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A Slippery Slope: Repentance and Everlasting Life

by

Bob Wilkin

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Letter from the Editor

This may be our last 16-page magazine. Starting in January-February 2014 we plan to expand to 32 pages. We would appreciate your prayers as this will be a big change. But we believe it will greatly enhance the value of our magazine for readers. Also, if you have a conference or book or other event you'd like to publicize in our magazine, please let us know (bethany@faithalone.org). We require that everything we publicize is clear on the freeness of everlasting life.

What is the role of repentance in the new birth? And what is repentance? In this issue I discuss a Free Grace view of repentance which I consider to be inconsistent with the Scriptures and with the fact that the sole condition of everlasting life and justification is faith in Christ, not faith and repentance.

Dr. Ronald E. Diprose continues his discussion of replacement theology. In this article he discusses how the Church Fathers adopted this view even though the New Testament does not teach it.

We get letters and emails from readers all the time. In this issue Shawn Lazar, Steve Lewis, and I tackle eight superb questions. While you may not agree with all of our answers, hopefully the discussion will cause us to search the Scriptures to see what is correct (Acts 17:11).

Dr. John Niemelä concisely and powerfully shows that the new believers of John 8:30-32 are what the Apostle John says they are, believers. He shows that verses 33 and following discuss not the new believers, but the larger crowd of unbelievers.

Finally, Bill Fiess, a Logos aficionado, does a word study on the Greek word *anenklētos* which is found only seven times in the New Testament. He shows that we are called to be blameless in our experience so that we will hear the Lord's praise at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Enjoy.



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A Slippery Slope:

Repentance and Everlasting Life

By Bob Wilkin

INTRODUCTION

For years the view of repentance as advocated by Chafer, Ryrie, and many others dominated Free Grace understanding. Repentance was seen as a synonym for faith. You need to change your mind about the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, you need to believe in Him, in order to be born again.

In his book *Absolutely Free!*, Zane Hodges suggested a completely different understanding of repentance and everlasting life. He showed that repentance is turning from sins and that it is not a condition of everlasting life. Instead repentance is a condition for what he called *harmony with God*.

A third view of repentance and everlasting life has emerged in Free Grace circles over the past twenty years. I've seen it in several Free Grace books and I've heard it from a number of Free Grace leaders.

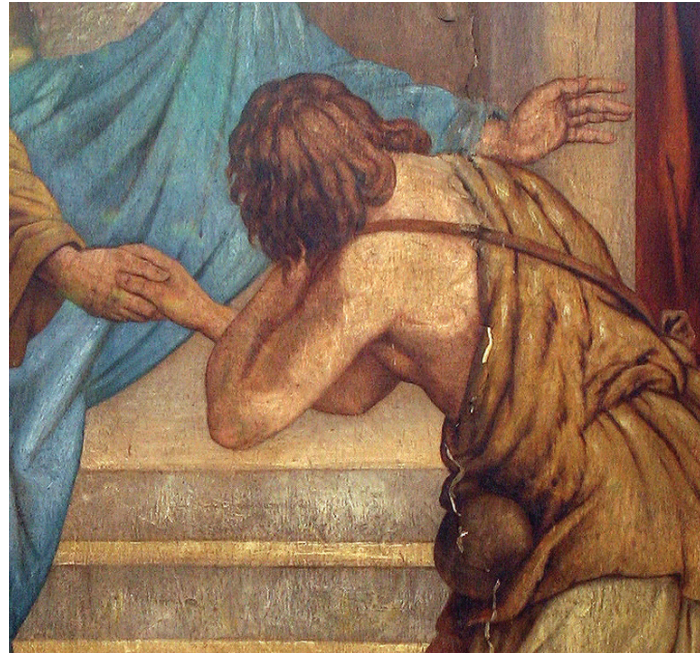
They do not give their view a name. I'll call it *the desire view*. In the desire view, in order to be born again one must not only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but one must also desire to repent of his sins and to live a new life. Repentance involves remorse over one's sins, a desire to turn from them, and to follow Christ.

One Free Grace author writes concerning the new birth and repentance, "there must be an acknowledgement of sin and a desire to be different." Another Free Grace writer similarly says, "repentance [is] an inner *change of heart*," "a *volitional* response," and "a change of mind, *attitude, and disposition* which implies and normally leads to an outward change in life and conduct" (emphasis added).

This new Free Grace view of repentance means that one must admit his sin, desire to turn from it, and follow Christ in a new way of life in order to be born again. This must be combined with faith in Christ, of course. But faith in Christ is viewed as insufficient apart from this desire to turn and follow.

In this article I'd like to explain why I think that view of repentance is wrong and why I believe it is inconsistent with the free gift of everlasting life.

Let's start with whether repentance is or is not a condition of everlasting life.



The prodigal son returns

THE BIBLE SAYS THAT REPENTANCE IS NOT A CONDITION OF EVERLASTING LIFE

I vividly remember a GES board meeting in 1989. Zane Hodges was just about to release his fourth book, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. He had a chapter on repentance that stirred up nearly everyone on the board. In that chapter he said that repentance is not a condition for everlasting life.

I recall one board member being in such strong disagreement that he indicated he would pull the appendix he had written for the book if that chapter on repentance stayed in. (The chapter stayed and he did pull the appendix. The appendix was later published by a theological journal.) The majority of the board agreed that the chapter had to go. I did not feel that way, but I also was not yet convinced that Zane was right. At that time I still held the change of mind view.

It took nearly seven years, but I was won over to the idea that repentance is not a condition of everlasting life. I changed my mind about the change of mind view. I repented of my view on repentance. Maybe others in the Free Grace community need to repent of their view of repentance too.

The words *repent* and *repentance* do not occur even once in John's Gospel, the only evangelistic book in the Bible (John 20:30-31). Nor do they appear even once in Galatians, Paul's defense of his gospel of grace (Gal 1:6-9).

Even in books that mention repentance we never see an indication that one must repent to have everlasting life. Repentance is always linked with escaping or lessening temporal judgment, not with eternal destiny (e.g., Matt 12:41; Luke 13:3, 5; 15:11-32; 2 Pet 3:9; Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11).

The reason we speak of justification by faith *alone* and of regeneration by faith *alone* is because the sole condition of the new birth and justification is faith in Christ.

Repentance is not a condition of the new birth. In the NT, as we will discuss more fully after we discuss what repentance is, we see over and over again that the sole condition of regeneration is

faith in Christ (cf. John 1:12; 3:16-18, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Gal 2:15-16; 3:6-14; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16; Titus 3:5; 1 John 5:11-13).

**THE BIBLE SAYS THAT
REPENTANCE IS TURNING
FROM SINS (NOT SIMPLY
SORROW FOR SIN OR A
DESIRE TO TURN FROM IT)**

A careful search of the NT shows that repentance is more than an admission of guilt and a desire to turn from one's sins. What we find is that repentance is actually turning from sins.

Consider Matt 12:41. There the Lord says, "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here." We read of that repentance in Jonah 3:10: "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." They "turned from their evil way." That was and is repentance.

We see the same thing in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The younger son asked for and received his inheritance while his father is still alive. He then left fellowship with his father and went to "the far country" and there he wasted his inheritance on "prodigal living." Later he "came to his senses," turned from his evil ways in the far country, and returned to his father. Repentance is turning from one's sins and coming back to fellowship with God.

The same is true in Rev 9:20-21: "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." See also Rev 16:9, 11.

Every single reference to repentance of men in the Bible refers to turning from one's sins. A *desire* to turn from one's sins is not yet repentance. One must follow up that desire by actually turning from one's sins.

In fact, it is possible not to desire to turn from one's sins, yet to turn from one's sins anyway. That seems to be the case with the

Ninevites. They believed that God would destroy them in 40 days (Jonah 3:5). Thus they put on sackcloth and ashes and turned from their evil ways. They turned because of the promised destruction, not because they had some desire to get right with God.

If the Ninevites had a desire to turn from their wicked ways, but did not turn, then they would have been wiped out a little over a month later. Desire is not enough. Actual turning from sins is needed in order to repent.

"The Bible says
that the one and
only condition of
the new birth and of
justification is
faith in Christ."

**THE BIBLE SAYS THAT
THE SOLE CONDITION
OF EVERLASTING LIFE
IS FAITH IN CHRIST**

Of course, the key is what the Bible says one must do to be born again. It says that the one and only condition of the new birth and of justification is faith in Christ. And it does not say that repentance is a necessary precursor to faith.

Ninety-nine times in John's Gospel the word *believe* (*pisteuō*) occurs. Tenney rightly called John's Gospel *the Gospel of Belief*. Repeatedly the Lord is quoted as saying that the one who believes in Him has everlasting life (e.g., John 3:16-18; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:35, 37, 39-40, 47; 11:25-27). Never once does He say (in John or in any of the Gospels) that the one who repents has everlasting life or that the one who believes and repents has everlasting life.

In Galatians 3:6-14, Paul refers to faith and believing as the sole condition of justification no less than eight times (vv 6, 7, 8, 9 twice, 11, 12, 14).

How could what the Lord and His apostles said be accurate if the true condition of regeneration and justification is *repenting and believing*?

**WHAT DIFFERENCE
DOES IT MAKE?**

Understanding repentance makes a huge difference in evangelism and in assurance of everlasting life.

Let's say you evangelize someone and you find out that he is living in sin with someone who is not his spouse. Would you not feel that it was part of your duty as an evangelist to find out if he had remorse over his sin and if he had a desire to turn from it? You would if you believed that repentance is a condition of everlasting life.

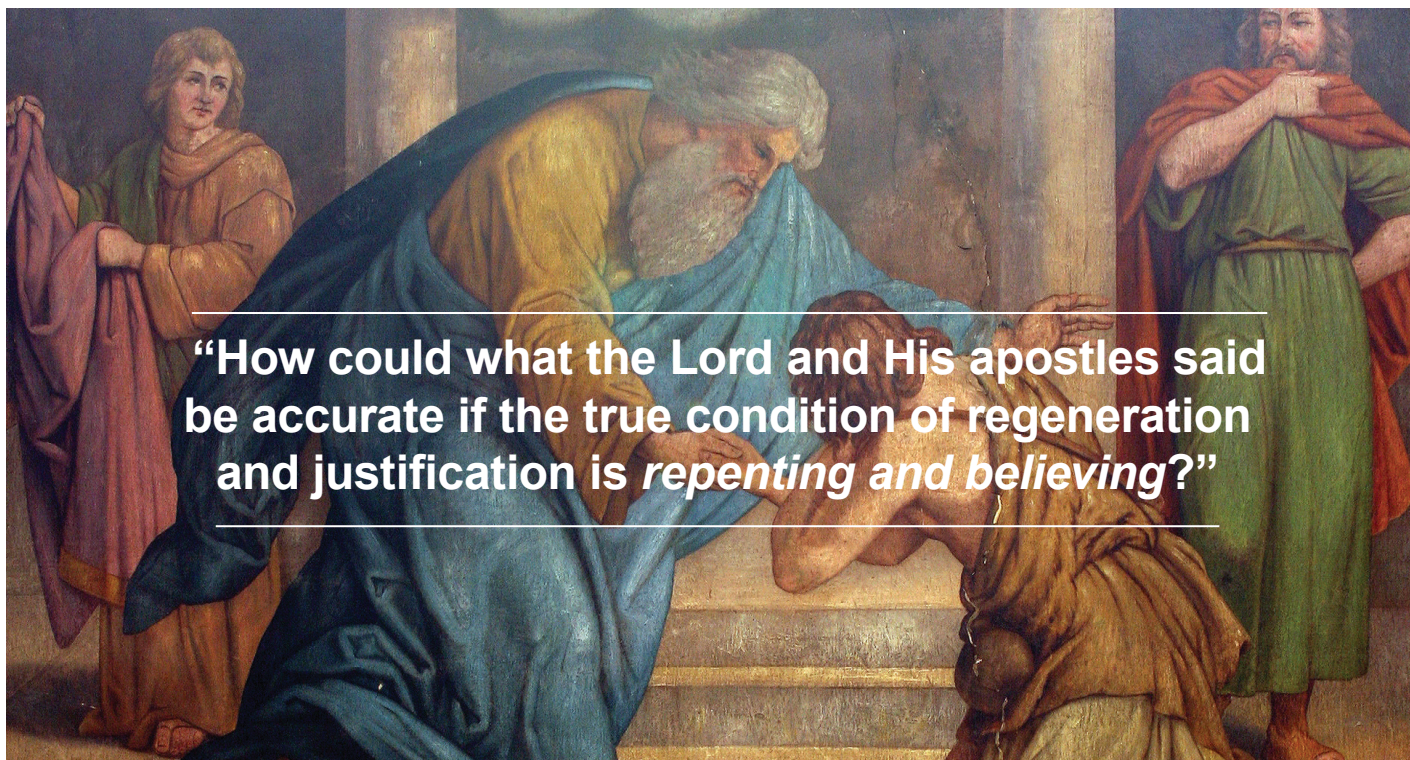
In fact, if repentance was a condition, wouldn't you need to talk with him about more than his love life? Is he cheating on his taxes? Is he cheating in college? Does he lie to get ahead? Is he a thief? If he had to repent in order to have everlasting life, would not a person need to be willing to turn from *all* of his sins and not merely *some* of them?

Yet when the Lord spoke with such a woman in John 4, He did not ask her if she was sorry for her sin. Nor did He try to ascertain if she was willing to turn from it. Nor does John even tell us whether she later turned from it or not. The only issue the Lord raised is that she had to know the gift (everlasting life that cannot be lost) and the giver (the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah). Once she believed that Jesus gives everlasting life as a free gift to all who simply believe in Him (i.e., once she drank the living water), she was born again. There was no call to repent. There was no mention of repentance.

If you believe that a person must desire to turn from his sins and you find someone who professes to be sure he has everlasting life by faith in Christ apart from works, yet who also is living in unrepentant sin and is seemingly content living that way, what would you think about his eternal destiny? Would you not wonder? Would you not think, "Well, he professes to be sure he has everlasting life simply by faith in Christ. Yet he gives no indication of sorrow for his sin or a desire to repent. I wonder if he is a true believer. Maybe he is a false professor."

If repentance is necessary to be born again and you find an unrepentant person, you would seemingly be forced to entertain the possibility that the person is not a true believer.

If faith in Christ is not enough, then it's not enough. Believing that Jesus died on the cross to take away the sins of the world



“How could what the Lord and His apostles said be accurate if the true condition of regeneration and justification is *repenting and believing*?”

is the ultimate proof that Jesus indeed guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him. Yet if believing the promise of life must be joined by a desire to reform one's life, the work of the evangelist is more than leading someone to faith in Christ. He must also guide him to repent of his sins.

And what about your own assurance of your own eternal destiny? Might you not wonder if you had sufficient sorrow for sins and enough desire to turn from them? How would you know that you actually repented? If you are like me, this would create doubts. When I came to faith in the fall of 1972 all I really wanted was everlasting life. I wanted to escape hell. I wasn't really concerned about turning from my sins or even following Christ. My concern was my eternal destiny. Does that mean I wasn't really born again in 1972?

Of course, our assurance is not based on what we did in the past. It is based on what we believe right now. Well, it is, unless assurance is tied to both faith and repentance. If repentance is a co-condition of everlasting life, then my assurance is based both on my current beliefs and my current desires. *Do I desire to follow Christ fully today* becomes an assurance question.

For perfectionists like me, this likely would lead to introspection and loss of assurance. I'd always wonder if I ever was truly sorry enough for my sins and ever really fully wanted to surrender to Christ.

That is why I think that the desire view of repentance is inconsistent. It is subjective, not objective. But the promise of everlasting life to the believer is objective. This view on repentance does not fit the Free Grace position.

It concerns me how those with this view evangelize. Possibly they do not bring up repentance at all. But in light of what they believe a person must do to be born again, they probably feel it is necessary to call people to repent of their sins and to desire to submit to the Lordship of Christ. If repentance is a desire to turn from one's sins and to follow Christ and if repentance is necessary to be born again, then it would seem that people would be required to preach repentance whenever they evangelize.

Of course, if repentance is necessary to be born again, then those of us who fail to preach repentance are sharing a message that can only result in regeneration for those who happen to be in a state of repentance toward God when we evangelize them. If we find people who are living in some willful sin and who do not have a desire to change and follow Christ, then our message would be ineffective because we left out a key requirement, a willingness to turn from one's sins and to follow Christ.

If leaders in the Free Grace movement are saying that one must be willing to turn from his sins to be born again, then it stands to reason that this view will begin

to filter down the ranks to non-leaders as well.

CONCLUSION

During my years on the staff with Campus Crusade for Christ (1974-78) I held a view that is similar to the desire view. I did not tell people they needed to be willing to change to be born again. But *if asked by the person to whom I was witnessing*, I would say that he had to be willing to change *if God gave him new desires*. I would say that the new birth might have the impact that he would no longer want to get drunk, for example. But he need have no desire to change now. He simply should recognize that his desires might change.

I now believe even that weak view of repentance was seriously flawed. I was allowing the camel's nose in the tent. The desire view lets the camel in even more.

The view that a willingness to turn from one's sins and to follow Christ is required to be born again might seem like a reasonable view. But it is not what the Scriptures teach. Thus we need to abandon that view. Otherwise we risk getting on a slippery slope away from the grace position entirely. ■■■

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

Israel and the Church Fathers

by Ronald E. Diprose

My special interest in the place of Israel in God's eternal plan began with a conference in Florence, Italy, in 1990. The theme of the conference was the Church's response to Israel, "*La Chiesa di fronte a Israele*." There were delegates from the Methodist, Waldensian, and Brethren Assemblies. After my exposition of Romans chapters 9 to 11—showing that God had not rejected his people, despite the unbelief of many—the Waldensian theologian who was chairing the Conference commented: "We [meaning most Waldensians and Methodists] must admit that we were wrong [in holding to Replacement Theology]". As a result, I decided to discover what had determined Christian thinking on this subject by reading relevant parts of the Patristic writings dating from the early Christian centuries. In order to do this research in a rigorous manner, I applied and was accepted into a doctoral program in Leuven, Belgium.

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY?

Opinions are divided on this vital point and much turns on the answer given. Some scholars take the hard language used by Jesus in speaking of those Jews who did not accept him as their Messiah as proof that anti-Judaism, leading to supercessionism, has its roots in the NT corpus. The Jews had been hoping for a political Messiah who would have freed Israel from the Roman yoke (Luke 24:21), whereas Jesus put off all such activity to his second advent (Luke 19:11-27; Acts 1:6-8).

In reality, the way Jesus described Jewish unbelievers was no different from the way the apostles describe all who refuse to believe the gospel (John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). The Hebrew prophets' denunciations of unbelieving Israel had been no less harsh, without any thought of disinheritance of their status as God's elect people. The NIV translators made a serious blunder when they inserted the definite article in 1 Pet 2:10, to make Peter say that believers in Jesus are "*the* people of God" whereas Peter, like James in Acts 15:14, speaks of "*a* people of God". At the same time Peter states very clearly that all of God's ancient promises concerning restoration, including the restoration of Israel, will be fulfilled at Christ's second coming (Acts 3:21).



After studying the relevant passages I came to the conclusion that the NT does *not* teach Replacement Theology. Rather, it documents a heated "in-house" debate within Judaism. Meanwhile there are statements made by both Jesus (Matt 23:39), and Paul (Rom 11:1-2, 28-29) which clearly exclude Replacement Theology.

THE COURSE OF POST-APOSTOLIC HISTORY

The origin of Replacement Theology is linked to a parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity following the disastrous Jewish war of 66-70 and the revolt against Rome led by Simon Bar-Kockba (132-135 A.D).

After these national disasters the Jews had to fight for survival in the Roman world. The oppressive political climate may be gauged by the fact that the Romans renamed the Jewish territories of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, "Palestine," after Israel's archenemies, the Philistines.

But the destruction of Jerusalem also meant the loss of a geographical identity for the Christian Church. The result was that Christian apologists sought to create a historical identity for themselves by claiming to be the rightful heirs of all that, in the past, had belonged to Israel. In other words, Replacement Theology was the product of a spirit of rivalry which grew up between the two monotheistic communities of faith.

The tactic of the non-Jewish church was to present itself as the only legitimate representative of Biblical monotheism, to the exclusion of the Jews. This entailed the appropriation of both the Jewish Scriptures and the promises made to the elect people. This operation was not as easy as it sounds because the name "Israel" appears over 2000 times in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, in order to

appropriate the revelations entrusted to Israel (Rom 3:1-2), Christian spokesmen had to interpret allegorically everything related to the history and future of Israel. Just how arbitrary this was can be seen in the fact all predictions of judgment on the nation of Israel continued to be understood literally!

ISRAEL IN CHRISTIAN WRITINGS OF THE 2ND TO 5TH CENTURIES

According to a pseudonymous writing, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, written during the first half of the 2nd century, the Church occupies the position that Israel was never worthy of occupying, and consequently, the Church is the true inheritor of the covenant and of all the promises made to Israel. In his passion to express contempt for the Jewish people, this author was prepared to overturn the meaning of the Biblical text. For example, physical circumcision was deemed to be a transgression that a wicked angel had induced the Israelites to do (IV, 3-4), while the temple was described as a habitation of demons and full of idolatry (XVI). In particular, chapter XIII sets the stage for a long-standing tradition, that continued up until the time of Augustine, of completely overturning the meaning of Gen 25:21-23 and making Esau stand for Israel and Jacob for the Church.

Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho a Jew* (ca. 140), shows the same contempt for the institution of circumcision as is seen in *The Epistle of Barnabas* (XIV, 2; XIX). Moreover Justin articulated the latent Replacement Theology evident in Barnabas in precise terms by calling Christians “the true Israelitic race” (CXXXV), making the Church a complete substitute for Israel.

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon from 177 until 195, is remembered mainly for his defense of the authority of the apostolic writings over against the Gnostic writings.

Although he did not engage in a polemic with the Jews, he shared the view that the Church had replaced Israel completely and definitively and thus allegorized all prophetic passages which have Israel in view (*Against Heresies* V, 34).

Tertullian (160-225), despite the sober tone of his *Answer to the Jews*, built upon what had become the standard interpre-

“Christian apologists sought to create a historical identity for themselves by claiming to be the rightful heirs of all that, in the past, had belonged to Israel.”

tation of Gen 25:23 and Rom 9:11-12. It is worth quoting him at length on this point:

Accordingly, since the people or nation of the Jews is anterior in time, and [greater] through the grace of primary favor in the Law, whereas ours is understood to be [less] in the age of times, as having in the last era of the world attained the knowledge of divine mercy: beyond doubt, through the edict of divine utterance, the prior and [greater] people—that is, the Jewish—must necessarily serve the [less]; and the [less] people—that is, the Christian—overcome the [greater] (Tertulliano, *Risposta ai Giudei* I).

So Tertullian—and Augustine after him (*The City of God*, XVI, 35)—make the Church descend from Jacob, when in reality it was the twelve tribes of Israel and also Christ who were descended from him (Rom 9:5). And they paradoxically identify

all the actual descendants of Jacob with Esau!

With Tertullian we find theological reflection based upon Replacement Theology. He begins by accepting Replacement Theology as a theological presupposition. Then he applies his rigorous logic to this presupposition, attributing his conclusion to an “edict of divine utterance”, thus making the Christian people formally superior to the Jewish people. What is more ominous is that he spells out the logical consequence of his reasoning by saying that the lesser people must overcome the greater while the “greater” people (i.e. Israel) must serve the “lesser” people (i.e. the Christian Church, see *Risposta ai Giudei* I). This declassing of Israel, as the servant of the Church, theoretically based on a divine edict, found many unhappy applications, particularly from when Emperor Constantine began creating formal legislation that reflected it.

I could continue quoting from the writings of Origen and Augustine, and from the anti-Judaic sermons of Chrysostom. In all of these writings we would find further demonstrations that Replacement Theology was a presupposition in the Patristic writings. In all cases the essential role of ethnic Israel, God’s elect people, was either forgotten or negated. They were substituted by the Christian Church, which was considered the true Israel, spiritual in nature. Jesus had said: “salvation is of the Jews” but now the Jewish identity of Jesus and the apostles, and almost all of the Biblical authors, was ignored, while the elect people were despised. ■

Ronald E. Diprose was Academic Dean at Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, Rome, for twenty five years, and is Editor of the theological journal *Lux Biblica*. His numerous publications include *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004).

News from the Grace Community

Pastor Ken Hornok retired from Midvalley Bible Church, Bluffdale, UT / Pastor Ken Yates is moving from First Baptist Church Honey Grove, TX to South Carolina / Brad Duskocil was re-elected as Chairman of the GES Board.

Go to faithalone.org/jobs.html for ministry jobs in the Free Grace community. Send your news and job opportunities to bethany@faithalone.org.

Ask and You Shall Receive:

Questions & Answers

by Various



CALVIN AND CALVINISM

Q In the conclusion of Shawn Lazar's recent article, "Cheap Grace or Cheap Law," he implied that Calvin denied "faith alone in Christ alone." I have long thought, following comments made by Zane Hodges, that Calvin & Luther agreed with it, that they thought assurance was the essence of saving faith. Is that wrong?

A. Thanks for your question. First, let me clarify that I didn't mention Calvin, so much as Calvinism, and there's a big difference between the two. Calvinism as a movement encompassing many different people, including the Dutch Dort Calvinists, the Westminster Presbyterians, the Puritans, the New Calvinists, and so on. So even if Calvin himself believed that salvation was strictly by faith, not works, and that assurance was of the essence of saving faith, it is pretty conclusive that later Calvinists, and others in the Reformed tradition, did not.

Second, unlike Hodges, I am agnostic about John Calvin's personal beliefs. Hodges accepted the arguments of R. T. Kendall and M. Charles Bell to the effect that Calvin believed assurance of salvation was the essence of saving faith. But their conclusions were rejected by other scholars, such as Richard A. Muller, in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*. Part of the problem is that there is no reason to assume that Calvin was consistent in his beliefs. I'm sure he did say things that suggested assurance was of the essence. But he also wrote that the elect are known by the "signs" of the Holy Spirit working in their lives. Pending further study, I prefer to reserve judgment on where Calvin stood.

—Shawn Lazar

FOUR QUESTIONS ON THE ATONEMENT

Q. You defend the universal atonement. But if Christ's atonement on the cross actually achieved universal propitiation, why would anyone be condemned?

A. There are many passages that teach the doctrine of an unlimited atonement

(i.e., Isa 53:6; John 1:29; 3:16-17; 12:47; 2 Cor 5:14-19; 1 Tim 2:3-4; 6; 4:10; Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:9; 1 John 2:2). But many people are unclear on what the cross was meant to achieve. The Biblical testimony doesn't always fit neatly into our theological traditions, and we should all strive to be good Bereans, and make our beliefs fit the Bible—not the other way around.

So, for example, your question assumes that a universal atonement would lead to universal salvation. Maybe you also assume that the atonement is an all or nothing affair, that removing sins (John 1:29) is tantamount to giving people everlasting life. But that is not true. Having your sins removed and being given everlasting life are two very different things.

For example, read the famous judgment scene in Revelation 20:11-15. We know this is the Great White Throne Judgment, the one for unbelievers. Notice that it mentions two sets of books: there are the books of deeds (plural), and then there's the Book of Life (singular). What purpose do they serve?

We read that the people are judged according to the works recorded in the first set of books (vv. 12-13). But does it say they

are *condemned* because of those works? No, it doesn't. Rather, in v 15 we are told these people are cast into the lake of fire *because they were not found in the Book of Life*.

It seems the books of deeds are opened to prove to each unbeliever that their works give them no claim to eternal salvation (and to determine their degree of eternal torment). But that does not mean their deeds decide their eternal fate. On the contrary, Rev 20:11-15 suggests their eternal fate hinges on whether or not they're in the Book of Life. And how does one get into that? By believing in Jesus for everlasting life (John 3:16, 36; Phil 4:3; Rev 22:17). If you believe in Jesus, you're in the Book of Life. And what happens if you don't believe? John 3:18 is perfectly consistent with Rev 20:11-15: people who do not believe are condemned now and will be eternally condemned if they die in unbelief. They are not condemned because of their deeds. They are condemned because they lack God's own eternal life.

Q. But if Jesus paid the penalty for sin, how can unbelievers pay for it again in hell?

A. Don't be so quick to assume the penalty for sin is *eternal* death. In Romans 6:23, Paul says the penalty for sin is *physical* death. And as you know, everybody dies, even Christians (short of the rapture, of course). The cross did not take that penalty away.

In fact, we would hesitate to say the cross paid the penalty for sin. We would say that Jesus took away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2), and His resurrection is proof that we who believe in Him will be raised with glorified bodies (John 11:25). But whether we believe in Him or not, we all suffer the penalty by dying. The cross, or the resurrection that followed, may take the *sting* of death away, by promising that all believers will be resurrected to eternal glory, but it doesn't actually take the penalty of death away.

Q. But if the propitiation was intended to remove guilt why are men still guilty?

A. You assume the atonement was meant to remove guilt. Was it? Consider Romans 3:23, where Paul says that all men are guilty before God: "We all fall short, [present tense] of the glory of God." If the cross

removes guilt, why would Paul say that Christians are presently guilty?

You might reply that you think Paul was speaking about a believer's experience *before* they came to faith in Christ. We were guilty before, but no longer. In that case, consider 1 John 1:7-9. It shows that even born-again people need forgiveness, which is only available if they walk in the light of God's Word and confess their sins.

Positionally, we are forensically justified the moment we believe in Christ (Rom 4:22-24), which implies we are simultaneously always sinners in need of justification (*simul iustus et peccator*). But experientially, it seems that we should not assume the cross was meant to remove our guilt. It makes that removal *possible* for confessing Christians, but it's not automatic.

“What we have needed is not only to have our sins forgiven, but to have God's own life in us.”

Q. How can people be condemned to the lake of fire as a judgment/penalty when the propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation of Christ has removed sin as an obstacle between man and God?

A. People are not condemned to the lake of fire because the obstacle of sin has not been removed for them.

The cross had many different effects. Some were universal. Some were particular. We have been arguing that one of the universal effects of the cross was that it removed sin as a barrier to everlasting life for all people (John 1:29). But the atonement does not mean that all people are automatically forgiven, or that sin's penalty (i.e., physical death) has been removed for all. You and I die because we are sinners, even though we are born again and justified.

Think about Adam and Eve. When they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, God did not declare them "sinners" (although they were); God declared them "dead." The result is that every human being is mortal, and what's worse, we are estranged from

God's own eternal life; "alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18). Therefore, since that time, what we have needed is not only to have our sins forgiven—you might say that only brings us back to a neutral position—but also to have God's own life in us (i.e., everlasting life).

So when people are cast into the lake of fire, it's not because the obstacle of sin hasn't been taken away, it's because they remain estranged from the life of God; it's because they lack everlasting life, and so their names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 20:15). The lake of fire is the default position for people lacking God's life.

We're sure these answers will raise many questions in your mind. If so, please send them in!

—Steve Lewis and Shawn Lazar

ARE WE IMMORALISTS?

Q. I've seen your video stating that no person can lose their salvation after they have received it. You as well as many other churches use the Holy Ghost's name to support the belief that it's God's will that people willfully sin until their death, after their salvation. That implies the Holy Ghost supports these sins. You teach that a saved person could molest, rape, and slowly cut the body parts of every little child in this world, but God would bring no judgment upon them, due to all their future sins being forgiven. How could you have such a reprobate mind?

A. You got all that from just one of our short videos? It's unwise and unfair to accuse anyone of such horrible beliefs without gathering more info. Please visit our website (www.faithalone.org), or read just about any of our books, magazines, or journal articles, and you will quickly learn two things.

First, it is true that we affirm the doctrine of eternal security ("once saved always saved"). We do that on the basis of Jesus' promise that believers would never perish, and would never be snatched from either His or His Father's hands. That is a guarantee, because, as Jesus explains: "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all" (John 3:16; 10:28-29). If you think you can lose your salvation, you must also think you are greater than the Father!

Second, in reading our materials, you will quickly see how much emphasis we put on the topic of temporal judgment for sin. The latest example would be Zane Hodges' commentary on Romans, entitled, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*. If you were familiar with our literature, you would know we definitely hold that God punishes the sins of believers in this life. Examples would include Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), the Corinthians who were improperly celebrating the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:30), and even Moses, whom God prevented from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12).

What does this mean in practice? It means that contrary to your assumptions, we would hold that a believer who committed the horrible sins you mentioned would be out of fellowship with God, would lack spiritual blessing, and would suffer severe temporal judgment from God, up to and including his premature death. We would also say that such a believer would suffer shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and loss of rewards for all eternity. But it's true, they would still be eternally secure.

In sum, it is absolutely wrong to think the doctrine of eternal security means that God approves of sin, or denies that He punishes it temporally, and we teach no such thing.

—Shawn Lazar

THE DESERTED ISLAND ILLUSTRATION

Q. I appreciate Bob's article "Another Look at the Deserted Island Illustration" (JOTGES, Spring 2013, pp. 3-20). In the article, you affirm that Hodges said, and you agreed, that what we need to know about Jesus "starts with, but is not necessarily limited to, knowledge that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead three days later" (p. 4). In your commentary on *John in the Grace New Testament Commentary*, commenting on John 2:20, you wrote, "Since the disciples were born again before they believed in Jesus' resurrection (cf. 2:11; 3:16), and since John's Gospel was written after the resurrection to tell people how they could have eternal life (20:31), belief in Jesus' resurrection is not a condition of eternal life." So, I would like to ask two questions for clarification, if I may: (1) How do your statements in the article and in the commentary fit together? and (2) Is



there a difference between "the gospel" and "the saving message"?

I hope those sound like questions for clarification, not for confrontation! Thanks in advance for your reply.

**"It is wrong to think
the doctrine of eternal
security means that
God approves of sin."**

A. Great questions!

The two statements harmonize in that there is a difference between the condition of everlasting life, which is simply faith in Christ for that life (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; 1 Tim 1:16), and what is needed to bring a person to believe that. While people in the very presence of the Lord of glory came to faith in Him with no knowledge of His upcoming death and resurrection, they had the advantage of seeing Him and hearing Him. There was a powerful witness in His presence and in actually hearing His tone of voice, the conviction in His voice, and the authority with which He answered objections.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are the ultimate proofs that His promise of life

is true. Once a person grasps the finished work of Christ on the cross, then believing in Him for everlasting life is quite logical and reasonable. That is not to say that all who believe in the cross and empty tomb are born again. One must believe the promise of life to all who simply believe in Jesus. Most people in Christianity today believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, rose bodily from the dead, and that He will give everlasting life to those who persevere in good works. It is our job to show them that the promise is to "whoever believes in Him" (John 3:16) not to *whoever behaves in Him*.

In terms of your second question, yes, there is a difference between the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-11) and the saving message/message of everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; Gal 2:15-16; Eph 2:8-9).

The term *gospel* is not even found in John's Gospel, the only book in the Bible whose specific purpose is to lead unbelievers to faith in Christ for everlasting life (John 20:31).

The *gospel* is the good news that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead on the third day, and then appeared to many people for over a month.

The *message of life* is the promise that whoever believes in Jesus for everlasting life has that life.

In other words, the gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ which should lead us to believe in the message of life.

—Bob Wilkin

Q. Some Jehovah's Witnesses came to my house. They said they believe in Jesus as their Savior, but they don't believe he is God. They showed me several verses where Jesus seems to speak as if he and God were two separate beings. If they are separate, how can Jesus be God?

A. Good question. For the JW's (and for Muslims and Mormons) whenever Jesus talks with God, or about God, or distinguishes His will from the Father's will, they interpret that as meaning that Jesus is clearly one being, and God a totally separate being. Therefore, they reason, God is not Jesus, and Jesus is not God. Period. The assumption is that each person must have their own being. But Christians do not share that assumption.

When we read those same texts, we readily admit that Jesus and God the Father are two different *Persons*, but we also affirm they share the same *divine substance, or being*. That is the heart of Trinitarian theology: distinguishing between the Persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

and the loving substance that all the Persons share in.

I know how daunting that idea can be, and you're probably wondering how anyone could have come to that conclusion. I don't have enough space to give much detail here, but consider three lines of evidence.

First, the Bible clearly says there is only one God (Deut 4:35, 39; 6:4; 2 Sam 7:27; 2 Kings 5:15; Psa 86:10; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6). Monotheism is a must.

Second, the Bible also says there are three Persons (Father, Son, and Spirit) who are distinct from each other, and yet who are somehow united in their actions. Just ask yourself these three questions:

1. Who raised Jesus from the dead? The Son (John 2:19-22; 10:17,18)? The Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11)? Or the Father (Rom 6:4; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 13:20; Acts 13:30; 17:30, 31)?

2. Who created the world? The Son (John 1:3; Col 1:16, 17)? The Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30)? Or the Father (Gen 1:1; Heb 11:3)?


3. Who justifies man? The Son (Rom 5:9; 10:4; 2 Cor 5:19, 21)? The Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11; Gal 5:5)? Or the Father (Ex 31:13; 2 Cor 5:19, 21)?

It seems as though all three were involved in the same actions, suggesting plurality within God.

Finally, the Bible says that God *is* love (1 John 4:8). Somehow, love does not just characterize God's actions, but love is His very being.

So the question is, how do you reconcile monotheism, plurality, and love?

Well, the early Christians concluded that the Godhead must exist as a loving communion of three Persons. Love is the foundation of God's being. But in its very nature, love requires plurality, i.e., it requires another person to love. So there is one God, who exists as three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, whose common being is their eternal reciprocal love.

So when we read Bible passages like Matt 3:16-17, where Jesus gets baptized, the Spirit descends, and God the Father says, "This is My beloved Son," Christians see that as just one example (out of several dozen) of the Trinity in action. It's a mystery, but it's a beautiful mystery, one that emphasizes, that God's love for the world (John 3:16) is an expression of His eternal Trinitarian life. —Shawn Lazar 

Mail your questions to Grace Evangelical Society, post them on our Facebook page, or email them to shawn@faithalone.org.

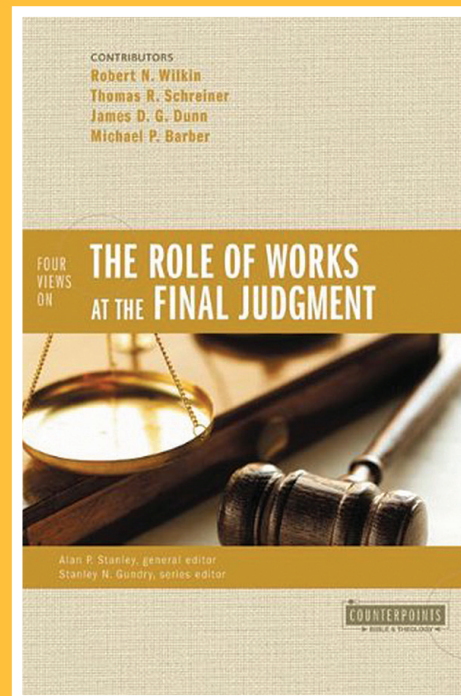
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Who Objected? John 8:30-33

John H. Niemelä

INTRODUCTION

It's clear that in John 8, Jesus is speaking to a hostile audience. Then, in vv 30-32, we find that some of the Jews believed in Him, and Jesus speaks to them about being His disciples. But in v 33 the tone suddenly changes. Beginning with the words "They said..." the hostile discussion resumes, and Jesus describes his interlocutors as *children of the devil*. Some Reformed interpreters think this verse shows that the new believers were actually false professors, because they did not persevere in their faith.

The question is, who are "they" who object to Jesus? Are they the new believers, or someone else?

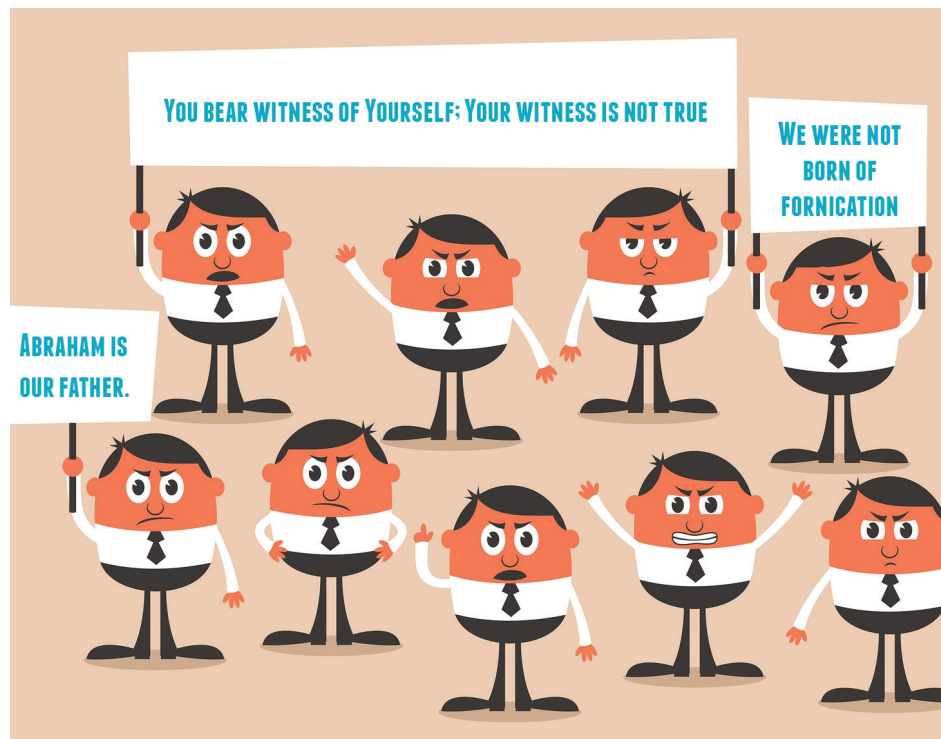
THREE VIEWS OF JOHN 8:30-33

One view is that vv 30-33 are continuous with the rest of the chapter. The persons who are said to have believed in Jesus are the same people who then object to Him, and so are not true believers and hence are not born again.

A second view is that vv 30-33 are not continuous. The new believers have started believing, but they need to persevere in their faith in order to obtain final salvation.

The third view is that vv 30-33 are not continuous and that the new believers mentioned are born again. The speakers in v 33 are not the believers, but the hostile crowd.

Here I would like to defend the third view.



TWO DIFFERENT GROUPS


According to the third view, vv 30-33 are not continuous. The comment made in v 33 is not by the new believers mentioned in vv 30-32. The third person plural pronoun *they* in v 33 refers to the last people who spoke in John 8 (cf. John 8:22), i.e. the unbelieving larger crowd (as opposed to a small group that came to faith).

John first mentions these new believers in v 30f. Thus, if they spoke in v 33, it would be their first speech in John. Note well: they would be new speakers, not old ones. So the question becomes, how does John introduce new speakers? Does he introduce them differently than old ones or non-speakers?

It may help to imagine a note in a proof-reader's copy of a children's book reading: "Pronouns never introduce new speakers as speakers." That's true here. John's Gospel definitely prefers explicit noun designations for speakers (over implicit ones). For example, the seven times the Samaritan woman speaks (4:9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 25, and 28) *woman* is the subject. Not once does John have *she* as the subject. John strongly prefers noun subjects for speaking verbs (especially when introducing new speakers). Hence, his style of introducing speakers disproves the claim that John 8:30-33ff refers to a single group.

It is significant that *apokrithēsan* ("they replied") in John 8:33 lacks an explicit

subject-word. John introduces/re-introduces speakers 353 times. Only 79 of those lack an explicit subject-word. John almost always uses this construction for re-introducing prior speakers. This stylistic issue points to those who have heckled Jesus throughout the chapter as the speakers of 8:33.

Why would John use a re-introduction formula to introduce a new group of speakers at the height of controversy? Judean hecklers were already attacking what Jesus said (at least since John 8:22). John re-introduces them as objecting to what Jesus taught some new believers: abiding in His word as disciples in His footsteps would free them. 

John H. Niemelä is Professor of New Testament at Rocky Mountain Seminary, Englewood, CO. This article is excerpted from a message he gave at the 2013 GES Annual Conference. MP3s available.

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Blameless & Above Reproach

By Bill Fiess

There are only seven uses of the Greek word *aneklētos* (blameless, above reproach, irreproachable) in the New Testament.

Three of these uses refer to one of the requirements of an elder (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) or a deacon (1 Tim 3:10). Those are fairly well known. The other four are not so well-known.

One refers to widows:

Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. *And these things command, that they may be blameless.* But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:3-8, emphasis added).

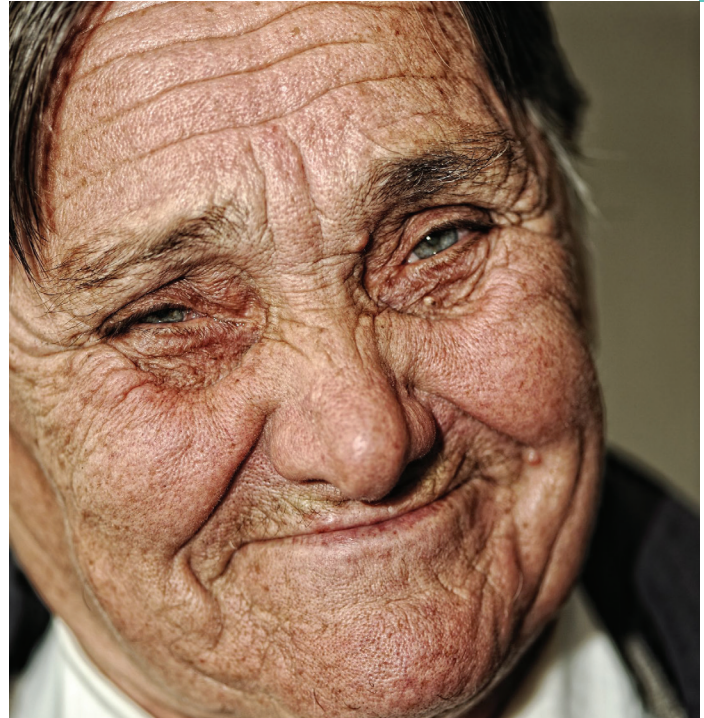
So not only should elders and deacons in the local church be blameless/above reproach, but so should widows. In light of this, surely *all* in the local church should be blameless. The elders and deacons are to be examples of what the whole flock should be like.

The final three uses of *aneklētos* show that the aim of every believer is to be found blameless at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

First, Paul prayed for the believers in Corinth “that [they] may be *blameless* in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:8, emphasis added). The expression *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema) in the Corinthian letters (compare 1 Cor 3:13; 4:3; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14) and in several of Paul’s other letters as well (compare Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Tim 1:12; 4:8).

Second, Colossians 1:22 is often cited as teaching the Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Yet it actually teaches the doctrine of eternal rewards for believers who persevere and hence will be found blameless at the Bema:

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and




blameless [*amōmos*], and above reproach [*aneklētos*] in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard... (Col 1:21-23, emphasis added).

If we simply look at the other six uses of *aneklētos* in the New Testament, it is clear what Paul means here. He is not warning believers that if they fail to persevere they will prove they were false professors and will end up in the lake of fire. He is encouraging believers to persevere so that they may be presented by Christ at the Bema as having been holy, blameless, and above reproach in this life.

Third, in 1 Tim 6:13-14, Paul urges Timothy, obviously a born-again and eternally-secure man, to persevere so that he might be highly rewarded at the Bema:

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep *this* commandment without spot, *blameless* [*aneklētos*] until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing... (emphasis added).

Blamelessness in the New Testament is not sinlessness. It means to be one who is an exemplary Christian, one who will be approved by Christ and praised by Him at the Bema (cf. Luke 19:17). Not all believers are blameless all the time. But we can and should be. That is our calling. We should long to be found blameless by Him. A simple word study plainly reveals this, even to a math professor. 

Bill Fiess is a mathematics professor.

“All in the local church should be blameless. The elders and deacons are to be examples of what the whole flock should be like.”

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