeliever must add remorse and repentance before his faith is real?

It would be difficult to twist the meaning of this passage in a worse way, even if a person wanted to. The Lord does not say the woman came to Him grieving over her sins. He says that her actions were done because she loved Him. Her tears were not tears of repentance. They were tears of gratitude and joy. She did not come to Him hoping that sorrow for her sins would cause Him to give her eternal life. *She already had it.*

Luke tells us that the oil she anointed the Lord’s feet with was very valuable. Obviously, she was not trying to buy eternal life. That is impossible. She was not trying to show that she had “true” repen-

tant faith. She wanted to honor the Lord with the most valuable thing she had. In the most concrete way she could, she was saying, “Thank You.”

This woman was already a believer. She knew who He was and had believed in Him before she came to the dinner. The Lord could not have made it any clearer. He tells her that her “faith” has saved her (v 50). It was not the recognition of her sinful life. It was not tears of sorrow over her sins. When she believed that He was the Christ, she received eternal life. He also forgave her of her sins. With that forgiveness, she could have fellowship with the One whom she knew to be the Christ. Being close to Him, at His feet, was a picture of that fellowship. Serving Him in the way she could was an illustration of serving the One in whom she had already believed.

CONCLUSION

Most unbelievers recognize that they are sinners. Many of them want to turn from those sins and lead a better life. Some do turn and improve their lives. Such things can lead an unbeliever to believe in Jesus for eternal life. But they are not required. Believing in Jesus for eternal life—faith—is how a person receives that gift.

When this woman heard the offer of that gift before she came to Simon’s house, she believed it. I do not know how sorrowful she was over her sins. It doesn’t matter. But I do know why she had come to the dinner at Simon’s house. She had come to express her gratitude and love for the King because of what He had already done for her. She brought her most valuable possession to express how she felt. Tears of joy, not repentance, flowed from her eyes as she washed His feet and served Him. ■



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What Does *Praise the Lord* Mean?

By Bob Wilkin

Have you ever said, “Praise the Lord”? If so, what did you mean?

There is a lot of confusion in Christianity about what the expression means.

Most people think that we praise the Lord when we 1) say the words *Praise the Lord*, or 2) have happy feelings during worship. But neither of those is praising the Lord. Singing 7-11¹ songs may produce a sense of euphoria in us. But if we are not actively praising God *with our minds* as we sing, we are just experiencing a feeling.

The expression *praise the Lord* occurs fifty-three times in the Bible, fifty-two of the uses occurring in the OT. The only NT use is a quote of Psalm 117.

Hallelujah means “Praise Yah.” It is a command to praise Yahweh, the Lord. *Yadah* is the more common Hebrew word for *praise*. It is used forty-nine times to refer to praising God’s name, praising Him, etc. It is also sometimes translated as *give thanks* or *confess* since the root idea is “to know” or “to acknowledge.”

The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology says *Hallelujah* is “The call to praise” (VanGemeren, Vol. 1, p. 1036). Notice that *Hallelujah* is “The call to praise.” In and of itself, it is not praise.

Islam has a practice called *the adhan*, the call to prayer. Five times a day a muezzin (moo-eh-zin) summons the people of the city to stop and pray. The *adhan* is not prayer. It is a call to pray that can be heard over a mile away by using loudspeakers. In the same way, *Hallelujah* is a call to praise. It is not praise itself.

To praise someone is to speak well about him. To praise the Lord, you must acknowledge at least one of two things.

First, you can praise God by extolling His nature and character. This is called *descriptive praise*. We

praise Him when we say that He is good, loving, merciful, gracious, omnipotent, etc.

Second, if you declare God’s mighty deeds in history, you are praising Him. That is called *declarative praise*. We praise Him when we speak of His parting the Red Sea, parting the Jordan River, creating the world and universe, providing manna in the wilderness, bringing water from a rock, delivering Israel from Egypt, and the Lord Jesus dying on the cross for our sins.

So, if while singing “Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah,” you are acknowledging in your mind specific attributes of God and specific things He has done, then you are praising Him while singing. If you think of no mighty acts and nothing concerning His character, then you might as well be singing, “Like a bridge over troubled waters.”

Here’s an illustration. You attend a seminar for supervisors. The speaker said, “You must regularly praise your employees. Praise them. Praise them often, and you will bring out the best in them.”

One of your employees is named Larry. If you went up to Larry the next day and said, “Praise Larry,” what would he think? He would probably be confused.

You do not praise Larry by saying, “Praise Larry.” You praise Larry by declaring something he did well or by describing one of his good character qualities.

If you said, “Larry, I appreciate that you’re here on time each day and that you work hard the whole day,” you would be praising him.

Or you might say, “You are honest, and I really appreciate that about you.”

Suppose Larry had a big project due, and he got it done three days before the deadline, and the quality of the project was outstanding. Telling him

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that you appreciate his getting it done early and that you are blown away by the quality of his work would be praising him.

Praise is concrete. It is not abstract.

You can write your praises down.

Take one minute and write down as many descriptive and declarative praises of God that you can think of.

You can do the same thing for your spouse, your children, your students, and your employees. Praising people is a major way in which we encourage them to do more loving and good deeds. The more we praise God, the easier it becomes to praise the people in our lives. Praise is contagious. It makes us thankful people.

Instead of saying, "Praise the Lord," actually praise Him! If you are thankful for that promotion at work, then praise or thank God for that job and promotion.

Instead of thinking that singing is worship, realize that engaging your mind is worship. Be intentional when you sing, pray, and teach.

Realize that even our requests of God can be a form of praise. If I ask God to give me wisdom in

the problem I am facing at work, I am acknowledging that God is all-knowing, wise, loving, and so forth. I know He can give me the wisdom I need.

When I pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," I am praising God since I am acknowledging that all I have comes from Him. He is the source of our food and sustenance.

In a sense, we should be praising God all day long. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "In everything give thanks." ■



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

¹ A 7-11 song is one in which seven words are sung eleven times. Of course, the actual number of words can vary and so can how many times they are repeated. For more details, see "Cut Out the Lobotomy Choruses" by Randy Newman at <https://connection-points.us/2013/07/29/cut-out-the-lobotomy-choruses/>.

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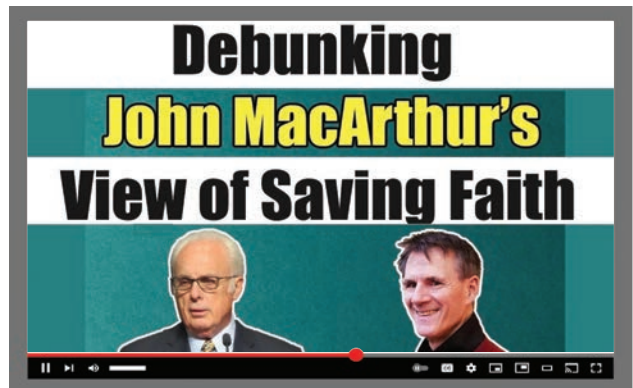
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