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THE BROKEN RECORD APPROACH TO EVANGELISM

PLUS Denying the Faith? / Faith in Christ / The Armor of God / Do Not Be Ashamed /
The Threefold Message of the Cross / Fear Changes Your Focus / Conflict Resolution

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FROM THE EDITOR

We have now entered a new year: 2018. In May we will commemorate 70 years since Israel became a nation again. There was much fervor at that time that the Rapture had to be soon. Those expectations rose greatly in the Six Day War in 1967 (June 5-10). A few months later, Zane Hodges famously said in chapel at Dallas Theological Seminary that he did not expect to be at DTS in a year. He thought the Rapture would occur within the next year. A year later in chapel he joked that he had now proved that he was definitely not a prophet.

I remember being in the library at DTS in 1980 and reading an article where Hal Lindsay was asked when the Rapture would occur. He said that we couldn't know the day or hour, but we do know that it will be within 40 years of 1948, when Israel was regathered. So he said the Rapture would occur before the end of 1988. Oops. 1989 came, and lots of books were proved wrong.

Some added 40 years to 1967 and came up with 2007. But that came and went too.

I long for Jesus' soon return. It would be great if it occurs in 2018. I know it will be soon. But soon from God's perspective is not the same as soon from ours. Remember, a thousand years is as but a day to the Lord. So while it could be this year, it might be decades or even centuries before the Lord returns. We must not live as though it has to be this year. If we burn ourselves out, we will not be able to serve the Lord effectively in the years ahead if He should tarry.

My aim in life is to be well pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:9-11). I long to hear Him say, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17). I live in light of the Bema, the Judgment Seat of Christ. His praise and approval are what really matters!



New Year's Light

Bob Wilkin, **EDITOR**

2018 could be the year that you or I go to be with the Lord via death or the Rapture. In any case, we should all be watchful. He is coming again soon. Let's live each day in light of His soon return.

We on the staff of GES and *Grace in Focus* magazine wish you a happy New Year. Our prayer is that you grow more like our Lord Jesus Christ this year. Hang in there. He is coming soon!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wilkin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Are you comfortable sharing your faith with others?

BY BOB WILKIN

WHAT IS THIS APPROACH?

It was the start of the fall semester of my senior year in college. A friend, John Carlson, had invited me to a College Life meeting, a Christian outreach event. He got me there by asking, “Is it possible that your view of the gospel is wrong?”

After that, I began meeting with staff member Warren Wilke. I told Warren I lacked assurance. Could he help me?

We met at the student center for an hour. Warren introduced me to the broken record approach to evangelism.

He started by saying that I could have assurance if I simply understood and believed the message of Eph 2:8-9. Then he quoted it, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

That was one.

That sounded good, I said. But what about this other passage? I asked about a tough text like Jas 2:14-26.

Warren gave a short answer, but then said, “But whatever that passage means, it can’t contradict Eph 2:8-9 which is crystal clear. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

That was two.

By the end of the first hour I’d asked about ten problem passages and Warren had quoted Eph 2:8-9 at least ten times.

By grace.

You have been saved once for all.

Through faith.

And that not of yourselves.

It is the gift of God. It is not of works.

No one can boast.

Broken record!

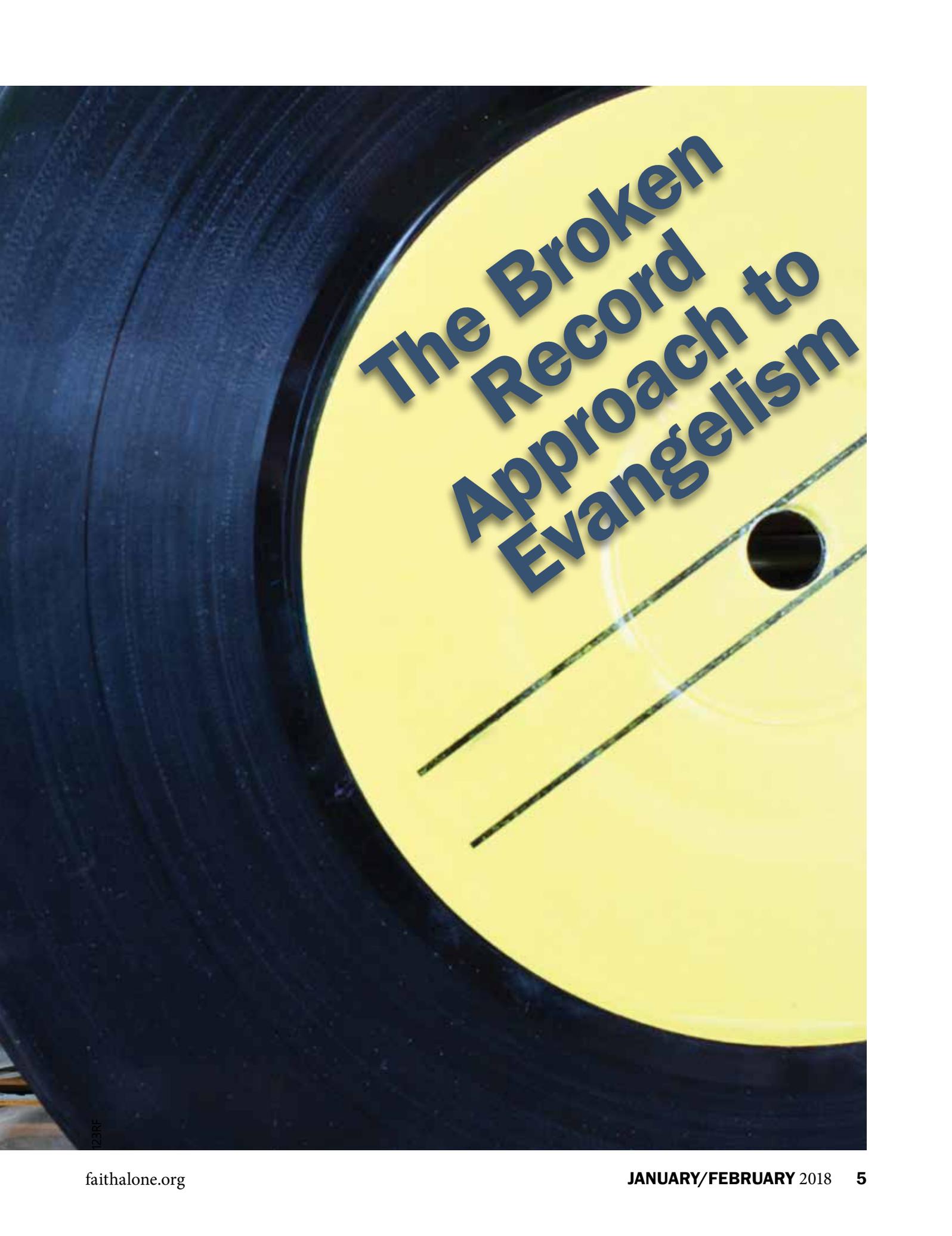
I agreed to meet again a few days later. Another hour. Ten more times he quoted Eph 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* I kept asking about passages that concerned me. He kept saying, “Whatever that means, it can’t contradict the clear meaning of Eph 2:8-9.

This went on for five visits. Around fifty times Warren quoted Eph 2:8-9. He was like a broken record. He was stuck on Eph 2:8-9. And you know what? It worked. I got it. That fifth week I was convinced. I knew that by grace I had been saved once and for all through faith in Christ and that my salvation was not of works. There was no ground of boasting for me.

Man, was I happy. That’s probably too weak of a word. I was overjoyed. I was ecstatic. I felt like I’d been delivered from eternity in hell. Well, I had been.

When I started sharing my faith on campus that year, I used a booklet, *The Four Spiritual Laws*.





The Broken Record Approach to Evangelism

123RF

I used it that year, the next year as a grad student, and then for four years on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ.

But I longed for the broken record approach. That is what I wanted to use.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE BROKEN RECORD APPROACH

What I love about this approach is that you take one verse or one short passage and you cling to it. You do not get off your text. You come back to it again and again.

The person is encouraged to engage you in a discussion on the meaning of the passage you are repeatedly quoting.

You don't need to remember the exact wording of four or five points. You don't need to be able to recall a dozen different passages in a precise order.

All you need to be able to do is explain the promise of everlasting life from a key text like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-9; Rev 22:17. Of course, ideally, this is one of the passages God used to lead you to faith in Christ.

When Warren shared Eph 2:8-9 with me, I did not simply sit there and take it. I started asking him to defend his explanation based on other texts. We had a dialogue going, one that lasted for five one-hour sessions.

That can happen to you as well. As you share your broken record passage, your listener, if he has any interest at all, will start asking questions or raising objections. Maybe he will mention other passages. Or he might charge you with easy believism or cheap grace. "That's too easy." "Why if that were true, then why wouldn't I just go out and live like the devil?"

The result is dialogue. Dialogue about the promise of life by faith apart from works.

Read John 4:1-25 and notice how the Lord's interaction with the woman at the well is indeed an interaction.

ONE-VERSE EVANGELISM

In the year 2000, a Navigator staff member, Randy Raysbrook, wrote an article on one-verse

“If we study
Jesus’ approach to
evangelism, we see
He basically used
the broken record
approach.”

evangelism. He more or less was suggesting what I'm saying here. Have one point and repeat it as often as needed. You can find his article online here (<https://www.navigators.org/resource/one-verse-evangelism/>).

Raysbrook uses Rom 6:23 in his article. "The wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life [by faith] in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thirteen years after I came to faith in Christ via the broken record approach, I received a doctorate from DTS in NT. After I taught for one semester at Dallas Bible College, the school closed its doors. I had several interviews for teaching at other schools. One was an interview at International School of Theology (ISOT) in San Bernardino, California. It was

Campus Crusade for Christ's new seminary.

When I spoke with the vice president in charge of setting up interviews, I told him I no longer used the *Four Laws*. I just use the Bible. He said that was fine.

But after teaching six separate hours in various classes, I was interviewed. Question 1: Are you willing to take students out and teach them how to share their faith using the *Four Laws*? No. I use the Bible.

I was now told that disqualified me.

The very approach that Campus Crusade for Christ used to lead me to faith in Christ was not considered a valid one.

Of course, I fully understood and accepted the position of ISOT. Campus Crusade for Christ had a model of ministry. It required all staff, including seminary professors, to use the *Four Laws* booklet. Since I wasn't willing to do that, it made sense that they rejected me as a candidate.

But the broken record approach is a valid model of ministry. Indeed, I believe it is far simpler than having to read many passages of Scripture with someone.

THE BROKEN RECORD APPROACH IS WHAT WE SEE IN SCRIPTURE

If we study Jesus' approach to evangelism, we see He basically used the broken record approach. With Nicodemus, He hammered away at the need to be born again, at the need to have everlasting life (John 3:1-18). While He was not quoting an OT text, everything He said was the Word of God.

When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, He had one point in mind: anyone who drinks

the living water He gives will have everlasting life (John 4:1-25). He led her to faith in Him by pressing the image of drinking living water and having one's thirst quenched forever. Compare John 6:35, "He who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Three elements are present in Jesus' broken record approach: 1) Whoever believes 2) in Him 3) has everlasting life. You see this in John 3:1-18; 4:1-25; 5:24, 39-40; 6:35, 37, 39, 47; 11:25-26.

This same approach is also found in the Book of Acts, with one point of clarification added. People thought that the death of Jesus on the cross proved that He was *not* the Messiah and hence could *not* give everlasting life to all who believe in Him. So the Apostles went to the OT to prove to people that the Messiah had to die and rise again from the dead. The good news is both the *proof* and the *explanation* for the promise of life: i.e., why all who simply believe in Jesus have everlasting life. In Acts you might consider Acts 10:34-43 (compare Acts 11:14); 13:16-48; 15:7-11; 16:30-34.

Whatever verse(s) you pick, make sure you present the simple truth that all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have everlasting life that can never be lost. When you explain the verse, you will naturally bring in the cross and resurrection.

Recently Sharon and I were visiting with a friend who is grieving over the loss of his wife of over fifty years. He did not know where he'd go when he died. But he wanted to know. I chose John 5:24 as my verse. The one who believes in Jesus has everlasting life right now, shall never come into judgment regarding his eternal destiny, and

has already passed from death into life. I had him read this out of the *Living Water* booklet. As we spoke, I pointed out that the cross explains why John 5:24 is true. Jesus paid it all at the cross. He took away our sins. Thus the issue is not our sins. The issue is that we are spiritually dead and we need everlasting life. That Jesus rose from the dead proves that He will raise all who believe in Him to live

**“Whatever verse(s)
you pick, make sure
you present the simple
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forever in perfect bodies.

I probably quoted John 5:24 four or five times. Not quite up to Warren's pattern of quoting Eph 2:8-9 ten times each time we spoke. But my friend got the point. He is not yet persuaded, but I started the conversation and left him with the Gospel of John. I asked him to read a chapter a day.

KEEP IT SIMPLE, SAINT (THE KISS METHOD)

The broken record approach to evangelism can also be called the KISS method. Keep it simple, saint.

Many believers rarely share their faith. I believe the reason is that they think it is so complicated and difficult that a professional needs to do it. Hogwash. The professionals

typically mess it up, bringing in turning from sins, submission, commitment, obedience, and the entire Christian life. Evangelism and discipleship are often hopelessly intertwined by the pros.

Pick a simple verse like John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; 11:25-27; Acts 16:31; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16; Rev 22:17. Quote it. Explain it. Quote it again and again as the opportunity arises in the conversation.

If someone hears your verse(s) and says, "That's fine for you, but I'm not interested," you can drop it right there without another word. Or, if you think the person is at least a tiny bit open, you might say, "I'll be praying that you become interested, for I care about you very much and there is nothing more important than having everlasting life."

With the KISS method, there is only one verse to memorize. Simple. You found the source of everlasting life. You are delighted to tell others about Him and His promise. Keep it simple, saint. 



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His latest book
is *Is Calvinism*

Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide.

Denying the Faith?

By Ken Yates

What does it mean to “deny the faith” (1 Tim 5:8)? This question brings up a couple of issues. First, is it possible for a Christian to verbally deny the Christian faith or to renounce Christ?

Even though many today would say a Christian could never do such a thing, and if he did, it only showed he wasn’t really a Christian, the NT teaches us that it is possible.

APOSTASY IN HEBREWS

Hebrews 10:38-39 clearly states that a believer, a “righteous one” can commit apostasy. Jody Dillow in his book *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (pp. 336-37), as well as GES’s *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (p. 1078), both have good discussions on this.

In addition, we see examples of believers who renounce basic doctrines of the Christian faith in the NT (1 Tim 1:19-20; 2 Tim 2:17-18).

History and experience also tell us that if a Christian is faced with persecution for his faith, it is certainly possible for that Christian to deny his faith. Of course, such a Christian does not lose his salvation, but will invite the discipline of God in his life as well as lose eternal rewards.

OTHER DENIALS

Another issue that this question raises is whether a Christian can deny the Christian faith *in other ways*. The NT tells us that we can.

In fact, that is what 1 Tim 5:8 is about. Paul is not talking about a Christian who verbally renounces his faith in Christ or any foundational doctrine. He is talking about Christians *taking care of their aging parents*.

Part of the Christian faith—the teaching of Christianity—is to honor your parents. To neglect one’s



widowed mother by not taking care of her would be to deny what Christianity teaches. Paul’s point in 1 Tim 5:8 is that such action by a believer would mean that his life does not match what he believes.

Some would say Paul has to mean that such a person cannot be a Christian because Paul goes on to say that such a person is “worse than an unbeliever.” How can a Christian, who is going to be in the Kingdom, be worse than an unbeliever?

Paul’s point is that even unbelievers generally take care of their parents who are in need. This is something that even the unbelieving world acknowledges should be done. The Christian who does not take care of a parent in need is acting in a way that even unbelievers usually don’t do. His actions are worse than the actions of the common unbeliever.

What we see here is that a believer can live a life that is outwardly as immoral as the world in which we live.

In fact, a believer can do things that even most unbelievers would not do.

DEPRAVED BEHAVIOR

We have a clear example of that in 1 Corinthians 5. In that chapter, Paul speaks of a “brother,” a believer who has eternal life, who is having a sexual relationship with his stepmother.

Paul specifically says that even unbelievers don’t do that! (1 Cor 5:1). Even the unbelievers in immoral Corinth don’t do that!

Like the believer who does not take care of the physical needs of his aging parents, the sexually immoral believer is one who metaphorically carries a sign that says, “My actions do not match who I am.” He, by his actions, denies what he claims to believe.

Paul teaches the same thing to Titus in Titus 1:16. He wants Titus to rebuke Christians who are not living like they should (Titus 1:13). By their actions they deny the Lord, even though they claim to “know”

God. (See Zane Hodges’s book *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 105).

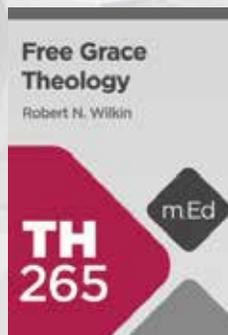
Christians can deny the faith. They can do it verbally or they can do it by their actions. While they cannot lose eternal life by such denials, each of the verses discussed here teaches us that there are consequences for denying the Christian faith, both in this life and at the Judgment Seat of Christ. 



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

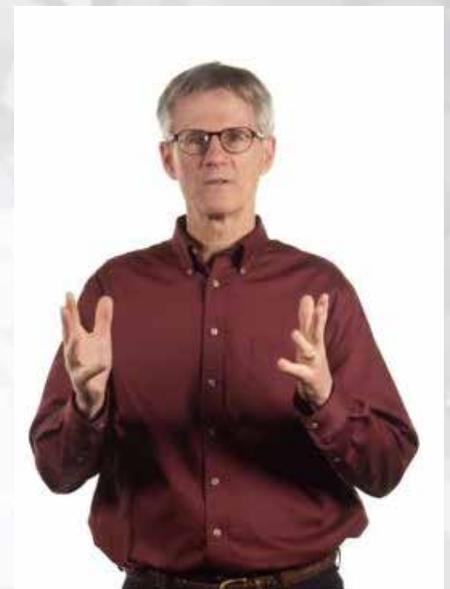
Mobile Ed: TH 265 Free Grace Theology

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?”

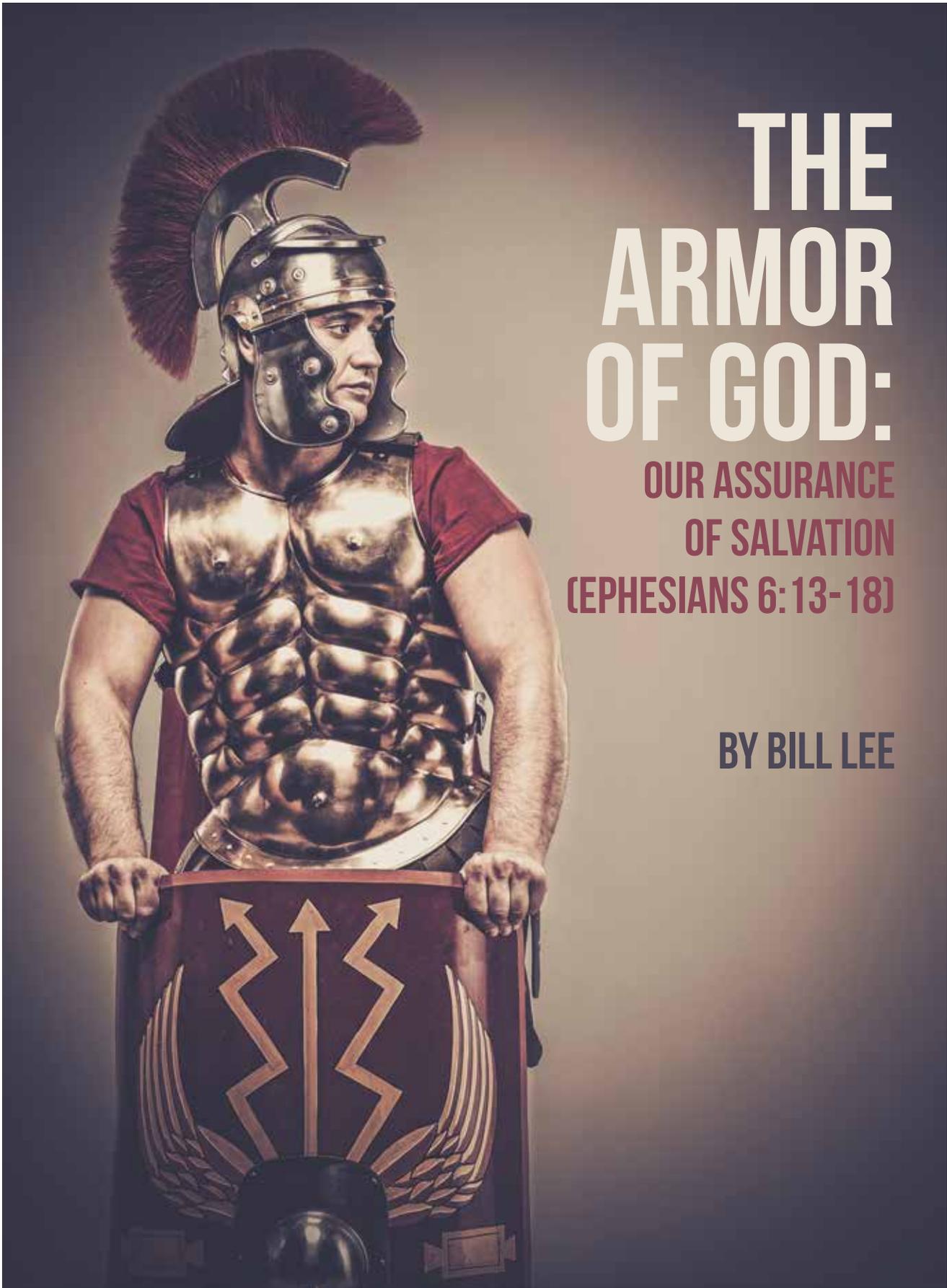


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THE ARMOR OF GOD:

OUR ASSURANCE
OF SALVATION
(EPHESIANS 6:13-18)

BY BILL LEE

“The only thing we have to offer that has any lasting value is the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose from the grave, and that by believing in Him we can have everlasting life.”

I have long considered Paul’s letter to the Ephesians the Christian’s guide to the spiritual conflict of the ages.

Paul wrote Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome after his arrest in Jerusalem. While he expected to be released, the possibility of being executed did exist, and that could be the reason Paul felt the need to explain in detail God’s strategic objective of His redemptive plan (Eph 1:9-10). The first three chapters of this letter discuss the means of salvation and the nature of the Church, the Body of Christ. But, in the fourth chapter, the Apostle shifts to explain the tactical role we as believers play in the plan. Think of those last three chapters as our standing orders.

It is in Chaps. 4-6 that we learn about the proper function of a healthy church, about our need to set aside our natural mindset, and about living wisely by the Holy Spirit. The final instruction is the one I want to discuss here: the command to put on the whole armor of God.

PUT ON THE ARMOR

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph 6:13).

Since Paul used a Roman soldier’s battle kit for his illustration, it seems proper to read it from a soldier’s perspective.

The command is to stand, not to attack. To stand against the enemy is a defensive posture. Paul is saying we ought to stand and defend the ground already taken. He has seen local churches across the Roman Empire get caught up in legalism, false spirituality, and internal disputes that robbed many of their

assurance of salvation, leaving them open to return to religious laws and mysticism.

The only thing we have to offer that has any lasting value is the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins, rose from the grave, and that by believing in Him we can have everlasting life.

That is what we have to defend and why we have to stand.

To do that we must have the confidence of our acceptance by God in Christ Jesus. We have to stand firm in the assurance of our salvation, and that takes the whole armor of God!

Paul, using the battle dress of Roman soldiers as his model, explains what it takes to stand firm in our faith. It takes all of the armor to stand against the schemes of our enemy. So, it is important to learn the function of each piece of our equipment.

THE BELT

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14).

The soldier’s belt was put on first, as it provided the back support needed to carry everything else. With God’s armor, the first item is *truth*. Since there is no article preceding the word *truth*, I believe Paul meant truth in its broadest sense. We can be certain he had God’s revealed truth in mind, but also the observable truth of reality and personal honesty.

The thing about truth is that it is invisible to our emotions.

What I mean by that is our emotions cannot discern fact from fiction. For example, watching a sad movie will usually make you feel sad, even though you know

it's fictional. Putting on truth is a function of the will, guided by the mind, often in opposition to how we feel. That is likely one reason the Bible instructs us to renew our minds (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23). Living in truth requires sound thinking.

Our salvation is based on truth demonstrated by real events.

Jesus Christ died for our sins. He took away the sin of the world. God promises to give everlasting life to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. Those facts are true even when life's troubles leave you feeling hopeless. Our assurance lies in the never-failing faithfulness of God, not in our emotions or anything else.

THE BREASTPLATE

The breastplate of righteousness is the next piece of armor. Like a bulletproof vest, it is something we put on, not something we do. It is God's armor, not ours. Therefore, I believe it represents the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah says, "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa 64:6). Consequently, our only hope lies in the righteousness that comes by faith. Paul says in Rom 4:5, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."

Every believer in Jesus Christ has been declared righteous by God. All sin has been forgiven, and we have peace with God. It is our security in God's declaration of righteousness that frees us to live wisely in the filling by the Spirit. Righteousness derived from law can't do that. Only a faith-based life empowered by the Spirit can give us the confidence to stand firm.

FOOTWEAR

And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15).

Standing requires a secure footing which is the preparation of the gospel of peace. Again, Paul is talking about something we wear, not something we do.

Our security is based on having been justified before God. Romans 5:1 states "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God."

Knowing we have peace with God strengthens us to stand firm. Harold Hoehner, seminary professor and Biblical scholar, put it this way:

It is the believers' "surefootedness" in the tranquility of the mind and security of the heart in the gospel of peace that gives them readiness to stand against the devil and his angelic hosts.¹

Again, it is faith in God's word that brings the assurance we need to stand. And that brings us to the next piece of armor God provides.

"It is our security in
God's declaration of
righteousness that frees
us to live wisely in the
filling by the Spirit."

THE SHIELD

Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph 6:16).

The shield is described as extinguishing the flaming arrows of the evil one. The Roman shield was usually a wooden frame

covered with leather which would be soaked in water before battle. The wet leather helped extinguish flaming arrows. Unlike the armor we wear, the shield must be carried and manually employed against attacks we can see coming.

Faith—our knowledge and confidence in God's word—is our shield by which we fend off any doubts the enemy might throw at us. He cannot separate us from God, but he'll settle for keeping us in doubt and falling back into fighting the wrong battles. But faith comes from knowledge. You cannot believe what you do not know. Each of us is responsible for taking up the shield of faith—to work at accurately understanding the Bible. Not what others tell us it says, but what we can read for ourselves. It is not that hard. The Holy Spirit will graciously reveal the truth to those who seek the wisdom of God's word.

THE HELMET AND SWORD

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17).

Here we come to the final articles of our armor. The helmet of salvation protects our mind. That is what helmets do. If your head is protected, then you can have the confidence to stick it up so you can see what

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There are at least 10,000 of you reading *Grace in Focus* every month. There are over a 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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get us to
the goal!





is happening. You can't deflect those flaming arrows flying around if you're not looking for them. What gives us the confidence to engage with the enemy is the assurance of ultimate deliverance by Jesus Christ.

The assurance of our acceptance by God is a big deal. It is the central point of God's armor. As our helmet, it gives us the confidence to face the threats in front of us. We can stand firm because we rest in the good news of life in Jesus Christ.

The final piece is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The way Paul has structured this clause indicates it is the Spirit who empowers the use of the sword. If you fill your mind with the word of God, the Spirit will use it to begin shaping you into the likeness of Jesus Christ. So, fill your mind with the Word of God. It is the Spirit's toolbox.

PRAYER

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints (Eph 6:18).

If you have the assurance that comes with wearing God's armor, then what remains is the need to stay in communication with headquarters.

That is prayer.

Pray in the Spirit at every opportunity possible. Praying in the Spirit is nothing extraordinary. It

simply means praying in agreement with the Holy Spirit's will.

Stay alert, keep watch over yourself and each other. The conflict we are in is real. Our enemy wants to disrupt the unity of the Holy Spirit and render the church ineffective in its witness. Satan's go-to tactic is to confuse us as to what God has said and thereby the assurance of our salvation. When the church loses its way, it gives people reason to question the gospel.

So, stand firm in the gospel of Jesus Christ Who died for our sins and rose from the dead so that we, by believing in Him, have life everlasting. www.faithalone.org



Bill Lee is pastor of Trego Community Church in Trego, WI.

1. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 844.

Mailbag

By You

We love going to the p.o. box and seeing it full of your letters!

“Thank you for the great work you are doing for our wonderful Lord!” ~C. L., Snellville, GA.

“A very well done magazine!” D.S., Houston, TX.

“I just read your book *Chosen to Serve* straight through and it took 5 hours! Thank you for writing something simple, clear, and concise that is an expression of Biblical theology...Your book was refreshing... God Bless.” ~V.L., email.

“Dear Dr. Wilkin and staff. We are so thankful for your ministry. Thank you for standing on the Word and sharing the good news of the gospel. May God bless you and your ministry.” ~T.T., Wesley Chapel, FL.

“I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for answering so many of my questions through the years. I especially thank you, Robert, for personally answering my specific questions about Jack Van Impe and John Hagee.” ~B.E., N. Manchester, IN.

“I continue to benefit greatly from your magazine. Thank you all for your time, effort, and love of sharing the gospel. You are much appreciated!” ~V.H., College Station, TX.

“Your ministry and teaching encourages us so much. We want to encourage you in a small way with this check. Just keep on teaching the ‘true truth’ and defending the Word of God in an unapologetic way.” ~M.M., Salt Lake City, UT.

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Holy Bible



Do Not Be Ashamed

(2 Timothy 1:1–18)

By Zane C. Hodges

SALUTATION (1:1–2)

1:1. In Paul's salutation to Timothy, the Apostle presents both the medium of his apostleship and its measure. The phrase **by the will of God** (*dia thelēmatos Theou*) is the divine medium, while **according to the promise of life** (*kat' epangelian zōēs*) suggests the divine measure or standard to exercise the apostleship.

All spiritual ministry has significance only as it proceeds **through** (*dia*) the will of God and according to a divine purpose in grace. Every sphere of service may be scrutinized as to whether it originates by divine volition, and whether it accords with God's offer of the life which is Christ Jesus.

Human wishes plus human programs equal human work.

1:2. Timothy is here addressed as a **beloved son**, whereas in 1 Tim 1:2 he is called a *true son*. A deeper warmth and more intimate tone pervade 2 Timothy. A genuine son of our faith must necessarily increase in his dearness to us, especially as others around prove disappointments. The Apostle's love for this faithful helper is richer against the increasingly somber background of the desertion of others (cf. 2 Tim 1:15; 4:9–11).

PROLOGUE (1:3–14)

1:3. As in so many of Paul's epistles, the Apostle begins with thanksgiving. Here, however, an aura of priestly activity pervades his words. **Serve** (*latreuō*) is a verb which in Biblical Greek carries overtones of official religious activity, as of priests, or of the performance of prescribed acts of worship (cf. Heb 8:5; 9:9, 14; 10:2; 13:10).

The phrase **as my forefathers** (*apo progonōn*) is said by Moulton & Milligan to be common in inscriptions.¹ Paul thinks of himself, as he ever did, as standing in the true mainstream of the worship of Israel (cf. Acts 24:14; 26:6; 28:20).

Shut up in prison and cut off from active ministry, Paul nonetheless finds joy in the priestly ministry of prayer—both in praise and in intercession. Indeed, in his prayers he thanks God for the unceasing remembrance he has of Timothy.

No circumstance of life (short of death) can cut us off from the elevated service of prayer. Though physically in prison, Paul was spiritually in the holiest of all, serving God even as his forefathers did in both tabernacle and Temple. We can, too, so long as we maintain, as did Paul, a **pure conscience** (*kathara suneidēsei*). We cannot enter the sanctuary if our conscience must always pause at the laver for cleansing.

The Apostle is grateful to God simply for an unfailing memory of his companion. Our frequent forgetfulness in prayer for those who need our prayers should likewise beget gratitude in us if the Spirit lays them constantly upon our hearts, for it is sustained and persistent prayer which yields the richest fruits. “Men ought always to pray ...”

Night and day (*nuktos kai hēmeras*) may be taken with **in my prayers** (*en tais deēsesi mou*). But it does not seem necessary to add to it after the use of **unceasing** (*adialeipton*). The sentence seems better balanced if we connect it with what follows in v 4.

1:4. The Apostle remembers Timothy in prayer for the simple reason that night and day he yearns to see him. We need not suppose that our priestly intercession should be—or in fact can be—divorced from the most personal and intimate movements of our heart. We intercede best for those we love most, for “faith worketh by love.”

1:5. Paul’s longing to see Timothy is prompted even more by remembering the tears his companion had shed. It is also due to the anticipation of the joy a reunion would bring. But this longing is equally enmeshed with spiritual realities.

As personal as the Apostle’s attachment is, it is also spiritual, for he remembers Timothy’s faith. The phrase **I call to remembrance** (*hupomnēsin lambanōn*) probably implies deliberate recollection in contrast to the spontaneous memory suggested by **mindful** (*memnēmenos*) in v 4.

The bond of attachment is all the stronger because of the reality—the unhypocritical character—of Timothy’s faith. In a day of growing Roman pressure and the spreading of hypocritical faith, the Apostle feels drawn to one in whom he knows the reality of faith to exist. And indeed, what can draw two souls together more firmly than genuine common faith? By comparison, earthly bonds are loose.

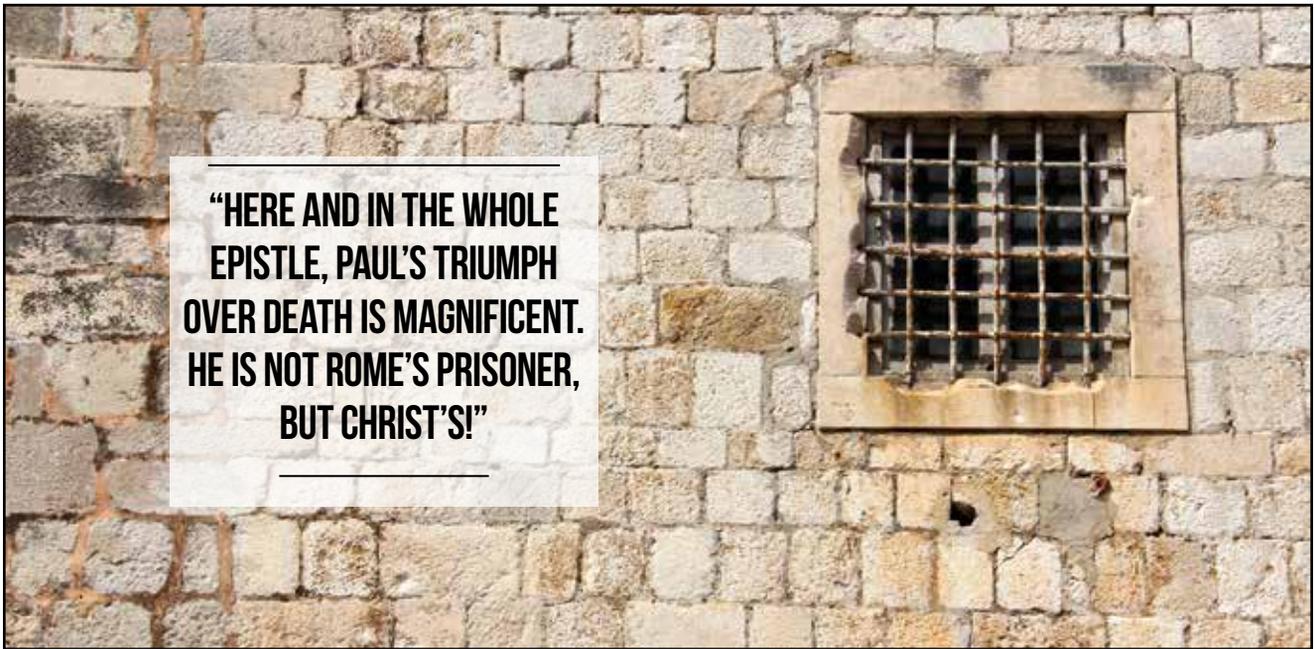
At the same time, **I call to remembrance** (*hupomnēsin lambanōn*) may contain an implicit warning in that Paul must deliberately call this faith to mind. In Paul’s view, Timothy seems to need an inculcation of firmness. Though commentators sometimes wish to deny this—perhaps out of a desire to defend Timothy—the injunctions contained in this section seem to imply concern on the Apostle’s part.

Indeed, 1 Cor 16:10 seems already to hint at a touch of timidity in Timothy. And it would be no surprise if the sudden arrest of Paul, with the implied danger to all Christians, might, along with the sorrow of it, serve to dampen the spirit of this man. Paul, therefore, reminds him that this sort of faith had dwelt in both his mother and grandmother. Their example might nerve this young man, as so often a godly parent’s memory causes us to swerve away from what we feel would be unworthy of them. We also learn that a woman’s faith may find its home (cf. *enōkēse*) in a man and then multiply itself in public ministry (cf. 1 Tim 2:15). Give a child a home of faith so faith can make a home in the child.

1:6. Note the connection indicated by **for this reason** (*di’ en aitian*). The very presence of such faith stirs Paul to exhortation lest its outworkings be lost. The energy of faith needs to be maintained against any human inclination to withdraw from its exercise. Faith decays when unused.

In fact, we must be stirred to bold action. The verb **to stir up** (*anazōpurein*) properly means to “rekindle.” A spiritual gift ought to be as a flame burning to be expressed within us. When opposition or discouragement causes this flame to burn low, we must diligently rekindle it (cf. Jer 20:8–9).

1:7. Timothy is reminded by the Apostle that this gift—a charisma of the Holy Spirit itself—does not dwell in him alone. The Spirit Himself has been given, and the gift ought to be exercised in that true spirit which God imparts—not of **cowardice** (*deilias*) but of **power, love, and sobriety** (*dunameōs kai agapēs kai sōphronismou*). Note this spirit’s trinity of attributes.



It is a spirit of *power*, for our circumstances and difficulties as we use the gift; *love* toward the beneficiaries of the gift; *sobriety* for ourselves who have received it. With the gift, God gives the enabling power of the Spirit, the love of the Spirit, and the guiding sobriety of the Spirit.

1:8. Note the connective, **therefore** (*oun*). With such a provision of the Spirit, shrinking due to fear and shame was utterly inconsistent. Instead, there should be courage to suffer for the gospel, not according to a human ability to endure, but **according to the ability God** (*kata dunamin Theou*) would give. We can bear less than we think if we trust our own strength, and more than we think if we trust His.

1:9–11. The connection of these verses with the challenge to suffer for the gospel is evident. For one thing, so glorious a gospel as is displayed in these verses is worth suffering for. Paul can never resist an opportunity to enlarge upon the gospel of God's grace. But more specifically, the restrictive attributive construction **Who has saved us** (*tou sōsantos*) defines for us the God by Whose power we can endure such suffering. Need we doubt that His power will be ours? This is the very God Who has thus saved us and called us in grace.

These verses not only sweep away questions of God's power being made available to us; they also destroy any shame over "the testimony of our Lord" or of "His prisoner" (v 8). The grace with which God has called

us is that which was given before "age times" (*pro chronōn aiōniōn*). Hence it is eternal.

But this grace bestowed in eternity past was then gloriously manifested in the Epiphany of the mighty Savior Whose great accomplishment is the annulling of death itself and the display of life and incorruption. And since fear of death would cause shrinking from witness, this fear is banished because the Lord Jesus Christ has nullified death and given us hope of incorruptibility and life.

Verse 11 adds that Paul, though "His prisoner," was, in reality, a herald, **an apostle**, and **a teacher** of these great truths! Here and in the whole epistle, Paul's triumph over death is magnificent. He is not Rome's prisoner, but Christ's! Facing death, he considers it annulled, and his eyes are captured by the resplendent **light** (cf. *phōtisantos*) of life and incorruption which lies immediately before him.

In the OT, death seemed to be a shadowy realm. It was not well known, hence feared.² Compare even godly Hezekiah and the sentiments of Ecclesiastes. But now the Savior has brought to us the full-orbed revelation of the age to come, robbing death of its terror. As James Mozley wrote:

The Gospel first gave to a future world clearness and distinctness, shape and outline; the Gospel first made it a positive district and region on which the spiritual eye reposes, and which stretches out on the other side the grave with the same solidity and extension with which the present world does on this side of it. A future life

was not an image before the Gospel: the Gospel made it an image. It brought it out of its implicit form, and from its lower residence within the bosom of the great fundamental doctrine of true religion, into a separate and conspicuous position as a truth. This was a bringing to light, and a species of birth, compared with which the previous state of the doctrine was a hidden and an embryo state.³

1:12. The Apostle continues his provocative challenge to Timothy not to be ashamed and to be willing to suffer affliction for the gospel. The challenge arises here out of Paul's own suffering in which, however, he feels no shame (*ouk epaischunomai*). Paul's example must have been distressing to Timothy if there was the slightest shrinking from holy boldness in his own heart. It is lovely, too, to see how the Apostle's deep love for Timothy, united with the movement of the Holy Spirit within him, causes him to rise to a height of spiritual expression unsurpassed in any of his other epistles (though its equals may be found, perhaps). Verse 12 has rung down through the ages as a challenge to countless hearts. Such are the fruits of love.

The crux in the interpretation of v 12 lies in the word **committed** (*parathēkēn*). This can hardly refer, as sometimes suggested, to a deposit given by God to Paul (either his gift for ministry or the truth of the gospel), for the **my** (*mou*) is certainly most naturally taken to be the one who makes the deposit, rather than the one who receives it.

The usage of **committed** (*parathēkēn*) elsewhere seems to confirm this. Frequently the atmosphere of the circumstances surrounding the word is of one who has to take a long journey and who deposits his money and other valuables with a friend, trusting him to restore it on return. The duty of the friend would be easily expressed by the verbs *phulassein* and *apodidonai*. The story told of Glaucus who was condemned by the Pythian oracle for even wishing to retain such a deposit (cf. Hdt VI.86; Juv XIII.199-208) shows the importance attached to faithfulness in these matters.

This imagery is exceedingly appropriate here. The Apostle is about to journey out of this sphere of time, yet—with Christ—he will return in “that day” (*eis*

ekeinēn tēn hēmeran). It is at the return of Christ to earth that rewards are dispensed for the kingdom which follows (cf. Luke 19:15; Rev 11:15, 18).

The Apostle's deposit is his life and ministry. The thought of good works deposited with God in heaven is native to Jewish literature.⁴ The Apostle knows he can take courage in the thought that, despite the certainty of departure from the faith (cf. Chap. 3) and general unfaithfulness, God can be counted on to safeguard the fruits of a life poured out in service to Christ. He knows whom He has trusted.

How superlatively well-placed this confidence was, history now informs us. Can anyone measure the total effects of Paul's life and work, the souls won, the Christians strengthened through the writings which all flowed naturally out of that life and have been

preserved by God? The divine interest that has accrued on the deposit made two thousand years ago, defies the human mind to calculate or compute! Its worth in eternal glory will be awarded to this devoted servant in “that day.” Oh, the privilege of a consecrated life which—at death—can be left in the hands of a faithful God.

1:13–14. The pivotal word **pattern** (*hupotupōsin*) is best taken here in the sense of “summary” or “outline.” It carries a sense confirmed by Galen and also

said to be repeatedly found in Sextus Empiricus. The reference may be our earliest explicit one to a doctrinal statement, of which 1 Tim 3:16 may be an actual example. (If so, the reading *Theos* finds additional support, for an explicit reference would be precisely what we would expect in a doctrinal summarization. Note *homologoumenōs* in that context.)

Trusting implicitly as he does to God, he nonetheless lays here upon Timothy his own responsibility in the matter. God would indeed guard the Apostle's own deposit of life and witness, yet the truth itself, which was the heart and core of the Pauline life, is a deposit to be guarded by the Apostle's protégé.

Moreover, it was not mere dead orthodoxy that was to be maintained, but a pattern of healthy (*hugiainontōn*) words in the midst of an atmosphere of faith and love (*en pistei kai agapē* is related

“God would indeed guard the Apostle's own deposit of life and witness, yet the truth itself, which was the heart and core of the Pauline life, is a deposit to be guarded by the Apostle's protégé.”

grammatically to *eche*). The divine dynamic must never go out of our creed, or we will find we cannot hold it. And that dynamic ever has its source in a Living Person (note *tē en Christō Iēsou*).

In essence, the **deposit** (*parathēkēn*) which Timothy is to guard provides the key to the preservation of the **deposit** (*parathēkēn*) which Paul entrusts to God. Here divine sovereignty and human responsibility meet. The fact is that the work of the Apostle Paul has been perpetuated by a countless succession of “Timothys” who held the pattern and guarded the deposit by the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. esp. 2:2).

Paul arouses his weakening protégé with this sense of responsibility which is both toward God and toward his God-given instructor. Note that the Apostle speaks of the Holy Spirit in each of them (*en hēmin*), giving to Timothy a sense of participation with Paul by the selfsame Spirit Who had and could energize them both. The maintenance of the truth through the centuries has ever been the work of this same Holy Spirit who has dwelt successively in the warriors of faith down through the ages. What a privilege to stand in a true apostolic succession such as this.

THE BACKGROUND FOR FAITHFULNESS: THE DEFECTION OF OTHERS (1:15-18)

1:15-18. With his introduction behind, Paul now launches into the body of his letter which is designed for the fortifying of Timothy to faithfulness in the gospel, by which alone the sacred deposit of truth may be effectually guarded.

The Apostle deals frankly with the present situation, for nothing is ever gained by pretending that the road is easier than it is. Apparently, the threat of persecution had caused an unwillingness on the part of those in Asia to identify with Paul. The aorist **have turned away** (*apestraphēsan*) may, and probably does, point to a specific situation when all had turned away from him—most likely at his arrest. Two names are especially culpable in this.

Even the household of Onesiphorus had, it seems, been tainted by this failure. Paul desires mercy for them, given past favors by Onesiphorus. It has been thought that since the household of Onesiphorus is so mentioned twice (here in v 16 and at 4:19) as to seem to exclude him, that Onesiphorus was therefore dead. Perhaps so, but he may also merely have been at the time separated from them on his travels. It is hard to decide which, but on the former hypothesis, his visit

to Rome might have been during the first imprisonment. As has been pointed out often, a refinement of this nature (as to Onesiphorus)—implicit rather than explicit—is hardly likely to have been invented by a Pseudo-Paul and points to the historicity and authenticity of the epistle. In any case, v 18 does not give warrant for prayers for the dead, since it is not formally a prayer but simply a wish.

There is a challenge to faithfulness both in a background of defection as well as in one who has proved unashamed. We are often inspired by the shadows of moral defeat to shine forth in spiritual victory. The heroes of faith have always done so.

The Apostle touchingly wishes mercy upon one who has shown him mercy (Onesiphorus = “help-bringer”), a certainty indeed in the light of our Lord’s own pronouncement (Matt 5:7).

He also desires the same for a family which seems not to have lived up to the standard of its head (as also the Christian family has fallen so much below its great Head and Lord). It is sad when previous faithfulness decreases in value through unfaithfulness (cf. 2 John 8). 



Zane Hodges taught New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary.

1. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1930, 2004), 538.

2. Editor: That is not to say that OT saints had no idea what the afterlife would be like, or lacked assurance of their salvation. Consider David’s confidence expressed in Ps 23 that “I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.” Or that his dead baby could not come to him, but he could go to his dead baby. Or Daniel’s declaration of the resurrection of the righteous to life.

3. James Bowling Mozley, *Essays Historical and Theological in Two Volumes* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1878), 2:173-74.

4. Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 148.

Faith in Christ Does Not Mean Faithfulness or Fidelity

By Wayne A. Brindle

UNLIKELY DEFINITIONS

What if you were debating someone about the merits of home schooling, and your opponent said, “Home schools are bad, because, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘school,’ it’s a ‘group of people gambling together,’ and we certainly don’t want our children to do that.”

What would your response be?

Mine would be “What?”

But sure enough, when I whip out my handy copy of the *OED*, there it is among the definitions: an infrequent British usage—a *school* is “a group of people gambling together.”

So where does our debate go from here? Answer: nowhere. Our opponent has illegitimately changed the meaning of one of the most significant terms of the debate.

This is what has recently been happening in the theological discussion of the meaning of “faith in Christ.”

Opponents of the free grace of God have decided that “faith” cannot mean simply “faith” or “belief.” It must include some kind of obedient activity and be translated as “faithfulness” or “fidelity” or, most recently, “allegiance.”¹

DEBATING FAITH

Recently Bob Wilkin debated Matthew Bates concerning the latter’s new book, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*,² in which Bates claims that most Christians have misunderstood the meaning of “saving faith.” During the debate, Bates made a number of Biblical and historical assertions that were, in my opinion, either totally misguided or misapplied toward



erroneous conclusions. I’ll discuss the three most significant ones here.

First, the best Greek lexicon says that the noun *pistis* (“faith”) can mean allegiance, fidelity, or loyalty; therefore, when the NT says that salvation is by faith, it includes “faithfulness” or “allegiance” to Christ.

Second, we need to look at Greco-Roman texts (outside the NT) in order to define NT words because there are many words that occur in the NT only a few times. When we do that, we discover that ancient Greco-Roman literature has many examples of this “loyalty” meaning of *pistis*.

Third, there are a large number of examples of *pistis* in the NT that cannot mean “faith” or “trust,” but have to mean “faithfulness” or “fidelity” (e.g., Matt 23:23; Rom 3:3; Gal 5:22; 2 Thess 1:4; Titus 2:10). About 20% of the occurrences of *pistis* in the NT are translated in contemporary translations as “faithfulness” or “trustworthiness.”

All of these assertions ignore the best Biblical and lexical evidence, and are examples of bad exegesis. Let’s look at each of them in order.

EVIDENCE FROM GREEK LEXICONS

BDAG, considered the best Greek lexicon for NT scholarly study, gives three basic categories of meanings for *pistis*: (1) “that which evokes trust and faith,” such as “faithfulness” and “fidelity” (it cites six NT passages with this specific meaning); (2) “believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted,” meaning



“trust” or “confidence” or “faith” (more than 180 NT passages are cited with this meaning, almost all of which refer to faith in God, Christ, the Gospel, or God’s promises—this is by far the dominant meaning of *pistis* in the NT according to BDAG); and (3) “that which is believed”—the body of faith or belief (thirteen passages are cited with this meaning).

Exegetes often come to Biblical texts with a set of theological presuppositions that drive their exegesis, with the result that “if there is an available meaning for a word that better serves the researcher’s own theological paradigm, that person favors the more obscure definition over the common definition.”³ In the case of *pistis*, any occurrence in the NT can theoretically have any one of the above three meanings. But the burden of proof would appear to be on the interpreter to demonstrate how the specific context would make the common definition unlikely. There are very few instances in which Bates can show this for *pistis*.

Sometimes interpreters suggest that the first definition given in a lexicon must be the preferred or most important one. Bates implies that since “faithfulness” is the first meaning given for *pistis* in BDAG, it should be taken as the most pervasive meaning. But this is not the case at all. In BDAG, the first listing is generally the meaning that is most similar to the meaning used in ancient or classical Greek. For an example of this, look at the word *ekklesia*. Three basic meanings are given: (1) legislative body/assembly; (2) gathering of people; and (3) congregation/church. One NT

occurrence is cited for the first listing (Acts 19:39); two are given for the second listing (Acts 19:32, 40); and about 110 for the third (mainly “church”).

So if you meet the word *ekklesia* in the Greek text and wonder which meaning is most likely (if all fit the context), which would you choose?

The order of presentation in BDAG has nothing to do with the “most likely” or “preferred” meaning in any particular passage. There are more than 180 references in the NT to “salvation by *pistis* (faith),” and none of them refer to “faithfulness” on the part of the believer.

EVIDENCE FROM GRECO-ROMAN TEXTS

Bates says that we need to look at Greco-Roman texts (outside the NT) in order to define NT words because there are many words that occur in the NT only a few times. The only way we can discover what those words mean is by looking outside the NT.

However, the word *pistis* is not one of the words that occurs only a few times in the NT. It appears 243 times, from Matthew to Revelation, in so many different contexts that scholars and translators have never had a problem translating it.

Bates says that the literature of the ancient Greco-Roman world has many examples of the “loyalty” meaning of *pistis*. First Maccabees 10:27 quotes King Demetrius as saying, “Continue still to keep *pistis* (loyalty) with us and we will repay you with good for what you do for us.”

More examples are possible.

However, BDAG gives almost as many examples from this literature with the meaning “faith” or “trust” as it does with “loyalty” or “faithfulness.”

The “loyalty” examples tend to be mostly from texts that pre-date the NT (from classical Greek and the LXX), but the examples cited with the meaning “faith” are mostly from Josephus, Philo, and the time period of the NT and the early church. This probably indicates that the predominant meaning of *pistis* gradually changed from ancient Greek to NT Greek, which may explain why its use in the NT reflects almost entirely the “faith/trust” emphasis.

In the LXX (an early Greek translation of the OT), which was composed from about 250 BC to 130 BC, the word *pistis* appears 59 times. It carries the meaning “faithfulness” or “fidelity” in less than half (44%) of these occurrences. Eight times (14%) it definitely has the meaning “faith,” another eight times (14%)

the meaning could go either way, and seventeen times (29%) the term has to be translated in a different way entirely. The use of *pistis* in the LXX illustrates the change of meaning that was going on in early Koine Greek, and by the time of its NT usage the focus on the concept of “faith” or “trust” was almost complete.

EVIDENCE FROM NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATION

Bates claims that a “large number” of uses of *pistis* in the NT cannot mean “faith” or “trust,” but have to mean “faithfulness” or “fidelity” (including Matt 23:23; Rom 3:3; Gal 5:22; 2 Thess 1:4; Titus 2:10), and that about 20% of its occurrences are rendered in contemporary translations as “faithfulness” or “trustworthiness.”

Both of these statements are false.

Of the five passages specifically mentioned by Bates, only three are translated by almost all recent versions as “faithfulness” or “fidelity”: Rom 3:3, Gal 5:22, and Titus 2:10. The Romans passage speaks of the “faithfulness of God” (God’s “faith” wouldn’t fit the context). The Galatians passage speaks of *pistis* as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, among which “faithfulness” makes good sense (the KJV has “faith,” which also makes sense). Titus 2:10 says that slaves should “show all good fidelity” or “faithfulness,” which certainly fits the context; many recent translations have “showing all good faith,” which has a related idea. In Matt 23:23 Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees that they have neglected justice, mercy, and *pistis*. Only about half of the best recent translations use the word “faithfulness” or the equivalent here. And only one major contemporary translation uses something other than “faith” in 2 Thess 1:4. Bates’s use of this passage is thus counter-productive to his case.

It’s no exaggeration, then, to say that major contemporary English versions translate *pistis* as “faithfulness” or “fidelity” in only three or four NT verses. Yet Bates says that 20% of the total occurrences are rendered in contemporary translations as “faithfulness” or “trustworthiness.” How many occurrences of *pistis* are there in the NT? The answer is 243. So in reality, recent translations use “faithfulness” (or the equivalent) for *pistis* only 1.2% of the time.

To get an understanding of how far from the truth Bates’s claims on this subject have gone, let’s take a quick look at what are probably the top eight recent Bible translations, and how they translate the word *pistis*. I will list how many times, out of 243 total

occurrences, each version translates *pistis* as “faith”: ESV=238, NASB=237, NKJV=237, HCSB=233, RS=237, NRSV=232, NET=228, NIV=226. The percentages for these translations range from 98% of the total (ESV) to 93% (NIV).⁴

The average percentage of translation of *pistis* by “faith” among these top eight versions is 96%.

Clearly there is no way one can reasonably claim that *pistis* in the NT regularly means “faithfulness, not faith.” It does so in very few contexts, but that’s all. The context must drive the translation and interpretation in every occurrence. And NT translators have consistently rendered *pistis* as “faith” throughout the NT in almost every instance.

CONCLUSION

Bates claims that *pistis* should be thought of as “embodied action,” not an “interior disposition” (as in trust or persuasion or faith). Therefore, he says, justification is actually by works. This, of course, would have been strange news to the Apostle Paul, who argued against works-salvation at every opportunity (see Rom 3:28; 4:5; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:24; Eph 1:13; 2:8-9; Phil 3:9). It also runs completely counter to the Gospel of John, in which the Greek verb *pisteuō* (believe) always means to believe or trust in or have the conviction that something is true. Passages like John 3:16, 11:25-27, and 20:30-31 make it clear that both Jesus and John taught salvation by faith alone and *not* by works. ■



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1. Lordship Salvation asserts that one must “believe in Christ” AND “follow Him as Lord” in order to be saved; this “allegiance” view says that having faith in Christ means to be faithful and loyal to Him.

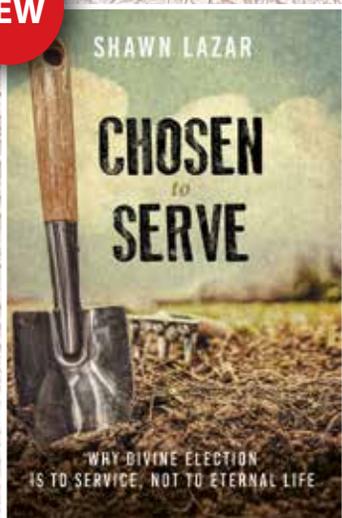
2. Michael W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

3. Craig L. Blomberg with Jennifer Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 138.

4. In the case of the NIV, the lower percentage is due to the fact that in six occurrences of *pistis*, the NIV translates it verbally as “believe” or “believing” or “those who believe” (the same idea as “faith”—not “faithfulness”); if these were added in, the NIV’s percentage would be 95.5%.

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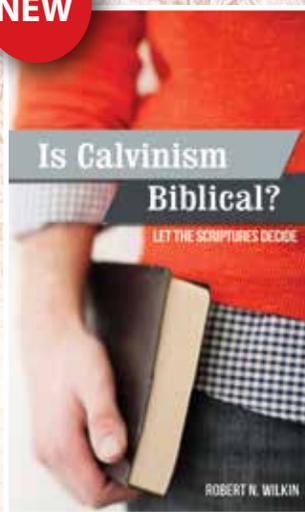
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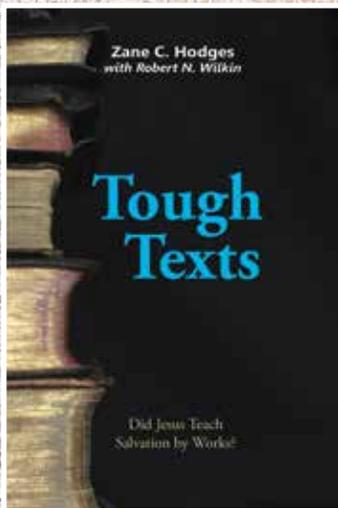


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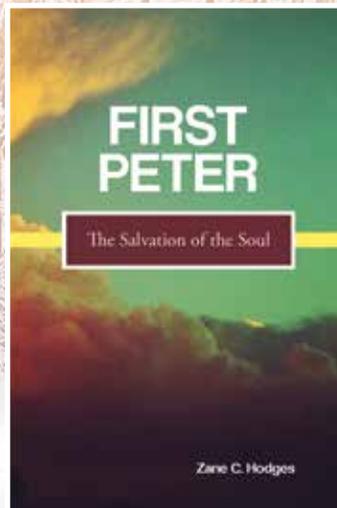


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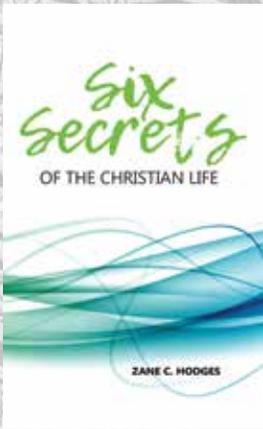
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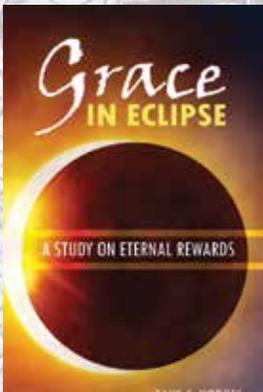


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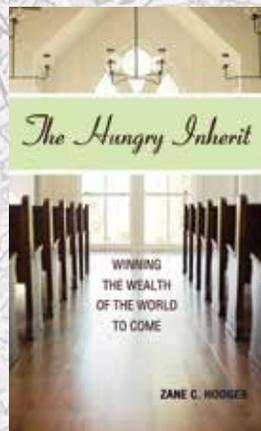


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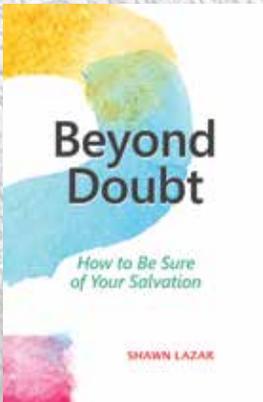


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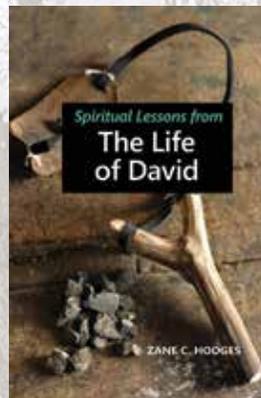


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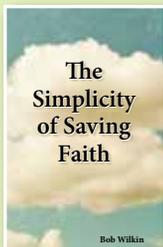
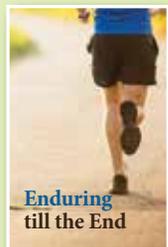


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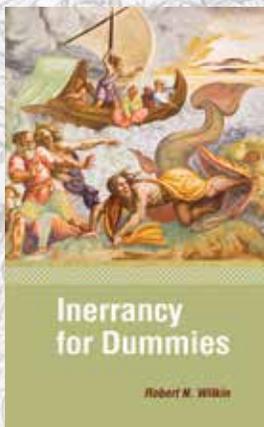
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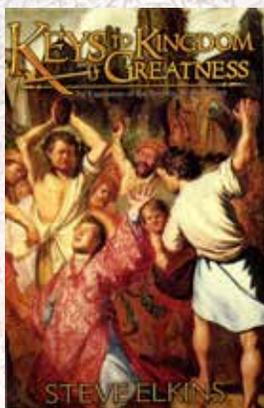


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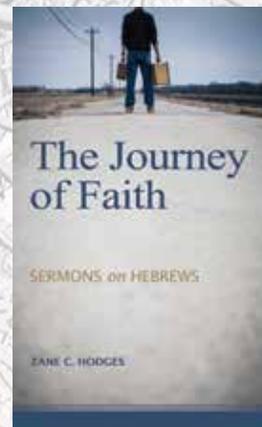


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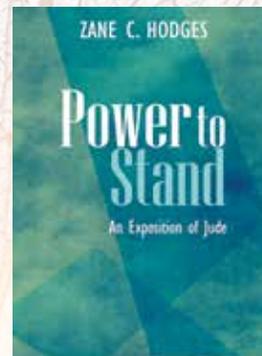


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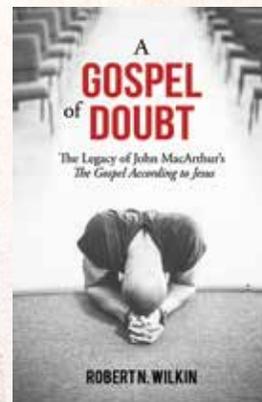


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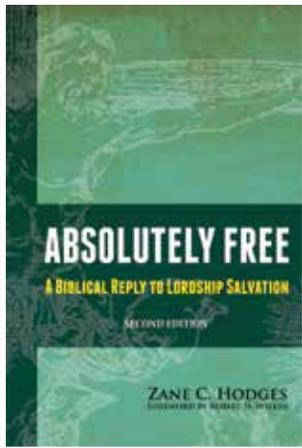
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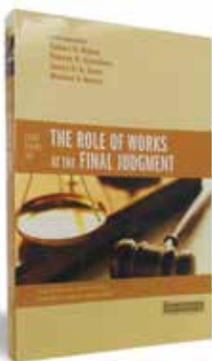
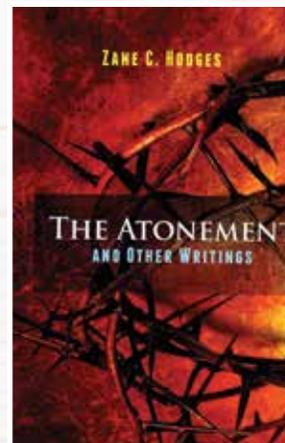
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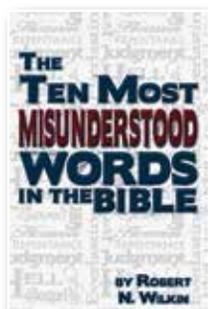
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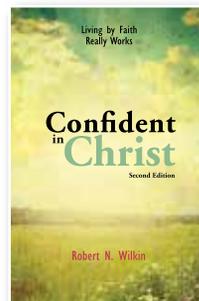
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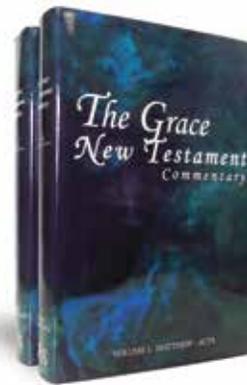
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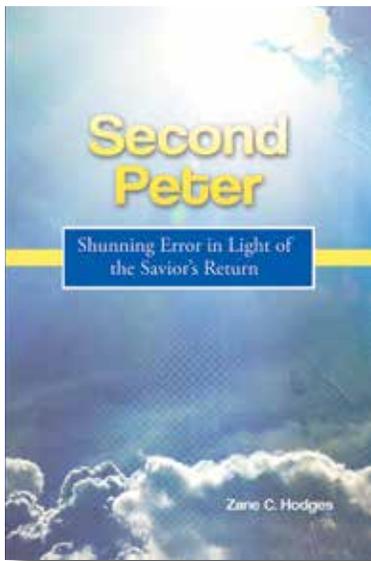
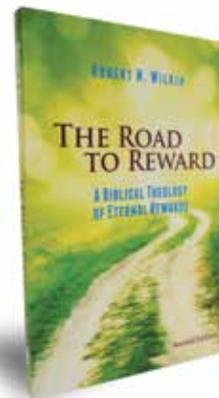
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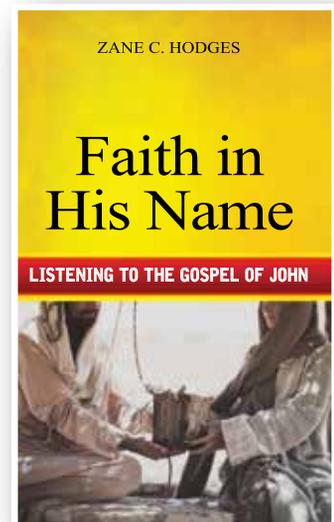
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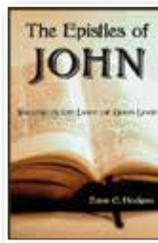




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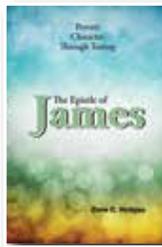
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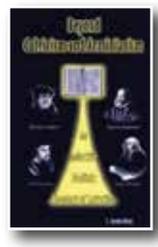
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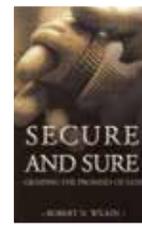
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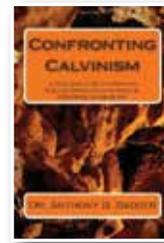
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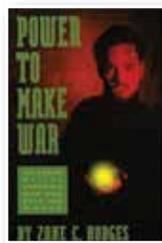
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Mobile Grace



By Bill Fiess

All of us who are living in the 21st century are well aware of the technological revolution we daily experience—phones by which we can talk face-to-face, internet by which we can view World Series games live, tablets which can connect us to just about anything. But those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ also have the privilege of using amazing Bible software which, for the first time in history, can instantly show us the occurrence of any Hebrew or Greek word in the Bible or immediately find an article on almost any Biblical subject.

LOGOS Bible Software is, in my opinion, the best Bible software available—and recently they have contributed something very significant to Free Grace believers.

LOGOS has for several years been producing mobile education courses on many theological subjects. One can literally earn a Master's degree by viewing such courses under the auspices of a seminary. But just a few months ago they released a course by our own Bob Wilkin entitled, *TH265—Free Grace Theology*. It is easily accessible, whether or not you own LOGOS Bible Software. That is, it will run on any computer or tablet or Kindle by just downloading the LOGOS operating system for free. You can view the product at <https://www.logos.com/product/129001/mobile-ed-th265-free-grace-theology>.

I am very excited about the production of this course for several reasons:

- It enables someone from anywhere in the world to thoroughly understand and appreciate Free Grace Theology.
- It is extremely well done, easy to access, and produced with cutting edge digital technology.
- The lessons are done in 10-15 minute segments and can be accessed in whatever order one may choose.
- Not only can you listen and view Bob speaking, you can also read his exact text, which Logos

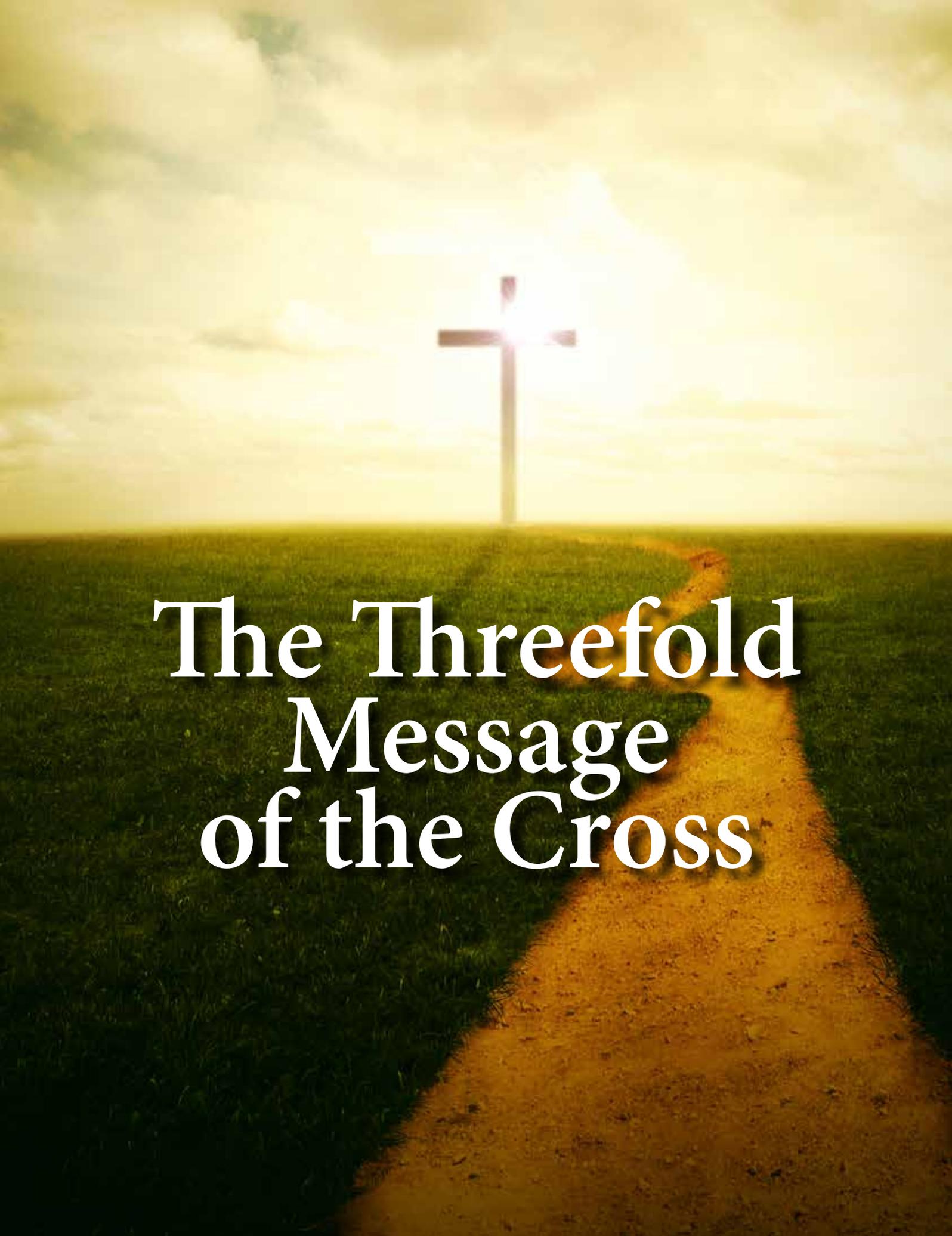
transcribed. Thus, you can re-study or copy-and-paste what he is teaching. This is a powerful teaching method because it is both auditory and visual.

- It is very thorough, covering many of the objections to Free Grace Theology, as well as its positive teaching. Even if someone is not convinced of Free Grace doctrine, it would greatly assist him in evaluating it.
- It can be used very easily for Sunday School classes or large group gatherings by simply using a laptop computer and a projector. That is, any of the segments could be easily shown in this way.
- Someone could come to faith in Jesus Christ by simply watching these videos. In addition, the message of how to get eternal life will undoubtedly be more fervently proclaimed by anyone watching these videos.

These are just some of the reasons I encourage you to buy this course. In a very real sense it is “a gift that keeps on giving.” This is, it is something that one can use for a lifetime and constantly consult on various topics. Check it out for yourself. 



Bill Fiess teaches math in Virginia and is an ardent LOGOS user.



The Threefold
Message
of the Cross

By Lewis Sperry Chafer

GOD HAS SPOKEN

The epistle to the Hebrews opens with a reference to the messages of God which have been projected into this world, and which have widened the possible scope of man's understanding and action from the limitations of the things of this world and the conclusions of finite minds to the issues of the entire sphere of God's redemptive purposes and the verities of the Infinite.

God has spoken. The effect of the message has been far reaching.

Men generally believe in certain facts the knowledge of which could come only from the Scriptures of Truth. But men do not always pause to consider all of God's message and its personal application to them with its necessary demands upon their faith. They believe in the Bible heaven, but do not carefully consider the only condition the Bible reveals upon which any soul can enter therein. They believe in the fact of sin, but seem to care little for the priceless cure divinely set forth for it. They believe there is a holy God and that men are sinners, but do not estimate what problems were involved in bringing about a possible reconciliation between that holy God and the meritless sinner. Yet how faithfully God has spoken on all these issues!

It is not enough to believe generally that God has spoken. What He has said must be carefully weighed and personally applied.

His message is as a shaft of light from the eternal sphere shining into a world where sin's darkness and blindness are supreme. Happy indeed is the man who humbly receives every word God has spoken

both of sin and salvation, and is thus able to look into the realms of glory along this radiant shaft of divine revelation. The following are the opening words to the letter to the Hebrews:

"God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The message from God spoken to the fathers by the prophets is contained in the OT. The message spoken to us by His Son and which was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, is contained in the NT. This latter message is primarily of "So great salvation" which in no wise can be neglected with impunity.

God has disclosed His own essential being through His Son. In this revelation which He has made through His Son, God is said to be Light, Life, and Love, or Wisdom, Power, and Love. Christ was an outshining of these elements which are in the being of God, and that manifestation of His being through the Son was made in terms which the finite mind might grasp. Men of Christ's time, from their study of Him, were able to say: "No man ever spake as this man," and, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do the miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." So the wisdom and power of God were recognized in Christ. But the wisdom and power of God had already a sufficient revelation in the very things that were created, so that even the heathen world is without excuse.

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his

eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom 1:19-20).

At least three messages from God through His Son are revealed in the cross.

LOVE

In John 1:18 a special manifestation of God through the Son is mentioned: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "No man hath (fully) seen God at any time" would indicate that while His power and wisdom had been revealed to some extent by the things created, the complete revelation had not been given and there was to be a very special unfolding of His bosom of love. The Son was in the bosom of the Father (the seat of the affections; from that bosom He never departed). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

Every moment of the earthly life of Jesus was a manifestation of God's love, but one event in the ministry of Jesus is especially designated as the means by which the bosom of God was unveiled. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16); "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10); "But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

In the cross of Christ, therefore, God has declared His love, and

this declaration is addressed as a personal message to every individual. It may be concluded that when this divine message really reaches a heart, the individual will thereby become conscious of a fact far beyond the range of human knowledge and so far reaching in its value that it transcends all other issues in life and death. It becomes intensely personal according to the testimony of the apostle: "Who loved me and gave himself for me."

**"In the cross of
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That knowledge-surpassing love is proven and expressed to "me" by the fact that He gave Himself for "me."

The vital question at once becomes, what did He do for "me"?

The Scriptures make it plain that He did enough to demonstrate finally and perfectly the infinite love of God. "Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us." This is more than a moral example: it is a distinct service rendered, and on so vast a scale that it adequately expresses the deepest message from the Father's bosom.

The message must be understood by those to whom it is addressed, but not necessarily by the processes of mere human reason. The cross of Christ was the final answer to

the great necessities and problems which sin had imposed on the very heart of God. This is revealed and is knowable only to the extent to which God has spoken, and never because man has examined and analyzed the heart of the Infinite. Human philosophy and blind unbelief have woven many veils which have tended to obscure God's plain revelation. The conditions which moved the heart of God exist in the higher realm and have no comparisons or counterparts in the range of human knowledge; hence human reason cannot be deemed sufficient to judge or challenge that which God has seen fit to reveal. Anything which adequately represents the infinite love of God will hardly be compressed into the limitations of man's wisdom. It is most probable that eternity itself will prove to be but a ceaseless unfolding of that fathomless expression of boundless love. Even now that divine expression of love in the cross becomes the source of supreme ecstasy to the one who has received the message into his heart. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In striking contrast to this, the unsaved person, either Jew or Gentile, finds no attraction whatever, in the same cross. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

That something of eternal value to lost humanity was accomplished in the cross is clearly revealed. Just how much was accomplished could not be fully revealed. However, some things are made plain.

The eternal issue of sin was called into question at Calvary's cross, and a sufficient Substitute

stood in the sinner's place until all grounds of condemnation were forever past and every righteous judgment of God was perfectly met. Human wisdom has sometimes challenged this revelation on the supposed grounds that it would be immoral for God to lay on an innocent victim the condemnation that belongs to another. This might be true if it could be discovered that the innocent One was an unwilling victim. But on this point every doubt is forever dispelled.

In Heb 10:1-14, where the sin-offerings of the OT are held in contrast to the one offering of Christ, the Lord is recorded as saying, "Then said I, Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God." So at the time of His crucifixion, He said to His Father "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

But there is a still deeper truth to be considered when the challenge is made that the substitutionary death of Christ is an "immoral thing." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor 5:19). Shall not the infinite God be morally free to bear on His own breast the doom of the one His infinite love would save? Would not a mother be morally justified who had flung herself between her child and the fire! Would the child be justified in later years, when gazing on those frightful scars, to deem that love-act as an immoral thing?

What Christ bore we are saved from bearing. His work was effective. "He died for me": not to show me how to die. He died that I might not die! God's love, in expressing itself to human hearts, provided a Substitute for them in their sin judgments, the issues of which reach out into infinity. This,

we are told, is what divine love did. Who can measure the blasphemy of those who speak of this love-expression as an "immoral thing"? So fallen is the heart of unregenerate man that he will even attempt to incriminate by a charge of immorality the very God Who seeks to save him from his doom.

The cross of Christ, though unveiling the heart of God in a moment of time, was, neverthe-

**“In these last days
God is speaking
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Reader, has God
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less, the expression of that which is eternal in that heart. Christ was "a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." What God did for sinners, therefore, is an expression of His constant attitude toward them. The cross is an assurance of the undiminished love of God at this very hour.

Only in the cross has God perfectly revealed His love to sinful man. Not in nature. Nor in the things and relationships of this life, for these may fail. And when they fail the stricken heart that has trusted these outward benefits alone as the evidence of God's love is heard to say, "it cannot be true that God loves me."

God's perfect and final revelation of His love is in and through

the cross, and the heart to whom this message has come is possessed with all the consolations of grace in the midst of the trials and afflictions of life. Such a one can say, "though He slay me yet will I trust Him."

In these last days God is speaking through His Son of His personal love for each individual. Reader, has God said anything to you through His Son? Can you say in the joy of that greatest of all messages, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"? If the cross has not become this to you, is it not evidence to you that you are neglecting this great salvation in spite of all professions and good intentions, and from the unhappy end of such failure there can be no escape?

SIN

While Christians are grateful to Christ for what He did in His death for them on the cross, should they not be grateful also in some degree to the Roman soldiers who put Christ to death?

This question has been raised by unbelief and may well be answered by first discovering just what part the soldiers took in that great event as it is viewed in the Bible.

In John 10:17-18 we read that Jesus said: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." He evidently made no resistance at the moment of His crucifixion, which was doubtless in great contrast to the violent struggles of the two thieves and wholly opposed to the highest ideal



of that time when self-preservation and self-advancement were the first consideration of all men. Whatever else took place, no man took His life from Him. So, also, the last words recorded as falling from His lips on the cross were of victory and authority. “Father, into thy hands I commend (deposit) my spirit.” This language distinctly indicates that His death was in no way a defeat through human force. Not one reference in the Bible, outside the mere historical statement of the crucifixion, ever assigns His death to human sources. It is rather indicated that God the Father was acting in that death. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6); “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom 3:25); “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). The soldiers

might take a human life; but God alone could accomplish a reconciliation through Christ’s death and thereby solve the great problems created by human sin. Christians are saved by the divine reconciliation alone, and no gratitude is due the human factors in the death of Christ.

The deed of the soldiers is not without meaning, however. From the first sin of man to the present hour, every unregenerate person is said to be at enmity toward God. That enmity is usually covered and latent, but as assuredly exists as the Word of God is true. It was the will of God that at the exact time and place when and where His infinite love was being unveiled there should be an unveiling, as well, of the desperate wickedness of man. Every human act in the crucifixion was a revelation of the fallen creature; yet to crown it all, one man, as though representing a fallen race, took a spear and drove it into the heart of God. The deep significance here lies in the inexplicable

fact that “God was in Christ” and that this human act was in reality against the person of God, as well as a rejection of the human presence of Christ and the blessings of grace He presented. So all those who tarry in unbelief are warned that in so doing they “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6).

Thus no man can be ignorant of the true nature of his own sinful heart who has honestly faced the meaning of the sin of rejecting Christ as enacted in the crucifixion. On this point God has spoken through His Son. Oh, the sin of even hesitating to receive the marvels of God’s grace as offered to lost men in the cross of Christ!

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The cross of Christ is also a message from God in that it is said to be a declaration of the righteousness of God.

Whom God hath set forth

to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom 3:25-26).

The English word “declare,” as used in this passage, is also used in the passage in John 1:18 already considered, wherein the bosom of God is said to have been “declared.” The Greek words from which these two translations are made are not the same. In the passage in John the word presents the idea of announcement (cf. Luke 24:35; Acts 10:8; 15:12, 14; 21:19), while in the passage in Romans the word indicates the legal aspect of a full proof of something in question (cf. 2 Cor 8:24, “proof”; Phil 1:28, “evident token”).

In v 25 of the passage under consideration, the evident proof of the righteousness of God was made at the cross concerning the sins committed before the death of Christ. God had always anticipated a perfect and sufficient sacrifice for sin. The blood of bulls and goats had never taken away sin, but had been the divinely appointed symbol of the blood that was to be shed. In view of the sacrifice that was to be, God had passed over, or pretermitted, the sins aforesaid on the condition that the offender present the symbolic innocent sacrifice for his sins. Although the offender may have comprehended but little of all the divine meaning and purpose, the sacrifice stood as a covenant with Jehovah that He would, in the fullness of time, meet all the need of the sinner. When the true and sufficient sacrifice was

accomplished, that sacrifice stood as a full proof that God had been righteous in all the generations wherein He had freely acted in view of that great event which was yet to come.

In v 26 the declaration, or full proof, of the righteousness of God is made in the cross in relation to the sins committed. Ever since the cross, human responsibility for the adjustment and cure for sin is not through symbolic sacrifices, as in the OT, but is rather conditioned on a personal trust in the sufficient sacrifice fully accomplished on the cross. Such justification, according to this verse, is for “him which believeth in Jesus.”

This verse also states what we may believe to be the deepest divine problem. How can the righteous God deal righteously with the sinner and at the same time satisfy His own compassion and love in saving him from the doom which His own righteousness must ever impose on one who commits sin?

Though He loves the sinner, there are unalterable conditions to be met in upholding His justice and personal character. Sin cannot be treated otherwise than sin, else all standards of holiness and justice fail. This is not a remote and exceptional problem; but it is one as far reaching and important as the very fact of the existence and destiny of the human family itself. It must also be considered as claiming the utmost attention of all intelligences of the universe. Can sin be righteously treated as sin and still a way be provided for the salvation of the sinner?

Any theory which tends to lessen the imperative for judgment which was created by sin does not fully

weigh the fact of the unalterable character of the righteousness of God. Is He not all-powerful and all-sufficient and can He not waive aside the sin of those creatures His hands have made? Is He bound by any law whatsoever? The answer is not of human origin, any more than is the question, though the human mind may comprehend it.

Even God cannot change the character of righteousness by altering or lessening to the slightest degree its holy demands. What is done for the satisfaction of His love in saving any whom His righteousness condemns must be done in full view of all that His righteousness could ever require.

The cross is said to be the message of God through His Son in answer to this divine problem. He might not change the demands of righteousness, but He has sufficient power and resource to meet perfectly those demands for every sin-doomed soul. The dying Christ was “set forth” in order that God might be just, and at the same time, satisfy His heart of love in being the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

As the righteous Judge, He pronounced the full divine sentence against sin. As the Savior of sinners, He stepped down from His judgment throne and took into His breast the very doom He had in righteousness imposed. The cross declares the righteousness of God, and because of that cross, His righteousness cannot suffer or ever be called in question, even when He wholly pardons the chief of sinners and floods him with the riches of grace.

All that righteousness can demand has by the very Judge been supplied: for it was God Who was

“in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” The problem was within the very nature of God Himself. How can He remain just and still justify the sinner whom He loved with an everlasting love? He was the mediator between His own righteous Being and the meritless, helpless sinner. The redemption price has been paid by the very Judge Himself.

This is revealed to finite man as being now accomplished by the infinite God. God has not thus acted because man requested Him to do so. It was His own solution of His own problem determined by Him before any man came into being. It was made actual in the cross in “the fulness of time.” Man is only asked to believe and act on the facts thus revealed.

Redemption by the cross was not God’s second best as contrasted with the innocence of Adam in the garden. It was in the divine councils from the foundation of the world and its accomplishment is unto a heavenly state above angels and archangels, yea, into the very image of Christ. This is the good news of the gospel. Sin’s judgments are already perfectly met. “He loved me and gave Himself for me.”

While the cross is to the unsaved Jew “a stumbling block” and to the unsaved Gentile “foolishness,” it is to those that are saved “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” These extremes in the conclusions concerning the cross by equally intelligent people can be accounted for on no other ground than that some, by the Spirit, have apprehended and accepted the declaration of God’s love and righteousness which He has made in the cross. They have seen that the very power of God in saving grace

has been set free, and that God’s own wisdom has been disclosed in solving His own problem of saving sinners by that cross. The new song of such a heart is, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

All praise be unto Him! Christ was God’s Lamb “that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “He became a curse for us”

“God has, for His own sake, removed every moral hindrance which His infinite holiness might see in sinful man, and so it is now possible for Him to exercise the last impulse of His love without reservation or limitation.”

(Gal 3:13). “He bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). “He was made sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21). “Jehovah hath caused to rest on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). “He is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2). “He tasted death for every man” (Heb 2:9).

It is, therefore, now possible for the righteous God to deal graciously with a sinner because that sinner, through the substitutionary death of Christ, is, in the estimation of God, placed beyond his

own execution, and the ground of condemnation is forever past. God has, for His own sake, removed every moral hindrance which His infinite holiness might see in sinful man, and so it is now possible for Him to exercise the last impulse of His love without reservation or limitation.

When thus unshackled and untrammelled in His love, He, through His own lavishings of love and grace, places the sinner in the eternal glory finally perfected into the very image of His Son. There is nothing in the highest heaven beyond that. It is the greatest possible thing that God can do. It is the infinite demonstration of His grace. God’s grace in action is more than love. It is love operating in full recognition and adjustment to every demand of righteousness. “Even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 5:21).

The conclusion from these revelations is that by the cross God has declared our sin, His own righteousness and His own unmeasured love. He has spoken to us through His Son. The reasonable requirement is that we believe that message. This is the only condition given in the Bible upon which one may enter into God’s saving grace.

GIF



Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) was the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. This is Chap. 3 of his book Salvation: A Clear Doctrinal Analysis (public domain).



Shreveport Bible Church

Grace on the Go



Students from Palabra de Vida

PALABRA DE VIDA QUERETARO, MEXICO

During the first week of November, Ken Yates was in Queretaro, Mexico. There is a Bible school there called Palabra de Vida (Word of Life).

Ken took part in two of the classes. The picture here is of the class on Romans.

The main teacher is Alonso Angulo, who has been to the GES national conference a couple of times.

Ken was also able to give each student a copy of Zane Hodges's book *The Gospel Under Siege* in

Spanish. This is a great opportunity to expose future leaders of the church in Latin American countries to Free Grace Theology. It also provides Ken a great opportunity to practice his Spanish. It looks like he will be able to continue doing this on an annual basis.

SHREVEPORT BIBLE CHURCH NOVEMBER 5

Shawn and Abby drove to Shreveport Bible Church. It was his third visit to that fellowship. He spoke on the subject of Biblical election. He showed that when God chose an individual to serve Him, He also implicitly chose a group to serve, too. This is true of Jesus and the Church. Jesus is the Chosen One. And God meant for the Son to have a Body, the Church. Through Jesus, God elected the Church. The message was taken from his book *Chosen to Serve*. It was good to see the saints there again. They are currently looking for a Free Grace pastor.

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY ASSURANCE AND THE PRACTICAL SYLLOGISM NOVEMBER 14-16

Bob flew into Boston and took the train over to Providence, RI. He spoke at the annual meeting of ETS, a group of about 2,500 Bible scholars from around the U.S., Canada, and the world.

On Wednesday Bob spoke on "Assurance and the Practical Syllogism." Puritans thought, and many



Bob with Drs. Rex Koivisto and James Davis



Bob's group: Hi, Al Valdes!

Calvinists today think, that saving faith is unknowable. Of course, also unknowable for them are whether Christ died for them, whether God is drawing them, whether God elected them, and whether they are eternally secure.

The practical syllogism is the way in which Puritans and Calvinists attempt to find subjective evidence that they have saving faith. The syllogism goes like this:

Major Premise: True believers do good works.
Minor Premise: I do good works.
Conclusion: I am a true believer.

The fly in this ointment is the conclusion does not follow. Buddhists and Hindus and Muslims and even

atheists do good works. The presence of good works does not prove that one is a believer in Jesus Christ.

Bob showed that the solution is to look to Christ, not ourselves, for assurance. He promises everlasting life to whoever believes in Him. I believe in Him. Therefore, I have everlasting life.

Bob was able to attend a number of good workshops, some of which might work as articles for our journal. He also saw a lot of friends including Al and Yami Valdez, Elliott Johnson, Charles Huneycutt, Roger Philippe, James Davis, Randy Price, and others. He also enjoyed the breakfast for Zondervan authors.



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Conflict Resolution— Genesis Style

By Marcia Hornok

THE OFFENSE

Relationship conflicts are inevitable, going all the way back to Cain and Abel. The most severe and lasting ones seem to be with kin. Do you have a relative or ex you try to avoid due to something done or said years ago? You may think it's too late to bring up now, and besides it was mostly *their* fault, but isn't a clear conscience better than simmering resentment? Although the steps necessary for forgiveness and reconciliation are excruciatingly humbling, Jacob's procedure in Genesis 32–33 can be a pattern for us.

Jacob's struggle with Esau began in utero (Gen 25:22). Growing up they had little in common, and parental favoritism fueled their differences. Esau despised his birthright of God's Covenant given to Grandpa Abraham and bartered it to Jacob for a meal (Gen 25:34). Then Jacob deceived his father Isaac for the covenant blessing (Genesis 27). Both events were irreversible, but Esau severely regretted them and blamed Jacob (Gen 27:34–38). Hebrews 12:14–17 says Esau tearfully sought in vain to get his dad to repent, but Isaac let the blessing stand (see Heb 11:20). God's promises cannot be broken, and God had said the elder would serve the younger (Gen 25:23).

Jacob could be viewed as the less culpable party for two reasons: (1) Esau gave away the birthright, and didn't the blessing go with that? And (2) it was mother's



idea; Jacob thought it too risky at first but then obeyed her. After that, Esau, the hunter, threatened to kill Jacob who went into exile. Years later, when Esau went to meet Jacob with 400 men, “Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed” (Gen 32:6–7). With his family in jeopardy, Jacob realized Esau must be pacified.

HOW GOD PREPARED JACOB

Jacob had experienced conflict with Uncle Laban for the twenty years they lived together. Trying to avoid confrontation, Jacob secretly packed up and left (Gen 31:20), but Laban “hotly pursued” him (Gen 31:36), bringing along his kinsmen. God intervened by speaking to Laban in a dream (Gen 31:24, 29, 42). Consequently, both parties aired their grievances and made a pact never to harm each other (Gen 31:44). Covenants are always initiated by a superior, in this case, Laban, to the inferior, Jacob. He agreed to all Laban’s terms and offered a sacrifice, which they ate together. After proper goodbyes, they went separate ways.

As Jacob traveled on, perhaps he reflected on the way God had intervened to protect him and resolve his in-law conflict. In any case, God provided another experience in Gen 32:1–2, the lesson of Mahanaim,¹ meaning *Two Camps*. There the “messengers of God” met him going back to Canaan as they had in Gen 28:12 when he left the land. Allen Ross wrote, “Mahanaim, like Bethel, was a spot where...the invisible was opened to the visible.”² God vividly reminded Jacob that his earthly camp was surrounded by God’s heavenly camp.

Secondly, with Esau and 400 men approaching, Jacob took his best option—he called on God. His prayer in Gen 32:9–12 is a model for all believers, especially during a crisis. Jacob *acknowledged* his relationship with God and God’s past goodness. He *admitted* his unworthiness. Then he *asked* for deliverance, and finally, he *affirmed* God’s promises.

God’s third preparation took the form of a night-long wrestling match, completing Jacob’s transformation from arrogant schemer to humble servant of

God, who could also be subservient to Esau. Although Isaac’s blessing to Jacob had said his mother’s sons would bow to him, Jacob was now willing to take full responsibility for his actions that had caused their separation.

Although Genesis records the discussion between Jacob and Laban, it does not record that Jacob and Esau discussed the reasons for their conflict, possibly indicating that component is not always wise. Instead, Jacob humbled himself and offered restitution. The steps he took still work today.

PRINCIPLES OF RECONCILIATION

First, Jacob initiated contact (Gen 32:3–5), stat-

ing that he had been with Laban, but not mentioning why (v 4). He simply asked for Esau’s favor, calling him “my lord” and himself “your servant.”

Second, he took precautions to protect his family (Gen 32:6–8), dividing them into two camps. Jacob could not be sure there would be no casualties, so he sent nearly 600 animals as gifts; then he himself went first. Perhaps this principle speaks to the

necessity of keeping personal conflict private, between you and the other party, and not involving the whole family or getting others on your side. This will prevent escalation.

Third, pray (Gen 32:9–12). Ross noted, “God’s people can pray with confidence for deliverance from their enemies because of His promises to them.”³ Prayer also gives a proper perspective of our dependence on the Great Forgiver, so we can extend forgiveness to others.

Fourth, make restitution extravagantly (Gen 32:13–21, 33:8–11). While Ross sees this as Jacob’s lack of trust in God by attempting to buy Esau off, Bruce Waltke says, Jacob sends “magnanimous gifts, in dramatic increments, and aims diplomatically to pacify his offended brother...Jacob calls his gift ‘the blessing’...He is ready to restore the blessing and to recognize Esau as lord, trusting God to keep His covenant promises.”⁴ Restitution can be costly, but personal sacrifice shows how seriously you want to reconcile.

“Jacob, like Israel, had learned to face conflict, admit fault, and heal relationships. From heel-grasper to limping wrestler, he had become dependent on his promise-keeping, trustworthy God.”

Fifth, clear things up between you and God (Gen 32:22–32). Forgiving and asking for forgiveness involve a spiritual battle, and admitting your contribution to the failed relationship is crucial. Intense and painful wrestling with God can transform us into His useful servants. As with Jacob’s permanent disability (at the end of his life he is still leaning on his staff as Heb 11:21 mentions), so our struggles with God change us for life and help us lean on God.

Sixth, meet in person, staying humble, respectful, and vulnerable (Gen 33:1–11). As the brothers approach each other, imagine the difficulty of Jacob bowing to Esau seven times with his newly dislocated hip. Perhaps this very thing answered Jacob’s prayer by softening Esau’s heart and eliciting sympathy—how could he attack a cripple? Despite the suffering and inconvenience, embrace your God-ordained thorns in the flesh. William Cowper wrote: “Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.”⁵

Jacob humbled himself before Esau, not only in posture, but also by calling him “my lord” five times and asking for Esau’s favor.⁶ No self-defense or justifying on Jacob’s part. He presented himself as the weaker party, the one who needed forgiveness. “Whereas conflict with Laban is resolved through a treaty of nonaggression, conflict with Esau is resolved through genuine expressions of repentance, extravagant gifts, and exaggerated humility.”⁷ In Esau’s response, “Keep what you have for yourself,” Waltke noted a possible double entendre—that Jacob can keep the birthright and blessing (Gen 33:9).⁸ However Jacob prevailed on Esau to accept his gifts. In his new identity as Israel—God’s Warrior—he struggles and prevails with God and men (Gen 32:26–28).⁹

Seventh, maintain friendly contact (Gen 33:12–20). Reconciliation does not mandate frequent contact. For example, while divorced couples need to go through the process of forgiving each other, that does not mean they need to remarry or become best buds. Jacob knew God wanted him to return to Canaan (Gen 28:15, 31:13, 32:9) so he did not go to Seir at Esau’s invitation. But evidently, he and Esau cooperated regarding family affairs, such as when Isaac died (Gen 35:27–29).

NOT ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL

The Bible tells us Jacob eventually returned to his father Isaac at Hebron (35:27), but we don’t know if Jacob went through a reconciliation process with him. Isaac had erred in trying to bypass God’s directive that the elder would serve the younger, but Jacob had certainly been wrong for deceiving Isaac by impersonating his brother.

Jacob, like Israel, had learned to face conflict, admit fault, and heal relationships. From heel-grasper to limping wrestler, he had become dependent on his promise-keeping, trustworthy God.¹⁰ He could forgive and ask for forgiveness. Does it always work?

In my case, where I unintentionally offended someone I love, I have followed these seven steps, but have not yet experienced the desired end. The person has not been willing to meet or communicate with me, so I continue to practice step #3, asking God to work in our hearts.

Requesting someone’s forgiveness is a deeply humbling experience. Making restitution requires expense and sacrifice, but the resulting reconciliation will be worth it. Hebrews talks about Esau in the context of pursuing peace with everyone (Heb 12:14). Genesis 32–33 shows us how. 



Marcia Hornok is the managing editor for *CHERA Fellowship magazine*.

1. See “The View from Mahanaim,” *Grace in Focus* (July/August 2017).

2. Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 540.

3. Ross, *Creation*, 545. However, Ross goes on to say that Jacob did not need to seek to appease Esau by “giving away God’s blessing on them.”

4. Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 444.

5. William Cowper, “God Moves in A Mysterious Way,” 1774, Public Domain.

6. Four times (Gen 32:5, 33: 8, 10, 15). Jacob used the same word twice in stating how God had favored (gifted) him, so he asked Esau to favor him by accepting his gift.

7. Waltke, *Genesis*, 455.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Thomas L. Constable, *StudyNotes on Genesis*, 246.

10. Hosea 12:4–6 indicates that Jacob’s wrestling with God had taught him to wait on God continually.

Fear Changes Your Focus (Luke 12:4)

By Shawn Lazar

Early in my Christian life, when I was about eighteen, I had the chance to become a youth pastor. But I said no.

Over the next several years, in different churches, and in different contexts, I was called to enter full-time pastoral ministry.

In each case, I refused.

Why?

In part, because I was afraid. (I think my main fear was a financial one. I didn't trust God to provide.)

Now that I am in ministry, I look back and wonder how often fear caused me to miss out on the good things that God had for me. I wish I could go back and tell my past self to serve the Lord, because the rewards are far greater than the imagined risks.

Has fear ever kept you from doing something worthwhile?

Have you ever let fear stop you from serving God?

It stopped people in the Bible, too.

THE EXODUS

Consider the Exodus generation.

They had so much potential. So much promise. So much God wanted to give them in Canaan, the land He had prepared for them.

But they refused.

Instead, they chose to wander in the wilderness for decades.

Every day Israel spent in the barren wilderness was a day they could have spent in bountiful Canaan.

They squandered so much time and missed out on God's blessing. They should have trusted and obeyed God and entered the land to take it. Instead, they cowered outside of it.

Does that sound familiar to you? Have you done the same? Have you shrunk back from obeying God? Do you regret it now?



NICODEMUS

Nicodemus was a respected leader in his community. Men praised him and looked to him for religious guidance. But all the while he hid his true beliefs about Jesus.

Nicodemus could have become an open disciple of Jesus. He could have been with the Lord every day for three years. Can you imagine being with Jesus like that?

Nicodemus could have seen the miracles, heard the teaching, and been mentored by the Master Himself. And after the death of Judas, Nicodemus could have even become the twelfth apostle!

But he didn't.

He stayed hidden.

Nicodemus came to faith in the Lord but kept it secret until after Jesus died, when he claimed His body (John 19:38-42).

Wouldn't you have followed the Lord, if you could?

I'm sure that, looking back, Nicodemus wished he had.

Every day Nicodemus spent in the dark as a secret believer was a day he could have spent with the Light (John 1:4-5) as an open disciple.

Nicodemus missed out on God's blessing.

FEAR CHANGES YOUR FOCUS

We look back on the examples of the Exodus generation and Nicodemus and think of what a foolish choice they made. Why did they act that way?



Out of *fear*.

Remember what Jesus said about fear:

“I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do” (Luke 12:4).

Fear changes your focus. That’s what happened to the Exodus generation and to Nicodemus. They were focused on their fear of men, instead of on God and His promises. And that prevented them from pressing forward.

The Exodus generation feared the inhabitants of Canaan too much to go into the land (cf. Num 13:27-33). Likewise, Nicodemus was likely too afraid of being put out of the synagogue to follow the Lord (cf. John 12:42). And that basic fear of other men stopped them from enjoying the blessings that come from obeying the Lord openly.

When fear trumps following Jesus, that’s a sign your focus has changed. Instead of being Christ-centered, you’ve become self-centered.

How so?

Acting out of fear means your thinking is taken up with *your problem*, instead of with *His Person* and *His provision*.

Fear is natural. There’s no sin in being afraid; at least, as an *initial* reaction. But it is not natural to have fear dominate your life, hinder your growth in spiritual maturity, and persuade you not to follow the Lord.

That kind of fear is a sign of rebellious unbelief. It is a vote of no confidence in the Lord. You are effectively saying, “Lord, I’m afraid of these guys. I think they’re too powerful for You!”

DO NOT FEAR

Jesus said you shouldn’t fear those who can only kill your body.

Notice, Jesus didn’t promise a trouble-free life! Trouble will come. It’s very possible that people will persecute you for your faith, to the point of killing you. Or, less dramatically, due to your faith, you could get fired, or lose a promotion, or lose your reputation, or suffer in many different ways.

Nevertheless, Jesus said *don’t be afraid!*

Why not?

The key is to put those problems into an eternal perspective.

In the long run, this life is *not* the end. There is an eternal life after this earthly one, and what we do here impacts how we will live there.

Physical death is a blink of an eye in light of eternity. So whatever happens here is relatively short-lived compared to our eternal destiny.

Yes, people can kill your body, but you were going to lose that body anyway. God will give all believers new ones in the age to come. So don’t worry! Fear of physical death is not something that should stop you from following God and living in His blessing.

Have you let fear change your focus?

Have you let fear cause you to miss out on serving God the way you were called?

If so, keep your eyes on Christ.

See everything through a Jesus lens and put your trust in Him, not in your troubles.

Serve Him as you are called to do, without fearing the people around you.

Fear is nature’s way of helping you avoid dying. Don’t let it be Satan’s way of making you avoid truly living. 



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.

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