

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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THE UNREGENERATE CAN RESPOND TO GOD (ACTS 10:4)

PLUS Legalism / The Decrees of God / Jesus Weeps / Of Elders and Deacons /
Who Are You, Really? / Harsh Hand / Going Overseas / Heartfelt Trust / AND MORE

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FROM THE EDITOR

Are you reading our daily blog? When someone told us to start blogging more often, we resisted. At that point, we were only doing two or three blogs a year...at best!

Then we started thinking strategically.

The reality is billions of people do most of their reading online. By not blogging regularly, we were not reaching that potential audience.

So we took action.

We redesigned the website and Bob and I committed to writing at least one blog a week.

It was hard at first. And the quality of the blogs was spotty. But over time, Bob and I got better. We got more disciplined in our writing, and more focused on doing it well.

Now, we write every day. As a result, our writing has improved and is getting better all the time. It's getting to the point where Bob says that our blogs are some of the very best material GES produces!

Surprisingly, there are GES supporters who only know us from our blogs!

In them you'll find short Biblical studies, devotional thoughts, book reviews, and doctrinal teaching.

We try to include some blogs in every issue of *Grace in Focus*. But if you're not reading the blog regularly, you're missing out on a lot of original content that is only available online.

You can read the blog at www.faithalone.org/blog/, where you can also sign up to receive it by email.

Many people have told me they now use our blog as part of their daily quiet time.

We love you, our magazine readers. We pray for the magazine to grow. We're also excited to reach a new online audience with the Biblical message of grace. We expect that a bigger blogging audience



A Double Dose

Shawn Lazar, **EDITOR**

will translate into a bigger magazine audience, with each growing the other.

Why not be part of both? Get a double dose of grace teaching starting today.



**THE UNREGENERATE CAN RESPOND
TO GOD (ACTS 10:4)**



A chapter from
Is Calvinism Biblical?
Let the Scriptures Decide
(available Dec 1, 2017).



By Bob Wilkin

Calvinists think of unregenerate people as cadavers. That is, they see them as totally unable to respond to God in a saving way—or in any way.

They often cite Rom 3:11 which says, “There is none who seeks after God.” Yet we know from many texts that what Paul means is that no one seeks after God *of his own initiative*. But God does take the initiative (John 12:32; 16:7-11; Acts 17:27), gives natural revelation to all (Rom 1:19-20), and convicts all of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11).

Cornelius is exhibit A (though there are many examples like him in Scripture). He sought God *before* he was born again because God was first seeking him. If our theology does not allow for the unregenerate to respond to God, then we ought to change our theology.

CORNELIUS WAS NOT YET BORN AGAIN (ACTS 10:44; 11:14)

I suppose some might object that Cornelius must already have been born again. I remember the president of a seminary suggesting that to me. He reasoned this way:

- Premise 1: Only born-again people can seek God.
- Premise 2: Cornelius sought God.
- Conclusion: Cornelius was born again when he sought God.

However, after I showed him what I’m about to show you, he changed his mind. He decided that Cornelius was unregenerate before Peter preached to him. I don’t know how he resolved that with his Calvinism, but he saw the point.

In Acts 11:13-14 Peter related something that Cornelius told him. This statement was not given by Luke in Chapter 10. Peter reported that Cornelius “told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you *words by which you and your household will be saved*’” (emphasis added). While the word *saved* refers to regeneration only about 30% of the time in the NT, this is one of those times. One way we know that is by what we learn in Acts 10:44.

Peter preached Christ to Cornelius and his household. In Acts 10:43, Luke tells us what Peter said: “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” It is unlikely that this was the intended ending of his sermon. Peter may have planned to add more information, including mentioning that along with forgiveness comes regeneration/salvation.

However, v 44 says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” The words *while Peter was still speaking these words* imply that Peter had not finished.

But Cornelius had been told in advance that Peter would give him words by which he and his household *would be saved* (Acts 11:14). Thus when they heard that all who believe in Jesus receive the remission of sins, they knew that Peter was speaking of something which accompanies salvation. At that moment they were convinced that all who believe in Jesus are saved forever. When they believed, they received the Holy Spirit. The reception of the Spirit occurred when they were born again.

Cornelius was unregenerate when he sought the Lord with alms and prayers. And, as we shall now see, the Lord actually took note of his prayers and his giving. His example shows that the unregenerate can respond to God. Thus the T in TULIP is contradicted by the Biblical account concerning Cornelius.

CORNELIUS'S PRAYERS AND ALMS PLEASSED GOD (ACTS 10:4)

Pastor Bailey Smith once famously said that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. He meant that God does not hear the prayers of unbelievers and that unless a Jewish person believed in Jesus, God did not hear his prayers either.

But God does hear the prayers of unbelievers. Cornelius, a Gentile who worshipped in a Jewish synagogue, got prayers through to God: "So he [an angel] said to him [Cornelius], 'Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God'" (Acts 10:4).

The word translated *memorial* (*mnēmosunon*, used only here and Matt 26:13 and Mark 14:9) refers to something remembered, especially "an offering that presents a worshipper to God" (BDAG). In

other words, his prayers and alms pleased God. They got His attention in a good way.

Acts 10:35 bears out this understanding: "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." Cornelius feared God. Luke had already told us in Acts 10:2 that he was "...a devout man and one who feared God with all his household." But now Peter added that Cornelius worked righteousness.

“Have you had an unbeliever attend your Bible study or church? What you find is that unbelievers can indeed understand and learn.”

That saying has confused many. How can the unregenerate *work righteousness*? The confusion derives from Calvinism's understanding of total depravity.

We know from Isa 64:6 that unbelievers produce righteous deeds: "All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags..." That means the Jewish people to whom Isaiah was writing, many of whom were unbelievers, did righteous deeds, but they had no merit with God. Their best deeds were like filthy rags before Him.

Unbelievers still have the image of God. Thus some of His attributes (called His *communicable* attributes) are evident in all humans, believers and unbelievers

alike. These attributes include love, justice, kindness, and mercy. Even though we all fall short of God's glory (Rom 3:23), we are nonetheless still in His image (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). The Spirit of God can work in the lives of the unregenerate. Thus they can "work righteousness," though those righteous deeds, like alms and prayers, have no merit with God. God is not obligated to give everlasting life to those who work righteousness, since all fall short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). But He is obligated to "accept" them. What Peter meant is that the person who works righteousness will receive more light, more revelation, from God. Peter was the messenger of that revelation in this case.

CORNELIUS UNDERSTOOD AND OBEYED GOD'S COMMUNICATION TO HIM FROM AN ANGEL (ACTS 10:1-8)

According to Calvinism's understanding of total depravity, Cornelius was like a cadaver or a stone, incapable of understanding or responding to anything God said. And yet, according to the Bible, Cornelius did understand and respond to what God said.

God told him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter. Cornelius immediately understood and obeyed.

Have you had an unbeliever attend your Bible study or church? What you find is that unbelievers can indeed understand and learn. If the lesson is on the Rapture, they can understand it and even come to believe it. If it is about God's eternity, they can understand and believe. If it is about the promise of everlasting life to the believer, they can grasp that, too, and believe. And if they do, then we say that the



person in question was born again that day.

The reason it is not futile to allow unbelievers to attend your Bible study or church is because unbelievers can understand and respond to God's Word. Cornelius certainly did.

THE ACTIONS OF CORNELIUS RESULTED IN HIS HEARING THE MESSAGE OF LIFE (ACTS 10:30-43)

Did God sovereignly and miraculously send Peter to Cornelius? Absolutely. He first sent an angel to Cornelius himself, then gave Peter three visions to convince him to go to Cornelius. God did exactly what was necessary to bring the promise of everlasting life to Cornelius and his household.

God's sovereignty does not mean that the unregenerate cannot respond to God. Cornelius responded to the light God gave him, and as a result, God sent him Peter and the message of everlasting life.

CORNELIUS BELIEVED AND THEN WAS BORN AGAIN (ACTS 10:43-44)

The order we find here is faith first, then regeneration. That is the same order found in the rest of the Bible. Of course, this violates one aspect of the T in TULIP, the idea that regeneration precedes faith.

Cornelius believed (see Peter's summary in Acts 15:7-9), and then the Holy Spirit fell upon him. If the Calvinist position were true, Luke would have to say the opposite.

Of course, Acts 11:14 confirms this understanding: "*Peter...will tell you words* by which you and your household will be saved" (emphasis added). Notice *the words* that Peter spoke led to their salvation. They were only saved when they believed those words, not before.

THE UNREGENERATE CAN RESPOND TO GOD

In Acts, Cornelius is not the only example of someone seeking God. Lydia in Acts 16 was also a God-fearer and she, too, sought God. She was at the place of prayer by the riverside when Paul came and spoke.

Likewise, the more noble-minded Jews of Berea "searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things [the things spoken by Paul about Jesus] were true" (Acts 17:11).

Lastly, Paul told the Athenian philosophers, "And He has made from one blood every nation of men...so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

Calvinism says that the unregenerate cannot respond to God. That is incorrect. The unregenerate *can* respond to God.

Acts 10:4 contradicts Calvinism and the Calvinist position on total depravity. 



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 40 years, Sharon. His latest book is Is Calvinism

Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide.

Legalism: No Laughing Matter

By Ken Yates

Nevertheless, what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free (Gal 4:30-31).

DEFINING LEGALISM

If we were to define legalism, we would say that it is the belief that one can either earn their salvation by keeping the Law of Moses or that one pleases God by that Law and thus focuses on the commandments instead of the Lord. The Christian life is to be successfully lived only by Christ living through us and transforming us into His image.

Paul combats legalism in the book of Galatians. False teachers, usually called Judaizers, were teaching the believers at Galatia that they had to keep the Law of Moses in order to either receive eternal life or please God.

It seems to me that there is another type of legalism. It is the belief that one can earn eternal salvation by their own set of rules, or that if one keeps these rules they are being successful in their Christian living. Once again, such beliefs focus on commandments or rules. In



some cases, these “rules,” or commandments, are in the Bible. Sometimes they are not. While it is OK to follow these rules that are not in the Bible as a personal choice, it is legalism to make them mandatory on others.

MAN-MADE RULES

We have all seen legalists. I remember when I was a teenager I attended a very legalistic church. Women could not wear pants. Going to a doctor was a sin. You couldn't play cards or go to the movie theater. The wearing of jewelry was prohibited. Women were not allowed to cut their hair. If a Christian did these things he was displeasing to the Lord. If he continued doing them he would lose salvation.

When I see a legalist I must admit that part of me wants to laugh. They appear as cartoon characters. They also do not realize how hypocritical and self-righteous they are. For example, in the church I attended, you would see women who wore their hair in high buns without any jewelry. They would use tons of hair-spray to hold their hair in place. They were convinced that such expressions of fashion made them super Christians. They had no idea that they were spiritually arrogant even if they never cut their hair.

Recently, I was told by an acquaintance that playing cards was a sin. However, the card game called “Rook” was OK. Others have told me that watching any movie made by Disney is a sin since the company supports homosexual rights. However, they admit that sometimes they watch Disney movies if their children really want to watch it.

It is often impossible for legalists to see their hypocrisy and inconsistency.

NO COMMANDMENT EARNS ETERNAL LIFE

How dumb to think that following any set of commandments would earn eternal life or that behaving in these ways is all we need to have intimacy with the Lord and be more like Him. Like I said, when we see these things there is a strong desire to laugh.

But legalism is not a laughing matter. How many people have tried and continue to try to earn salvation

by following a set of rules? Such legalism perverts the Gospel of grace.

In addition, how many Christians have fallen prey to living a legalistic life by focusing on rules, often man-made rules, in order to please God? Such legalistic living almost always results in spiritual arrogance and a judgmental attitude towards those who do not keep the same rules. Such living destroys the process of becoming more like Christ.

TWO SONS

“How many people have tried and continue to try to earn salvation by following a set of rules? Such legalism perverts the Gospel of grace.”

In the book of Galatians, when Paul discusses the legalism involved with the Law of Moses, he does not see it as a laughing matter. The Gentile believers who were going out to be circumcised, keeping the Jewish feasts, and stopping eating ham were deceived. They needed stern correction.

He points out that Abraham had two sons.

Ishmael was born through Hagar, a slave, through human effort.

Isaac was born through Sarah, a free woman, through the power and promise of God. A legalistic view of things corresponds to Hagar and the birth of Ishmael.

Obedying God through the power of the Spirit by living by faith corresponds to Isaac's birth.

Abraham would not allow Ishmael and Isaac to live together. They were “cast” out. That is the attitude the church should have towards legalistic teaching. ■



Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society and GES's East Coast and International speaker.

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There are at least 11,000 of you reading *Grace in Focus* every month. There are several hundred thousand reading online. If you went to faithalone.org, clicked on DONATE, and committed to a monthly donation of only \$10, we could raise the funds to support ministries like these:

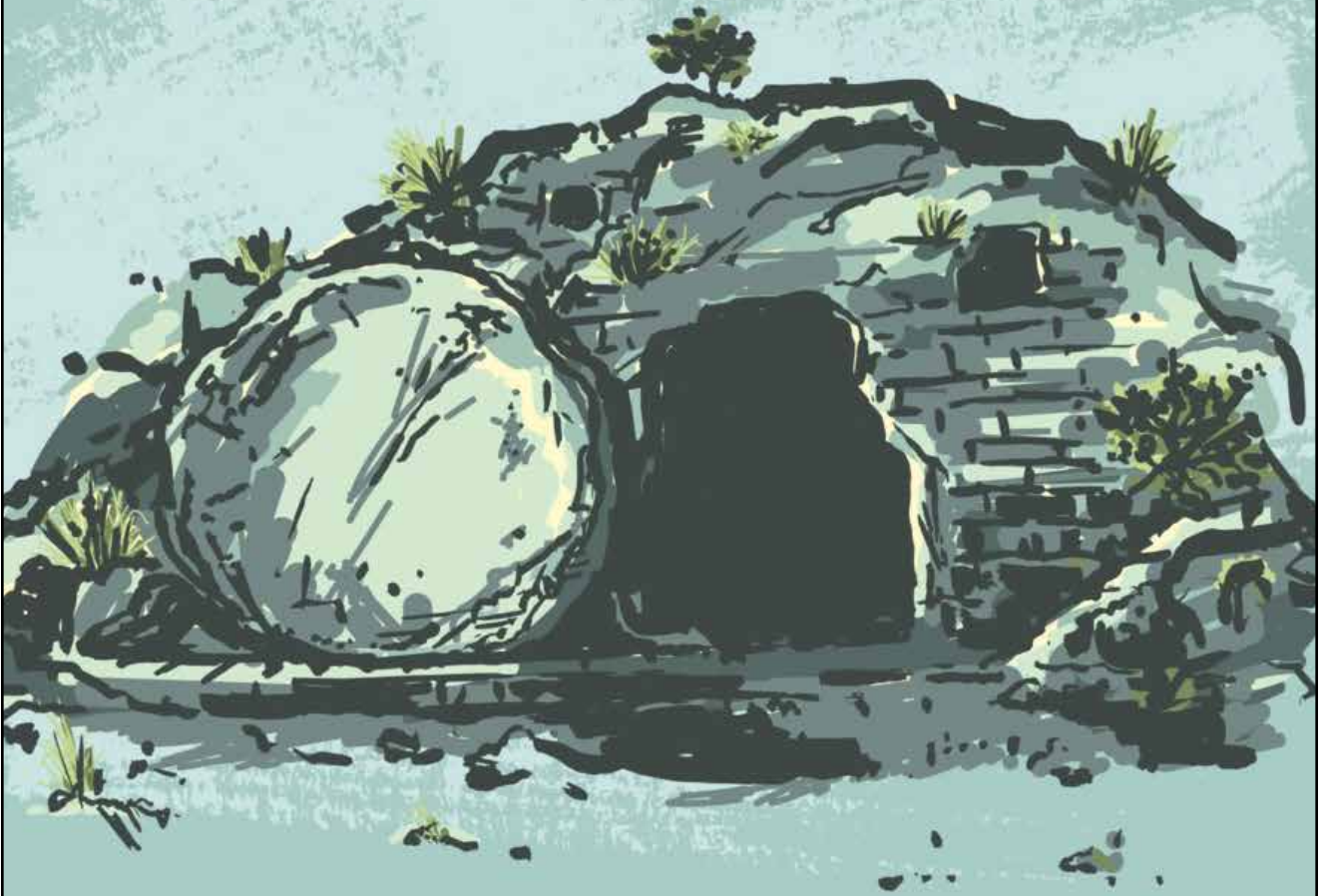
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For every \$100k increase in our budget, we can fund one of those positions for two years.

get us to
the goal!



Jesus Weeps Beside Our Tombs



BY BUD BROWN

My daughter-in-law recently posted a Facebook message about our ten-year-old grandson who has muscular dystrophy.

My son was scared tonight. He can feel his muscles deteriorate and is afraid of the day he can no longer walk. He is upset and concerned what this means for his life. As he sobbed in my arms, he was so sweet and told me he can keep going on because he knows how I love him.

I was impatient with his anger. I feel guilty for that. This parenting thing is tough. I want to protect and shelter him from this difficult pain.

He talked to his sister about his fears. She cried too, mourning her brother's lack of ability to play with her in ways she understands. We sat in a huddled mass, crying it out. When our tears ran dry, we talked it out and realized he can do a lot in or out of a wheelchair.

Where is Jesus when sisters weep for brothers? When mothers mourn children who are denied normal lives? Where is He when parents live with the dread of knowing that when they go to the grave, they will leave a child totally dependent on others? Where is God when a little boy suffers a withering disease that will steal his ability to even feed himself? Where is *that Jesus* we're told loves the little children?

Standing beside us in our grief.

WHEN LAZARUS DIED

Almost 2000 years ago, on a rocky hillside near Jerusalem, He stood beside a friend's tomb, weeping with His friend's family. We find this story in John 11.

So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around

Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus wept (John 11:17-35).

That's where we find Jesus; weeping beside our tombs. He snorted with anger and wept with grief. Anger at what sin has done to the human race. Grief over a friend's death.

JESUS SHARES OUR GRIEF

We don't stand alone in the midst of helpless rage at life's injustice. We don't grieve privately. Jesus shares our grief, weeping with us.

But He does more than weep. He comforts with promises of hope.

All who believe in Him have everlasting life.

All who believe will rise from the grave.

All who believe will escape the second death.

These are not condolences or wistful assurances. They are promises of hope: one day everything really will be made right.

Biblical hope is not a mere aspiration; it is certainty coupled with glad anticipation. Certain because Jesus has the power to keep those promises.

We see His power in what happens next.

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:38-44).

THE VICTORY

This was not the first time Jesus raised someone from the dead. Neither will it be the last. One day the promise of 1 Corinthians 15 shall be fulfilled.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:52-54).

Death, dreadful and horrible as it is, does not close the book. Jesus promised that it leads to another unending chapter in our stories.

There is only one condition to Jesus' promise. Not many conditions, not a few conditions, not even two conditions. Just one. That requirement is the fulcrum in the narrative unfolding at Lazarus' tomb.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

The lone condition to access the comforting hope is embedded in His question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

The only proper response is, "Yes, Lord, I believe..."

JOY AND SORROW

We know both joy and sorrow in this life. My wife and I grieve with our grandson and his family. But his life is also filled with the joy and happiness known to ten-year-old boys. He delights his parents and (sometimes) his sister. He is precious to us all.

But, still, there is the sorrow. In this world, we often traverse the vale of tears. My grandson walks that path. We walk it with him. Many of you also experience the crushing grief of watching a loved one suffer.

That is this life, a bittersweet draft of joy and sorrow. Every person who sees this earth must drink it. But one day that bitterness will be purged when Jesus raises us to new life.

Until then we do not stand alone in grief. Jesus stands with us, weeping beside our tombs. We cling to hope. We are rest assured of His promise.

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

Do you believe it? 



Bud Brown is President and Co-Founder at Turnaround Pastors.

Mailbag

By You

You get to know us through our writing. Let us get to know you by writing back!

“I have enjoyed listening to the audio recordings of the Denver Conference. But why are they so short? Only 20-30 minutes?” ~P. L., Shreveport, LA [Edit: We’ve been trying shorter sessions so as to include more speakers and more topics. It might also have to do with our attention sp—squirrel!]

“Thank you for your ministry and especially for the magazine.” ~T.A., Cecil, PA.

“To God be the glory! Keep up the good work for His name’s sake!” ~G.B. Raleigh, NC.


“I receive such encouragement from the literature. I can no longer attend the seminars.” ~B.O., Brenham, TX.

“I enjoy the expanded magazine. Good work. Sorry to hear you’re leaving the Riley Center. Was it a financial reason?” ~K.P., Fort Worth, TX. [Editor: Yes. It got too expensive. But we are very excited to be holding



the 2018 National Conference at the Hope Center in Plano, TX!]

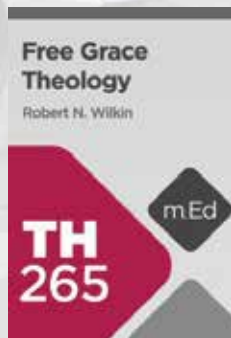
“Christ saved me without any help from me, and will keep me saved without any help from me. There is no way I can feel or work my way to heaven. Once saved, always saved.” ~A.A. Bigfork, MN.

“My husband, John, and I are so thankful you came to Lynchburg this past weekend for a conference. It was so refreshing and encouraging!” ~F.A., East Meadow, NY. 

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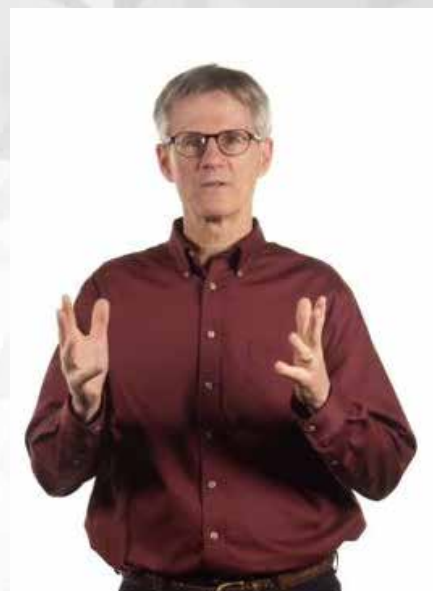
Mobile Ed: TH 265 Free Grace Theology

Have you ever wondered, “Can I lose my salvation?” or “Does God choose who is saved?” or “What does Jesus mean when he talks about rewards?”

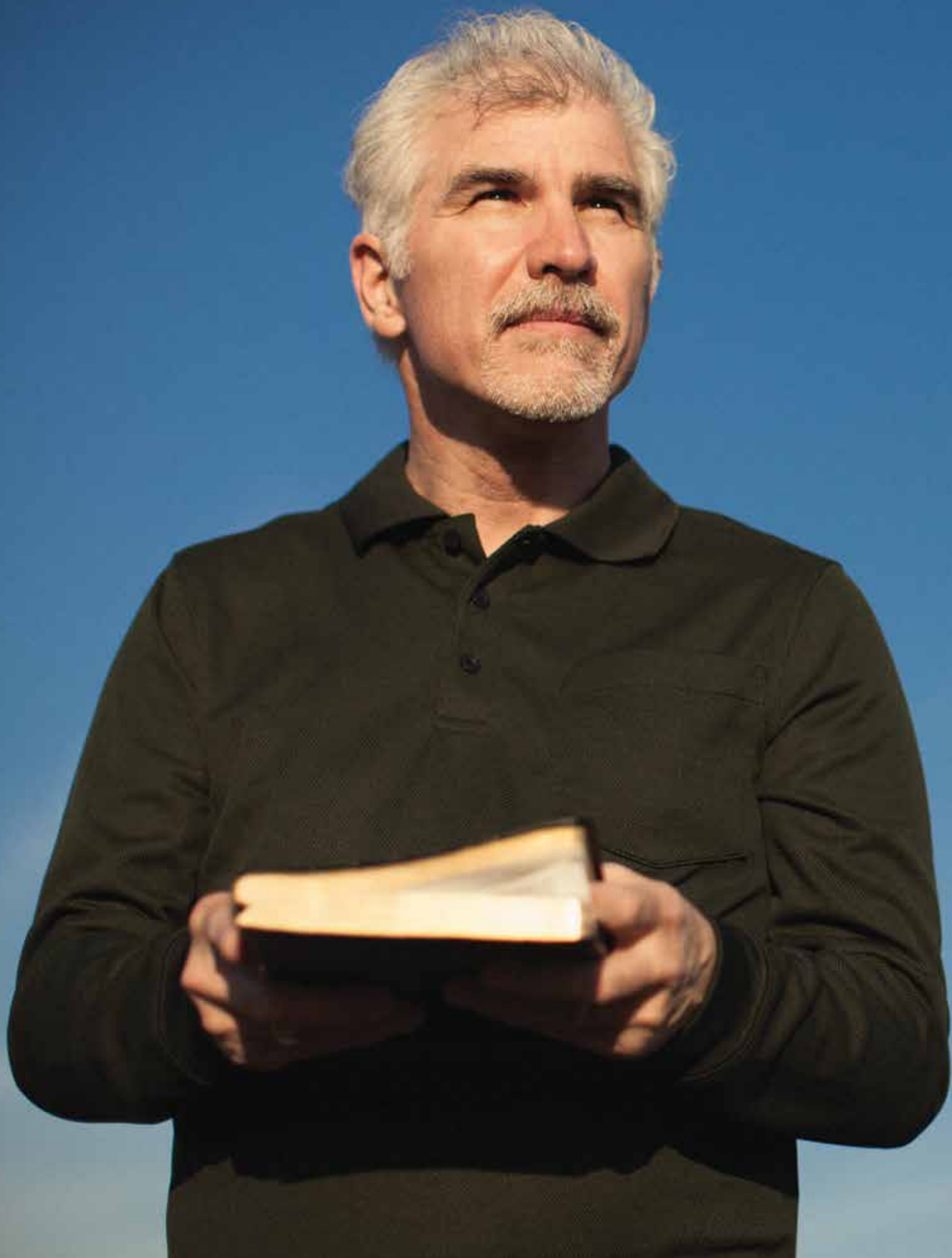


In this 12 hr video course, Dr. Bob Wilkin explores these and other questions related to salvation. You’ll see how Free Grace theology compares to Calvinism and Arminianism, and how it relates to the Lordship salvation view.

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Of Elders and Deacons (1 Timothy 3:1–13)

By Zane C. Hodges

FUNCTION AND MATURITY

3:1. The discussion of privilege in the public gatherings of the Church as they relate to men and women leads quite naturally to the discussion of another privilege—that of spiritual oversight. It is a **good work** (*kalou ergou*). An ascending scale is seen. Just as public prayer and ministry are restricted to men alone, oversight is restricted to certain kinds of men: those who possess proper spiritual qualifications. Paul deals with the various stations in the assembly, first male and female, and now bishop and deacon.

3:2-3. That an **elder** (*episkopos*) and *bishop* are one and the same individual seems transparent from Titus 1:5–7 and Acts 20:17, 28. These passages are conclusive. One views *function*, the other *maturity*.

Sometimes a point is made out of the singular *an elder*, but this is faulty exegesis. First, nothing is more natural than to speak of a group generally by referring to one individual specifically. Saying that “a Dallas Seminary student must possess a college degree” or “a candidate must possess U.S. citizenship” does not mean there is only one student or only one candidate.

Second, the singular is used in Titus 1:7 (*episkopon*) immediately following the plural “bishops” (*presbuteros*) in v 5, showing its true force to be representative rather than exclusive.

Third, the Church at Ephesus had a plurality of elders, as is proved by Acts 20:17, 28 and by 1 Tim 5:17. If the elder is identified as the “preacher,” this last verse is fatal to the view, for not all the elders labor in the Word and in doctrine. We may confidently

reject the idea that the Scriptures know anything about a church organization headed up by a single individual.

ONE WIFE

The phrase **husband of one wife** (*mias gunaikos andra*) is difficult. Various views have been advanced. First, it could refer to faithfulness to one's own wife, that is, a "one-woman man." Second, it could refer to avoidance of polygamy which even at that time could be found among Jews, according to Josephus. Third, it could refer to remarriage either after divorce or after a wife's death.

The first option seems not to do justice to the numeral *one* (*mias*), or at least handles it strangely. The second view about the danger of polygamy was nonetheless probably slight and is not likely to be before Paul's mind. The third view seems best. Remarriage, while certainly permitted, is not viewed without some disapproval (cf. 1 Tim 5:12). The man who maintains his "first faith" exhibits thereby a constancy of character which marks him out as fit to lead the Lord's people (cf. 1 Cor 7:8, 27, 40; Luke 2:36–37).

The phrase **able to teach** (*didaktikon*) means "skillful in teaching." That this does not necessarily imply the possession of the gift of teaching is clear from 5:17. But an overseer needs to know how to get something across to those he is leading.

GET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

3:4. Note the emphatic position of **his own house** (*tou idiou oikou*), indicating that surely if his own house is not well-managed, he is incapable of managing God's. This requires emphasis in these days of unruly preachers' children. Such a one cannot lead God's people. The phrase **with all reverence** (*meta pasēs semnotētos*) is not the kind of subjection that brings snickers at Dad behind his back.

3:5. The verb **manage** (*prostēnai*) means "to be at the head of, to rule;" likewise, the overseer is charged to **care** (*epimelēsetai*) for the church of God. The overseer must never permit his authority to get out of proper proportion. The true spiritual ruler is one who "cares for" the well-being of God's flock. Authority is heady wine. Few can take it.

3:6. The condemnation...of the devil (*eis krimā... tou diabolou*) is best taken here as an objective genitive, although in the phrase "snare of the devil" (*pagida tou diabolou*) from v 7, it is subjective. But

condemnation (*krima*) is distinctly a judicial term and points to God. Just as Lucifer in his place of elevated brightness and privilege was beclouded and **puffed up** (*tuphōtheis*) by pride and thus fell under God's judicial sentence (*krima*), so most easily does the **novice** (*neophuton*, "newly-planted"). The passage strictly applies to elders but has suggestive ramifications as regards to the practice of pushing new converts forward too rapidly.

3:7. Since the **reproach** (*oneidismōn*) is separated from **the devil's trap** (*pagida tou diabolou*) by the word **fall** (*empesē*), it is best taken absolutely and as not governing the genitive *of the devil*. The reproach may come from both within and without the assembly, and as criticism has a tendency to leave us discouraged and defeated, such a one may easily fall into the temptations with which Satan would trap and utterly ruin him in spiritual life. If the enemy cannot lift us up with pride, he will seek to tear us down through reproach and clever snares.

DEACONS AS INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY

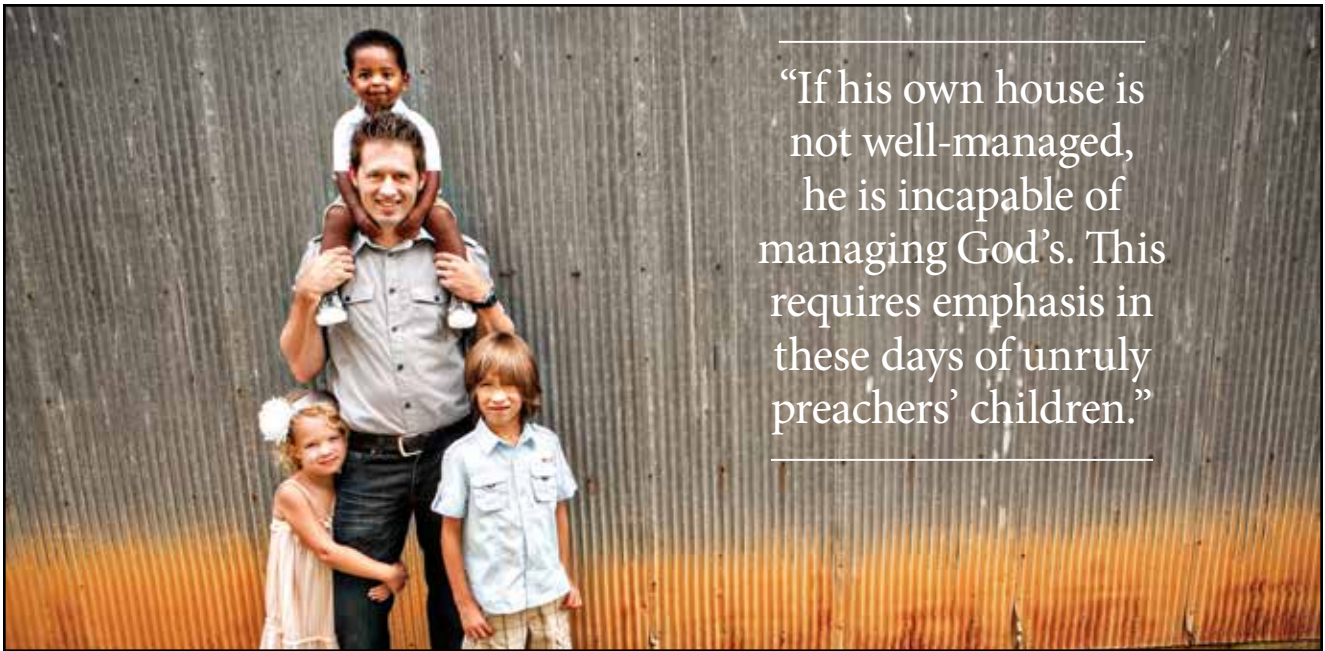
3:8. The word **deacons** (*diakonous*) is used only in this passage (vv 8, 12) and in Phil 1:1 in a technical sense as a word describing a position in the church. (Perhaps also, but not certainly, in Rom 16:1.) Both here and in Philippians, it stands in distinction to *elder* (*episkopos*), but not *bishop* (*presbuteros*), and from this fact its significance may be inferred. In contrast to the authority implied by *elder*, the word in accord with its non-technical usage suggests service which especially meets temporal and material needs.

Though the specific word used here for *deacon* does not occur in Acts 6:1–6, the noun *service* (*diakonia*) occurs in 6:1 (and also in v 4 in reference to the ministry of the Word), and the verb form occurs in 6:2. The particular job description of the seven men listed in Acts 6 is suggestive of the work of "deacons."

3:9–10. The **mystery** (*mystērion*) referred to is made explicit in v 16. It deals especially with the Incarnation, God manifest in the flesh.

The office of deacon is sublimely linked with the truth of the Incarnation, for it was the Lord Jesus who said,

...but whoever wishes to become great among you, shall be your *deacon* [*diakonos*]...for the Son of Man did not come to be ministered to [*diakonēthēnai*], but to minister [*diakonēsai*] and give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43, 45).



“If his own house is not well-managed, he is incapable of managing God’s. This requires emphasis in these days of unruly preachers’ children.”

Thus “deaconing” touches a rich principle which lies at the very heart of the faith, and if the mystery involved is held in a clean conscience, it will be productive of selfless, Christ-like service. Since **mystery** (*mustērion*) was a technical term for religious mysteries known only to the initiated, it here implies that the deacon has an insight into the inner meaning of the faith. But do we? Are we initiated into the supremacy of lowly service rather than of outward honor?

3:11-12. The term **wives** (or *women, gunaikas*) may refer to either the wives of deacons or to deaconesses. The word *deacon* could be used of women (e.g., Rom 16:1 of Phoebe). But in any case, the use of *gunaikas* would have been needed to make plain any special remarks intended for women deacons.

The similarity of the qualifications to those of the male deacon in v 9, plus the absence of any reference to family and household duties so eminently natural if wives are being looked at (cf. v 12 of the men), points to the concept of a deaconess.

The apparent parallelism of **likewise** (*ōsautōs*) in v 11 with *likewise* (*ōsautōs*) of v 8 points clearly, as do the qualities listed, to a parallelism of thought. Paul seems to be saying that women deacons must have these same qualities. Thus this office is opened to the woman. If so, it involves no teaching.

3:13. The word **obtain** (*bathmon*) is found in the mystery religions and is perhaps virtually a technical term connoting a “step” in the soul’s journey heavenward. It was also a term used in philosophy to

denote the gradual attainment of wisdom. Against the backdrop of *mystery* from v 9, the idea seems to be that an advanced standing in the mystery of godliness has been achieved, a step toward divine wisdom and insight, which issues in boldness toward God by faith, that is, that faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The deacon comes to understand the ministering heart of his Savior, opening to him a storehouse of understanding upon which he may draw by faith in prayer. The word **boldness** (*parrēsian*), involving originally freedom of speech, probably suggests prayer. When the deacon comprehends the heart of Christ, he knows what he may ask and expect through the boldness of faith.

While a deacon might think himself of little importance, he actually earns a standing which enriches his access to God. Service is richly worthwhile. **GFH**



Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary (1958-1986). This article is taken from his lecture notes on 1-2 Timothy (forthcoming).

A chapter from
*Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to
Service, Not to Eternal Life.*



By Shawn Lazar

INTRODUCTION

When theologians write or talk about *the decrees of God*, it is usually in hushed and reverential tones.

These decrees are said to lay at the very heart of the mystery of predestination and election to eternal life. In fact, some theologians use “decree” as a blanket term to describe anything that God has willed about salvation.¹

There is a great and venerable tradition about God’s decrees. But as a committed and unapologetic Biblicalist, I have to measure those traditions by the Scriptures. And what do we find? They come up short. Very short!

The surprising truth is that, despite the emphasis that systematic theologians put on God’s decrees in election, the Bible itself rarely mentions God’s decrees. And the dozen or so verses that deal with them *never* concern an individual’s eternal destiny.²

THE DECREES OF MEN

By far the most common references to decrees in the Bible are to those of men, such as the legal decrees issued by kings and rulers.³ Many of these legal decrees were considered unalterable (especially in the context of Median and Persian law⁴) as we see in Ezra 6:11, Esth 8:8, and Dan 6:8.

Ezra records numerous decrees made by different kings such as Artaxerxes, Darius, and Cyrus, e.g.,

such as whether Jerusalem and the Temple should be rebuilt or not (Ezra 4:19, 21).

Nebuchanezzar initially decreed that everyone should worship a golden image (Dan 3:10), only to relent and decree that no one should insult the God of Israel (Dan 3:29). He also decreed that the wise men of Babylon should interpret a dream for him (Dan 4:6).

Likewise, Darius decreed that all should tremble before the God of Daniel (Dan 6:23).

These are all practical, legal decrees by governments over their subjects.

It is the same in the NT.

Caesar Augustus passed a decree that everyone in the Empire should be registered (Luke 2:1). And the first Christians confessed that Jesus was king, against Caesar’s decree (Acts 17:7).

I’m sure you get the picture.

Decrees had to do with civil government and legally binding orders dealing with political matters and behavior.

Are God’s decrees any different?

Although theologians often speak about God’s eternal decrees, the Bible rarely mentions them. In the rare case in which God does decree something, it is never in connection with choosing individuals for eternal life or death, but always related to His governance of the world.

GOD’S DECREES ABOUT ISRAEL

There are several verses that mention God’s decrees with respect to His rulings⁵ or moral government of

THE DECREES OF GOD

His people and the world. For example, there are two references to God's decreeing a covenant with Israel:

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There *the Lord made a decree and a law* for them, and there he tested them (Exod 15:25 NIV, emphasis added).

The Lord went on to challenge the Israelites to obey Him so they would not be punished with disease as the Egyptians were. The decree was obviously not a pre-temporal choice of individuals for eternal life, but a part of the blessings and curses that were stipulated in God's covenant with Israel.

We find another reference to God's covenantal decree in Chronicles:

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.

He confirmed it to Jacob *as a decree*, to Israel as an everlasting covenant:

"To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit" (1 Chron 16:15-17 NIV, emphasis added).

God promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan. Although God's action in and through Israel had a redemptive purpose, this was clearly not an eternal selection of only some individuals to eternal life.

GOD'S DECREES ABOUT MORAL GOVERNMENT

There are several mentions of decrees that relate to God's moral government over man:

Although they know *God's righteous decree* that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Rom 1:32 NIV, emphasis added).

Paul was saying if you break God's moral law, you deserve to die.

Indeed, God's moral government is such that He usually decrees that lawbreakers suffer disaster. For example, in Jeremiah we read,

When the commander of the guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, "The Lord your God *decreed this disaster* for this place. And now the Lord has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the Lord and did not obey him" (Jer 40:2-3 NIV, emphasis added).

Likewise, because of her sins, God decreed that Israel would suffer the catastrophe of the exile, in which only a remnant would return to the Holy Land:

Though your people be like the sand by the sea, Israel, only a remnant will return. *Destruction has been decreed*, overwhelming and righteous (Isa 10:22 NIV, emphasis added).

During the exile, God also made a decree against King Nebuchadnezzar in a dream interpreted by Daniel:

"This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is *the decree* the Most High has issued against my lord the king" (Dan 4:24 NIV, emphasis added).

And as part of that disaster judgment, God could decree to send deceiving spirits:

"So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has *decreed disaster* for you" (1 Kgs 22:23 NIV, emphasis added; cf. 2 Chron 18:22).

All of these examples of God's moral governance of men are limited to temporal judgment, not to eternal death. They are also, most often, corporate decrees, dealing with peoples and groups. What they do not deal with is an eternal choice of some individuals to heaven and others to hell.

GOD'S DECREES ABOUT NATURAL GOVERNMENT

God's moral government over men is complemented by His natural government of creation. God has moral laws for moral creatures and natural laws for nature. These natural laws are also called His decrees.

For example, God "made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm" (Job 28:26 NIV), and God put the sea in its "decreed place, and set bars and doors" for its boundaries (Job 38:10 KJV). He did the same for the sand:

"Do you not fear Me?" declares the LORD. "Do you not tremble in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, *an eternal decree*, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it" (Jer 5:22 NASB, emphasis added).

God has decreed that all the heavens—from the sun and moon to the angels—should praise His name. He has decreed they are to be established forever and "never pass away" (Ps 148:6).



GOD'S DECREES ABOUT DAVID AND JESUS

God's decrees also encompass the vocational election of certain individuals, particularly David and Jesus. For example,

I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord:
He said to Me, "You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You" (Ps 2:7).

This passage refers to God's enthronement of the king of Israel, who is regarded as His son. The NT applies this passage to Jesus. It is not a Trinitarian statement of His deity,⁶ but, according to Paul, a reference to the Messiah's resurrection from the dead:

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

'You are my son; today I have become your father.'

God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said,

'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

So it is also stated elsewhere:

'You will not let your holy one see decay.'

Now when David had served God's purpose in

his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay" (Acts 13:33-37 NIV).

This decree is vocational. It refers to the Messiah being begotten in the sense of being raised from the dead, which vindicated His Messianic claims, including being the true King of Israel.

CONCLUSION

I am amazed at the emphasis some systematic theologians put on God's decrees regarding His choosing of some people to eternal life and others to eternal death. The entire debate between certain Calvinists (e.g., supralapsarians and infralapsarians) has to do with God's (non-existent) eternal decrees about salvation.


Perhaps the Westminster Confession of Faith best exemplifies this unbiblical emphasis on God's decrees in eternal election:

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.⁷

As we've seen, this is deeply mistaken. Strictly speaking, none of God's decrees are eternal (in the sense of being depicted as made in timeless eternity), and certainly none have to do with choosing which individuals have everlasting life and which will have everlasting death.

As Laurence Vance summarized the evidence,

There is no such thing as God's eternal decree of predestination—except in the philosophical speculations and theological implications of Calvinism.⁸

If you've been worrying about God's decrees concerning your eternal destiny, you are thinking in unbiblical terms. 



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. Look for his new book, *Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life*, available now.

1. For example, John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing, 2013), 206-30.

2. It is interesting to read Sam Storms's Appendix on "The Divine Decrees," because he doesn't actually quote any Scriptures that say God makes decrees about salvation. At the beginning of the Appendix he refers to some verses dealing with election, but spends the next six pages detailing the order of the divine decrees without examining the Scriptures that actually mention God's decrees. See Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 213-19.

3. Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, Revised Edition (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1991, 1999), 255.

4. J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 253.

5. *Ibid.*, 254.

6. Arno C. Gaebelin, *Gaebelin's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), 457.

7. Westminster Confession of Faith. See <http://www.creeds.net/Westminster/c03.htm>. Accessed June 20, 2017.

8. Vance, *The Other Side*, 256.

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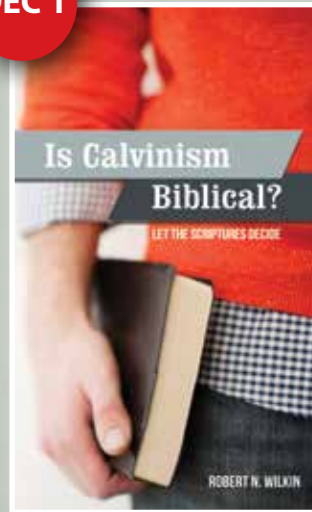
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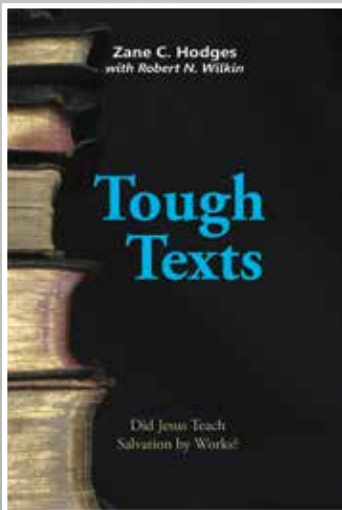


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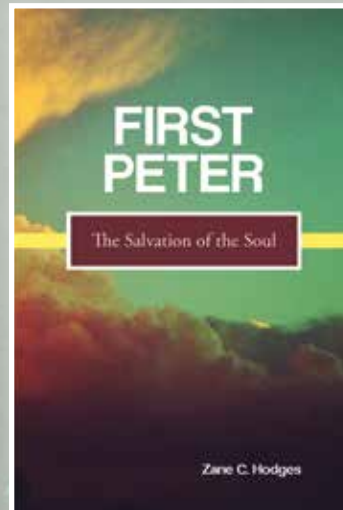


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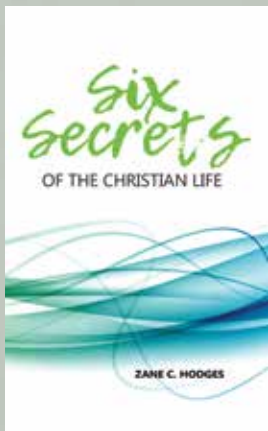
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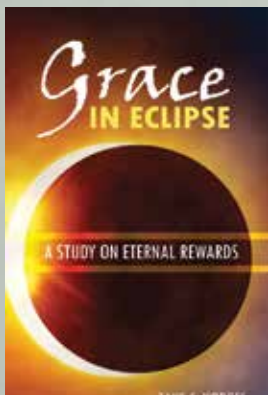


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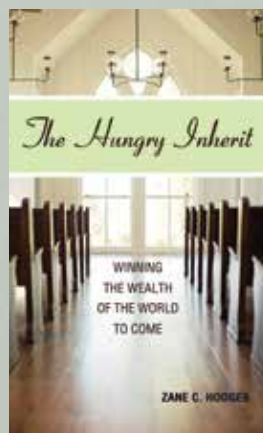


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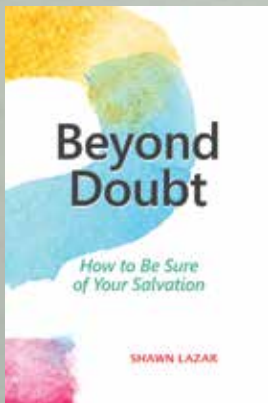


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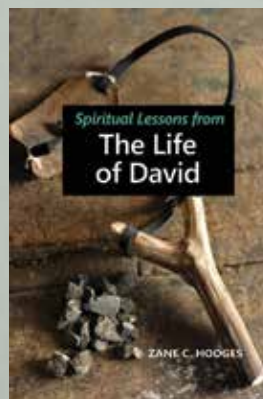


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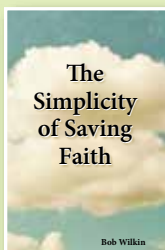
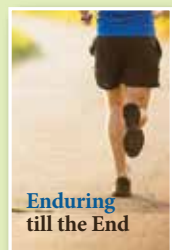


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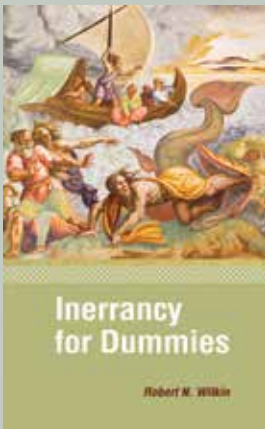
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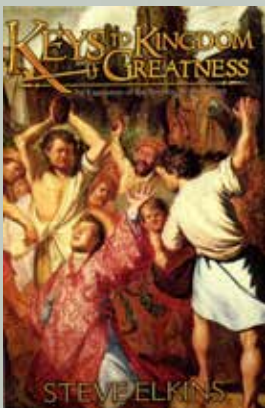


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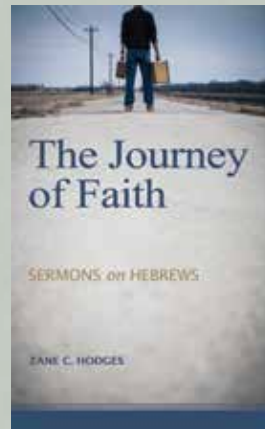


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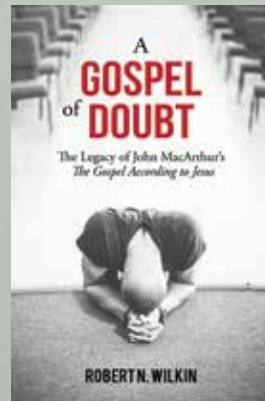


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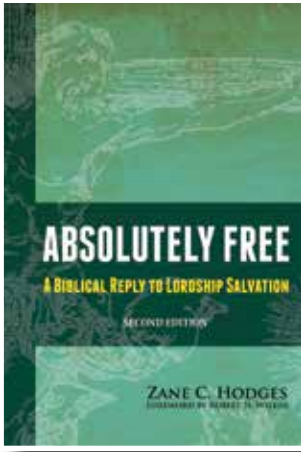
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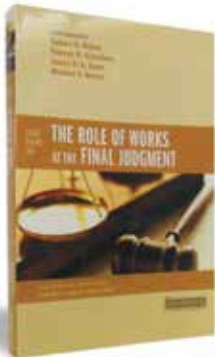
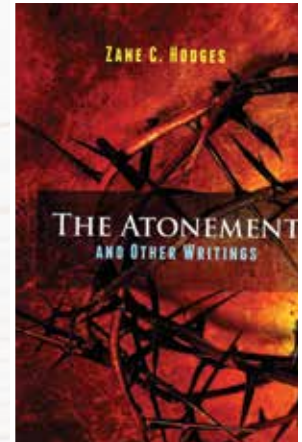
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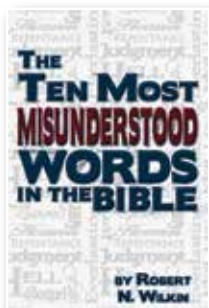
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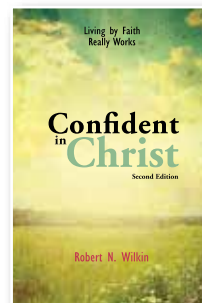
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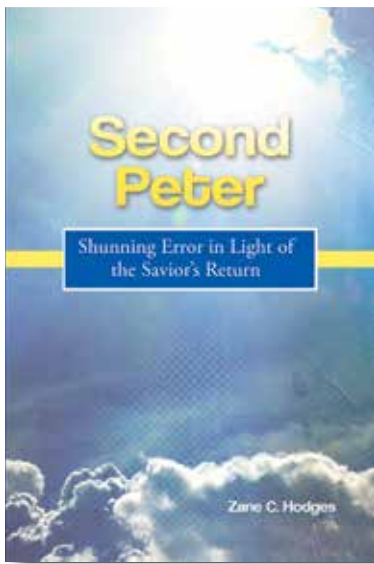
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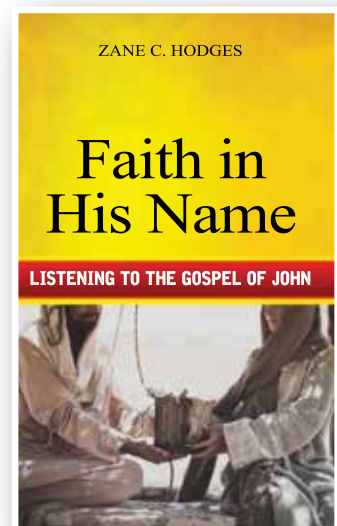
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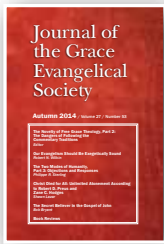
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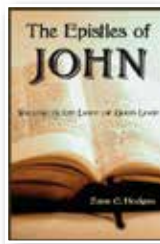




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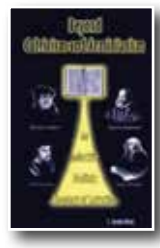
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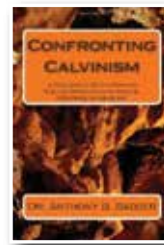
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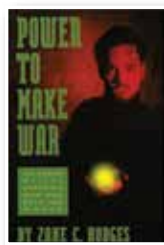
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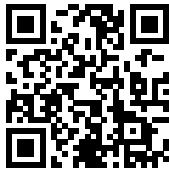
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Grace on the Go

By Staff

**VIRGINIA REGIONAL CONFERENCE
LYNCHBURG, VA
SEPTEMBER 8-9, 2017**

Bob flew into Charlotte and then caught a regional jet into Roanoke. Dave Rees picked Bob up and took him to Lynchburg.

About 50 attended Friday night and 40 on Saturday. Everyone was very enthusiastic about the conference. People came from North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and even Delaware.

The messages by Dr. Jim Borland, Dr. Wayne Brindle, Ken Yates, Donnie Preslar, and Bob were very well received and were very practical and exegetically sound and challenging.

You can listen to the messages online at <https://faithalone.org/category/audio/>.



The Lynchburg Regional

**GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
CHARLOTTE, NC
SEPTEMBER 10, 2017**

Bob rode with Bernie and Julie Hunsucker back to Charlotte and spent the night at their home in the historic district. On Sunday, Bob spoke on 2 Peter 3:1-9 (His Promised Return Is Certain) during Sunday School and on Luke 19:11-17 (Well Done: A Life Well Lived) in the worship service.




The fine folk at Grace Bible Church

Several people were present who had heard Bob on KCBI radio over twenty years ago! One young man was vacationing from Northern California and found Grace Bible Chapel on our Church Tracker list. He had no idea Bob would be speaking. Several people were there because of Hurricane Irma.

Special thanks to Bernie and Julie for their hospitality. Thanks also to Pastor Donnie Preslar and his wife Bonnie for the invitation to speak and for their encouragement. Bob has been coming to this historic grace church for over twenty years and he is always encouraged by the fellowship.

**INBOUND CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 25-28
BOSTON, MA**

On the advice of Tony Evans's strategy team and with their gift of a ticket, Shawn attended the Inbound Conference in Boston, MA. Inbound is a type of marketing strategy. Over 20,000 attended. Michelle Obama and John Cena were plenary speakers. There were nearly 300 breakout sessions.

Shawn attended several that were extremely helpful on practical topics like copy-writing, how to use social media more effectively, and how to increase your audience online through ebook giveaways. We hope to implement some of these techniques soon. 

To read more about GES activities, read the Partners in Grace newsletter, given to our top donors, at <https://faithalone.org/newsletter/>.



Who Are You, Really?

By Ric Webb

When you look at Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal*—the son with his head shaved, his clothes tattered and torn, no robe, his sandals bare to the sole—you see the picture of one who has been brought to the brink of despair. Broken and bleeding...and most of it within.

He makes the long “road to return” with nothing; he is absolutely empty: his money, his health, his honor, his self-respect, his stellar reputation, everything has been squandered.

The one and only thing he has left in this painting is the short sword hanging at his hips—the “badge of his nobility.” The sword is the symbol of his sonship. Even in the midst of his degeneracy and debasement he had clung to the truth—the simple, life-bringing truth that he was still the *son* of his father.

Though he came back a beggar and an outcast, he had not forgotten, like so many of us, the most important thing: he was still the sacred son of his father. It was when he *remembered* his sonship, and all the wealth it once held, all the *power* of this position, that “he came to his senses” (Luke 15:17a).

If you are a believer, where are you in this picture?

What is it you've forgotten about *who* you *really* are?


Can you hear the Father calling, “You belong to Me and always will. I love you...more than the life of My very own Son”?

The farther we run from communion with Christ and fellowship with the Father, the less able we are to hear the voice of the Spirit which calls us to the Beloved. And the less we listen to the voice of the Spirit, the more entangled we become in cosmic

corruption, in the multi-tiered manipulations of the power-mad of this world.

One thing can set us free: the by-faith knowledge, the intimate understanding, that I am still—and always will be—a son or daughter of Almighty God, the treasured child of a perfect Father. Let the Spirit speak those words into your heart, and let them sink down, deep into the soul.

Listen to me closely. The Father's love is passionate and pursuing. It is *powerful* and *perfect*. But it will not force itself into the life of the beloved. We must *choose* to respond to His initiation. We must decide for ourselves whether to accept it or reject it. God longs to heal us of all the darkness which resides in the substrata of our souls, but we are still free to stay there or step into the Light of His love. This much we can know for certain. God's limitless love is *always* there, always ready to *give* and *forgive*, independent of our response. His love doesn't depend on our remorse or repentance, on *any* change—either internal or external—we might make. God's love is as unchanging as it is unending. So, whether you are the younger son or the older son, the reckless rounder or the self-righteous scoundrel, God's only desire is to have you Home. If that's not the perfect image of fatherhood, then none exists.

You are a child of God in whom Jesus dwells, and you are a citizen of your Father's Kingdom. This is *who* you are and *where* you are, regardless of what may be raging around you or within you. Amen? 

Ric Webb is the Pastor of Heart's Journey in Little Rock, AR.

SAVING FAITH IS NOT HEARTFELT



123RF

By Bill Fiess
with Bob Wilkin

Many theologians and pastors today do not like to use the word *believe* when speaking of saving faith. They much prefer to speak of *trust* or even *heartfelt trust*. For example, Dr. Wayne Grudem in his recent book on clarity in evangelism said repeatedly that saving faith is “heartfelt trust in the person of Christ” (p. 11); “heartfelt trust in Jesus *as a person*” (p. 39, emphasis his); “heartfelt trust in the person of Christ” (p. 99); “heartfelt trust in the living person of Christ” (p. 105); and “heartfelt trust in the living person of Jesus Christ as my Savior and my God” (p. 142). Indeed, one of his four chapters is entitled, “Underemphasis on Trust in the Person of Christ” (Chapter 4, pp. 99-118).

Why do people dislike the word *believe*? And when they prefer *trust*, why do they speak of *heartfelt trust* in the living person of Christ?

In our postmodern world faith in propositions is considered impersonal, even if you are believing propositions about a person. Faith as a personal encounter, however, is considered quite acceptable. For example, Grudem says, “The more you talk about the need for trust in the *person* of Christ the more you have to talk about a *personal encounter* with Christ, about coming into his very presence, and that means realizing deeply that he is your God” (p. 106, emphasizes his).

Notice the subtle shifts which take place. First, believing is said to refer to trust, even though not a single English translation ever translates *pisteuō* as

trust. Second, trust is then boosted up to heartfelt trust. Third, heartfelt trust is then not in the promise of everlasting life but in the living person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Fourth, heartfelt trust in the living Christ is then identified as a personal encounter with Him. Fifth, a personal encounter with the living Christ then becomes coming into Christ's very presence and realizing deeply that He is your God.

Starting with believing in Jesus—many pastors and theologians today end up with a commitment to the Lordship of Christ as the real meaning of believing in Him. Grudem says,

The more we emphasize coming into the presence of Christ and trusting him, the more the idea of optional submission to his lordship becomes unthinkable. When we truly realize what it is to come into the majestic presence of the risen Christ, any thought of saying, 'Jesus, I'll trust you as my Savior today, and later I might decide to turn from sin and follow you,' is as far from our mind as the uttermost part of the sea (p. 106).

To believe in Jesus for everlasting life (1 Tim 1:16) is to be convinced or persuaded that He gives everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him (cf. John 11:25-27 and note Martha's response). It is not trust, heartfelt trust, a personal encounter, submission to His Lordship, or deciding to turn from sins and to follow Christ, etc. It is believing in Him.

If you prefer to use *trusting* in Jesus over *believing* in Him, you should ask yourself why. The Lord Jesus spoke of believing in Him, not of trusting in Him. The Apostles spoke of believing in Him, not trusting in Him. As the late AWANA missionary Don Bunge wrote, *Whatever Happened to the Word Believe?*

Notice these passages which refer to not believing:

"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12).

"But if you do not believe his [Moses'] writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:47).

"Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?" (John 8:46).

But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him (John 12:37).

The other disciples, therefore, said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Imagine changing the word *believe* to *trust* in these quotes. Would that mean the same thing? No. "If you do not believe Moses' writings" is not the same as "If you do not trust Moses' writings." In fact, it is hard to know what that would even mean. The same is true of all of these examples and even also uses of *pisteuō* in the NT.

How about Jas 2:19, "the demons believe [that God is one], and tremble"? Would the meaning be the same if we changed it to, "the demons trust in the one God, and tremble"? No. That would not make sense. What would it even mean to say that demons trust God?

And what about Jesus' question to Martha in John 11:26b, "Do you believe this?" He had just said that He will raise from the dead into glorified bodies all who believe in Him (v 25) and that whoever lives

and believes in Him will never die spiritually (v 26a). If He then asked, "Do you trust this?" what would that mean? He is asking if she is convinced that what He said is true. Then she answers, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God..." Trust would not be a good translation there either.

Saving faith is not heartfelt trust. It is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for what He promises the believer—everlasting life that can never be lost (John 3:16; 6:35; 11:26). ■

"If you prefer to use *trusting* in Jesus over *believing* in Him, you should ask yourself why. The Lord Jesus spoke of believing in Him, not of trusting in Him."



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia. Y'all already know Bob.



123RF

ASSURANCE AND THE FALLACY OF AFFIRMING THE CONSEQUENT

BY SHAWN LAZAR

There are two standards for evaluating a logical argument. First, is it true? And second, is it valid? When an argument has true premises and is valid, you call it sound.

According to the first standard, in order for a logical argument to be true, the premises must be true. That's common sense. I wrote an article that explained the difference between having true or false premises in assurance. Obviously, Biblical assurance must be based on true premises, not false ones (see "Assurance Made Simple").

In this article, I want to address the second standard, i.e., the validity of the argument. To have Biblical assurance, your argument must not commit any logical fallacies. One of the biggest fallacies is called *affirming the consequent*.

Formally speaking, this is what the fallacy looks like:

If p then q.

Q.

Therefore, p.

WHERE DID YOU GET THAT BUMP?

If you didn't follow that, here's an example in plain English, using my three-year-old son, Zane:

Premise 1: If Zane falls off his bed, he will have a bump on his head.

Premise 2: Zane has a bump on his head.

Conclusion: Therefore, Zane fell off his bed.

Do you see the problem? Do you see why that is a fallacy? Can you tell why the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises?

(If you know my son, Zane, you will!)

Have you ever heard the expression, "Some people get all their exercise by jumping to conclusions!" Well, that's the essence of the fallacy of affirming the consequent. It jumps to conclusions.

The conclusion fails to consider other possibilities that might explain the second premise.

In plain English, just because Zane has a bump on his head *does not mean he must have fallen out of bed*.

That *could* be the explanation. But there are dozens of other possibilities for why he has the bump on his head (believe me, he's tried them all!).

For example, Zane could have fallen out of a tree, or off a swing, bike, or scooter. His sister could have hit him on the head with a bat, stick, baseball, branch, rock, or book. He could have run into a door, wall, or window. Yes, it is also possible he could get a bump on the head by falling out of bed, but that is only one option among many.

The conclusion jumps to conclusions.

That's the fallacy of affirming the consequent.

ILLOGICAL ASSURANCE

Many people base their assurance on the same illogical reasoning. For example, they might reason this way:

Premise 1: Saved people do good works.
Premise 2: I do good works.
Conclusion: Therefore, I am saved.

Do you see the problem?

For argument's sake, let's assume the premises are true. Let's assume that saved people do good works and that you do good works. However, being saved is not the only explanation for why you might do good works.

For example, maybe you do good works because you're a Muslim, or a Buddhist, or a Jehovah's Witness, and your religion demands you do good works.

Maybe you do good works because you're trying to earn your salvation.

Or maybe you do good works because it's your job, or you want to run for public office, or you want to get a scholarship to college, or you want to impress a girl.

Being "saved" is only one possible explanation among many for doing good works. Hence, the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises. It is invalid.

Here's another example:

Premise 1: Saved people feel a strange warming in their bosom.
Premise 2: I felt a strange warming in my bosom.
Conclusion: Therefore, I am saved.

In this case, the first premise is definitely false. (The Bible does not teach that feeling a strange warming in your bosom means you are saved.) But let's assume it is true. This commits the fallacy of affirming the consequent because many things can cause a strange warming in your bosom.

For example, maybe you ate some ghost pepper hot sauce, or ran a marathon in Texas during the summer, or are going through menopause, or are having a mild heart attack.

Being "saved" is not the only explanation. And it is illogical to think so.

THE ASSURANCE SYLLOGISM

Biblical assurance must be valid. The premises must be true and it cannot commit any logical fallacies. So how should you think about it?

The simplest way is as a deductive syllogism:

Premise 1: Jesus promised, "He who believes has eternal life."
Premise 2: I believe.
Conclusion: Therefore, I have eternal life.

That is a valid argument. The conclusion necessarily follows from the premises.

Moreover, this argument is Biblical. The promise of life implies this approach to assurance.

When Jesus makes that promise, He invites you to believe it and to draw the appropriate conclusion.

If Jesus promises believers everlasting life, and you believe, then what do you have? Everlasting life. That's the conclusion Jesus wants you to draw. That's the conclusion you should draw. You should be assured of your salvation, simply by understanding and believing Jesus' promise.

You can see this reasoning at work in the conversation between Jesus and Martha (see John 11:25-26). Jesus told her that whoever believes in Him will never die, and asked if she believed that. When she answered, "Yes, Lord, I believe," Martha could draw the appropriate conclusion.

Premise 1: "Whoever believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"
Premise 2: "I believe."
Conclusion: Therefore, I will never die.

This argument is not only true (because the premises are true), it is also valid (because the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises). In other words, what I call the "Assurance Syllogism" is logically sound. And if you believe it, then you are assured of your salvation. ■



Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications for Grace Evangelical Society. Look for his new book, Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life, available now.

Taking Free Grace Overseas

By Ken Yates

Many people in the Free Grace movement were introduced to Free Grace Theology through the ministry of a Bible teacher or pastor. In many of those instances, the teacher had been exposed to that theology in seminary. Often, that seminary was Dallas Theological Seminary.

But things have changed. Free Grace Theology is not nearly as prevalent at DTS as it was in the past. In fact, Free Grace seminary professors are few and far between. If the Lord tarries, where will the next generation of Bible teachers be taught grace?

ARE THE DOORS CLOSED?

It would be easy to conclude that the doors to teaching in seminaries and training the next generation of Bible teachers are pretty much closed. Of course, some will receive the necessary training in their local churches, but teaching in an academic setting seems to be more or less a losing proposition.

But that is only if we look through a very small lens. The opportunities are still there if we will broaden our horizons. Free Grace teaching is welcomed overseas!

WIDE OPEN

As part of the ministry of GES, we look to take the message of grace to other countries. I have found that Bible colleges overseas are open to Free Grace teachers. In the past few years I have taught in the Philippines, Africa, Costa Rica, and Nepal. In all of those instances, the students were very receptive to the things being taught.

In every one of these countries, I also had the opportunity to speak at churches. In most places



where I have gone, the people understood English. In a few instances I needed a translator, but that has presented very few problems.


PLANNED TRIPS

To give you an idea of the possibilities, I would like to let you know what GES has planned for the coming year in this area. In the next twelve months I have trips scheduled to Mexico (twice), Nepal, the Ukraine, and Africa. In each case there will be a class of Bible college students who will be taking a class on a NT book.

In Nepal and Africa, English is the language we will use. In Mexico, Spanish will be used. I have been trying to learn Spanish and hope to get to the point where I can teach by myself in that language in a year or two. But even here, there is exciting news. The main teacher in Mexico has come to the GES conference a couple of times and is from Costa Rica. He is fluent in Spanish and teaches from a Free Grace perspective.

In all of these cases I will have the opportunity to speak at local churches.

PRAY

I ask for your prayers as I go on these trips. Each one is about two weeks long. Pray that we would have wisdom in using our time and resources wisely. If you would like to come, please contact me. 



Ken Yates is Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society and GES's East Coast and International speaker. Reach him at kenwyates@gmail.com.

The Harsh Hand of Lordship Theology

By Brandon Burdette

Years ago I attended a Baptist church in Los Angeles. It was during this period that I'd assimilated as much Reformed theology as I could get my hands on. I was halfway through the membership course in this Calvinist church when one of my worst church experiences occurred.

It happened on a late Sunday afternoon, between services. The elders brought a teenage girl named Esther before the membership to have her sin exposed.

Esther was a nice, quiet girl who regularly came to church with her polite, Spanish-speaking family. She was active in the children's ministry and in the choir. Up to this point, nobody in the church had any reason to doubt she was a saved person. But she had recently become pregnant by a boy from her high school and felt very embarrassed about it.

An elder escorted Esther up to the pulpit, where the pastor waited. She was sniffing. The church was silent. She sheepishly looked at the floor. The pastor began to describe her circumstances and told us she wished to repent of her sin publicly, *unto salvation*. He went on to explain that Esther's sin indicated she had not been regenerate. He announced, "Esther wishes to profess her newfound faith in Jesus Christ before you all." She did this while weeping. She said she had truly put her trust in Christ this time. From now on she'd live a life of obedience. Members solemnly clapped and murmured Amens.

As for me, I couldn't believe my eyes and ears! I sat dumbfounded in my pew. Questions started racing through my mind. "What about King David and his impregnating Bathsheba? Hadn't he been regenerate


when he impregnated her? Indeed, hadn't he already written some of the Psalms? And what about Samson? Doesn't the book of Judges say he was a Nazirite unto God from the womb, and that he womanized among harlots? Hebrews 11 says Samson was a great hero of the faith. And how about Solomon?"

It seemed to me the church was not dealing with Esther the way Jesus treated unsaved sinners and repentant believers.

For example, in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15), Jesus emphasized God's unconditional love and acceptance of His sheep, no matter how far they strayed or what they did. He implied there was nothing a believer could do to lose his eternal salvation.

I took my questions and thoughts to the pastor later that evening, to no avail.

I can only pray that Esther believed the saving message at some point and is free from Lordship Salvation today.

Let us always remember that God considers us righteous by faith alone. No amount of obedience or disobedience to the Law can affect this irreversible and eternal position (John 5:24; Rom 4:5; Gal 2:16). Neither should our behavior affect our assurance in Christ, "in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (Eph 3:12). If you keep these truths in mind, you can obey from a heart of gratitude instead of from compulsion and fear. Salvation is liberating (John 8:32, 36)! 

Brandon Burdette is a writer. He lives in Los Angeles, CA.



LIGHTSTOCK

Q&A

By Staff

LOVE

Q According to 1 John 3:23, must Christians love one another to be saved?

A Some think 1 John teaches that we must behave a certain way to be saved, or at least to *prove* we are saved. For example, they say if we don't *love* other Christians, then we are not truly born-again.

That interpretation misses the point of 1 John. It is not about giving us tests of life, but tests of fellowship. The purpose of 1 John is to see if we are in fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. John makes that purpose clear right at the beginning (1 John 1:1-4). In 1 John 3:23, we are commanded to love. In the very next verse (v 24), John explains why—so we can *abide* in Him.

Not every believer is in fellowship with Christ. Not every believer abides. Only believers who love others are abiding and in fellowship with Christ.

REPENTANCE

Q What does *repentance* mean in 1 John 1:9? And is it talking to unbelievers?

A Technically, the word *repentance* does not occur in this verse. John tells his readers that they need to *confess* their sin. Those are two different actions.

Repentance means changing your behavior—you stop sinning and do what's right.

Confession means agreeing with God that you have sinned.

To answer your other question, John is addressing believers. When you walk in the light of God's Word (the context of this verse) that Word exposes the believer's sin. At that moment, he should confess it and not deny that it is sin. This is the only way that fellowship with God can take place.



123RF

PERSEVERANCE

Q First John 2:17-23 seems to suggest that all believers will persevere in faith. I agree with Bob Wilkin's interpretation of the parable of the four soils which shows that is not true, but this passage seems to contradict that. Could you explain what it means?

A In this passage, John is talking about the false teachers that were impacting his readers. They claimed to have the authority and the backing of the Apostles. Yet, John points out that if they had, they would not have separated from them. This does not state they were separated from Christ or any such things.

The false teachers were unbelievers, but that is not the point here. His point is that if these teachers were in fellowship with the Apostles, and taught what the Apostles taught, they would not have gone out on their own.

The same could be true for a believer. He could be a teacher and believe in orthodox doctrine. However, he could later abandon that doctrine, separate from an orthodox church, and teach heresy. Church history is full of such people. First Timothy 1:20-21 is a NT example of such believers.

In summary, this verse is not teaching perseverance in the faith. It is saying that if a teacher upholds

the authority of orthodox apostolic teaching he will remain in that teaching and not go out and teach contrary to what the Apostles taught (this is true for a believer or unbeliever).

TO BELIEVERS OR UNBELIEVERS?

Q Your ‘gospel’ is really no gospel at all. The gospel message is for *unbelievers* and yet you quote verses from letters that are clearly written to the *saints*. Saints are those who have received salvation. Romans 10:9, Eph 2:8-9, and 1 Corinthians 15 are all Scriptures written to the saints and have nothing to do with attaining salvation. Acts 2:38 is the gospel. Peter preached: “Repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and receive the Holy Spirit.” The result: 3,000 came to faith in Jesus Christ were baptized (same day) and received the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures that you use for salvation don’t produce any converts.

A Free Grace folk agree that almost all the books of the NT were written to believers. I’ll briefly address each of the verses you mention.

Many Free Grace folk would agree that the confession of the mouth in Rom 10:9 is directed towards believers, but the salvation is from God’s temporal wrath, not from hell.

There is some disagreement about 1 Corinthians 15, but many would agree that the “gospel” there also is directed towards believers. It concerns their sanctification or overall spiritual health, not being saved from hell.

In Eph 2:8, Paul explained to Jewish and Gentile believers what happened when they received eternal life. He told them they were saved by grace when they were unbelievers. Though not written to unbelievers, this verse can be applied to them evangelistically.

You say Acts 2:38 is the saving message for today. By contrast, Free Grace folk would argue it is best understood in a Dispensational sense. Peter was talking to Jewish Christians who believed (v 37). In v 38 he specifically addresses the Jewish people who crucified Christ who now believe the gospel. The *salvation* and *forgiveness* there are not eternal. Peter is telling them

that in order to have fellowship with God and to avoid His discipline in this life (in AD 70?) these believers needed to be baptized and repent. So, many did.

NOT EVERYONE WHO SAYS “LORD”

Q I have a friend who is very worried over Matt 7:22. How can he have assurance in light of Jesus’ statement that not everyone who calls him “Lord” will enter the kingdom?

A Matthew 7:22 is often taken to mean that if you are a true Christian you will have good works. However, it is clear from the context that that is not what is going on.

Matt 7:15 tells us that Jesus was talking about false *prophets*, not false *believers*. And how do we tell if a prophet is false? Not by his works, but by his words. His message and words are the bad fruit that Jesus refers to in vv 17-18 (cf. Matt 12:33).

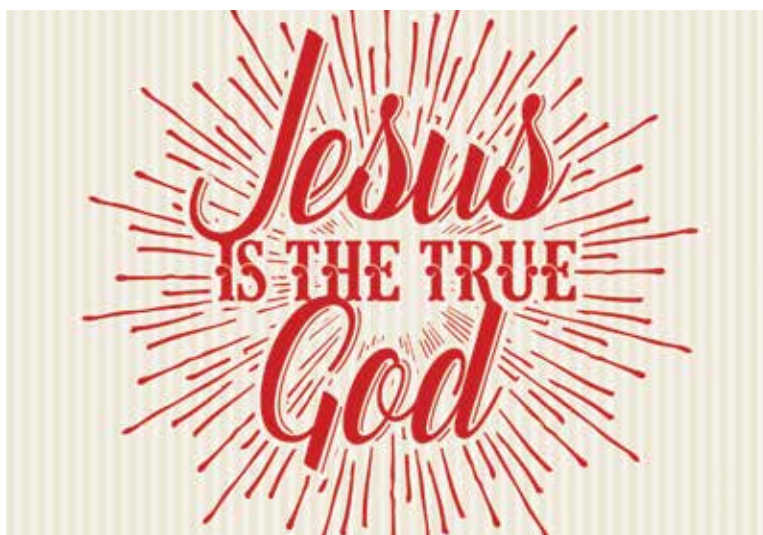
So in what sense have they not done the will of the Father (v 21)? These false teachers claim to have done good works (7:22). That is the basis of their appeal. But the Father’s will is not to do good works, but that you *believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life* (see John 6:40). The false prophets have not done that.

They are unregenerate. They act like Christians, but have never believed

the saving message. They call Jesus Lord, but He never knew them, because they never believed.

In summary, Matt 7:22 is not telling us that we can look at our works to see if we are truly saved. Instead, it is saying that many people who have professed that Jesus is Lord, and who have attempted to live for Him, have never actually believed in Him for eternal life. Instead, they attempted to earn eternal life by doing good works and have taught others the same. Instead of spending eternity with the Lord, they will be told to depart.

“Many people who have professed that Jesus is Lord, and who have attempted to live for Him, have never actually believed in Him for eternal life.”



BEGUN IN THE SPIRIT

Q What is Gal 3:4 saying? Is the suffering in vain because they will lose their salvation?

A I think the key is v 3. The two verses say this: “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain.”

Some Galatians thought that spiritual maturity comes through keeping the Law. They had begun the Christian life by the Spirit and started living by the Spirit. But now, they were turning back to the Law. If they did, their struggles in the Christian life would have been in vain. They would not reach spiritual maturity that way. Thus, they would waste their labor up to that point.

GOD IN THE FLESH

Q I want to start by saying I appreciate and enjoy the YouTube videos you guys do. They helped me out a lot this past year.

I was wondering if you'd be able to help me out with a question about salvation.

I got saved back in May of 2007. However I've been doubting my salvation for a while now and the anxiety and the worrying is killing me to the point of making me physically sick, and very depressed.

When I first heard of the gospel I asked more questions about it, and my friend led me to Christ back in '07 in my school cafeteria.

When I got saved I believed Jesus is the Son of God, and I believed in His death, burial, and resurrection.

The problem is I didn't realize at the time that Jesus is God in the flesh. I believe and understand that now, of course, but didn't believe it at the time because I didn't understand it. I believed Jesus was God's Son and He died for my sins. I just didn't realize when I got saved that He is God in the flesh. Does that mean I wasn't saved back then? Please get back to me as soon as possible. There's no worse fear than thinking you're not one of God's children.

A Thanks so much for your great question. Not having assurance of salvation is indeed a horrible state to be in. To answer your question, one receives eternal life when he believes that Jesus guarantees it to all who believe in Him for that gift (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47). The other things that you believe about Him—His death, burial, resurrection, deity, and so on—are reasons why you believe in Him for eternal life.

My guess is that very, very few people who have believed in Jesus for eternal life have a correct understanding of many truths about Him, including His deity. It took 400 years of church history to come to preliminary conclusions about that. Certainly, children who believe do not understand all these things.

The bottom line is, if you knew that you had eternal life when you believed in Jesus for it, you were eternally saved at that moment. Now that you know Jesus is God in the flesh, you have even more reason to believe in Him for eternal life. And, quite frankly, you will spend the rest of your Christian walk coming to learn more about Him. ■

Got questions? Send them to questions@faithalone.org.

Salvation by the Installment Plan?


By Phil Congdon

Many Bible teachers are fond of a saying that goes like this: “You are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.” Doesn’t that sound neat? It states a fundamental truth—that we are saved by faith alone—then turns around and states that while it is faith alone that saves us, that faith is never alone. This saying is used to teach the idea that if a person puts his faith in Jesus Christ, but doesn’t live a right kind of life, he isn’t saved. But wait a minute; let’s plug in our logical

minds for a minute and see if this is really neat—or nonsense.

The phrase “You are saved by faith alone” is obviously true. Scripture repeatedly tells us that it is faith alone without works which saves (e.g., Eph 2:8-9). But what does the second phrase say? Incredibly it says exactly the opposite. We can paraphrase the saying this way: “Faith [in Christ] alone saves you, but if your faith [in Christ] is alone, it doesn’t save you.” This kind of illogical thinking allows some theologians to turn the truth of the gospel on its head and make salvation a result of faith plus good works.

In response, these teachers state that they do not mean faith + works = salvation, but rather faith = salvation + works. But the end result is the same. If I pay cash for a car and drive it home, it is no different than if I were to drive it home and pay for it over the next few years. It doesn’t matter when you pay—before or after you take possession. If you ever have to do good works to be saved, salvation isn’t free; it’s something you earn.

The Apostle Paul knew this. That’s why he wrote, “To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). 

Phil Congdon is senior pastor of New Braunfels Bible Church in TX.

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