

GRACE (in) FOCUS



Can a Christian Quit?

A Real Mountaintop Experience

One Ugly Picture

Christ's Impeccability

Biblical "Ha-Ha" Moments

And much more!

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Letter from the Editor



Last year saw record gas prices and high inflation in the U.S. and around the world.

Thank you to all of you who support this ministry with your prayers and gifts. We had an excellent financial year last year, permitting us to continue to expand our outreach.

We've been adding some new features to the magazine like book reviews, short profiles of people involved with GES, a few pages of pictures of recent ministry events, and more articles. One way we are adding more articles is by decreasing the number of pages devoted to selling our books. We trust you will avail yourself of our website for more information about our books than we can put in the magazine.

If you do not currently read our daily blogs or listen to our daily podcasts, I hope you will check them out. I am always delighted to hear from people who are blessed by these daily ministries. They are, like all our ministries, labors of love.

By the way, don't forget to tell your friends from other countries about our foreign language blogs. We now have blogs in Spanish, Portuguese, Filipino, Russian, Italian, German, Polish, and Chinese. Thank you to all of our translators. All of these are freely available on our website (www.faithalone.org).

All our authors love to share the truths of the free gift of everlasting life and the blessings now and forever associated with believers who walk in fellowship with our Lord and Savior.

Grace in Focus magazine is designed to help equip you and your local church so that we might all glorify the Lord Jesus more fully. Life is about the Lord Jesus. Everlasting life is about the Lord Jesus. The secret to success in life and in everlasting life is falling more and more in love with Him. How we long to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." ■



Robert N. Wilkin

A *Real* MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE

BY GENE GREESON

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-eight years ago, when I was 46 years old, I had set my sights on climbing Mount Everest. My plan was to accomplish that feat in the following years with a group of other climbers.

While it was a lofty goal, there were reasons why I thought it was an attainable one. I had just completed climbing to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa. While there, I even did 30 jumping jacks to prove, among other things, that it is possible to breathe at a height of over 19,000 feet. I hadn't performed a jumping jack since my high school days and hadn't planned on doing one on top of that mountain, but my emotions overcame me as I stood there gazing at the clouds below me.

The prospect of climbing Mount Everest was now more exciting than ever.

THE NEXT STEP

I knew that if I was going to climb the highest mountain in the world, I still needed some more practice. Our climbing team set our eyes on Mount McKinley in Alaska. That would be another stepping stone to reach the ultimate goal of Everest.

At that time, I owned a computer store. We were experiencing some financial issues with the store and there were certainly costs associated with climbing McKinley. In addition, I could not take time off to train for and then accomplish the climb. On top of all that, I had sustained some foot injuries while playing basketball. As you might guess, feet play more than a small role in climbing the world's tallest mountains.

I agonized over the decision, but it was clear that I could not go to Alaska. It would almost certainly mean that I would not be able to climb Everest either. I was disappointed but realized that reaching the top of Everest was not as important as other things happening in my life.

The wisdom of that decision was borne out. The team that I was scheduled to climb McKinley with attempted to scale it but was not able to reach the top. They made it to a camp at 17,000 feet but were forced to stop because of weather. While there, they waited for more than a week for the snowstorms to abate so that they could complete the climb. It was all in vain. They were not able to do so.

Obviously, I felt bad for them. However, I was very glad I had made the decision not to put my health and the financial well-being of my business at risk for an attempt at that endeavor. I would have really regretted that decision while walking back down the side of McKinley!

A LIFE-SAVING DECISION?

The wisdom of that decision came into even more focus the next year. The team that I had been assigned to climb Mount McKinley with did indeed travel to Nepal to climb Mount Everest. I was no longer a part of that team, so of course I did not travel with them. I did have a greater joy, however, and it certainly eased the disappointment. As the team travelled to Nepal, I married my wife, Dori.

Two months later, I heard devastating news. The team had indeed made it to the top of the tallest mountain in the world. It was such a great accomplishment. Many of them, however, died while returning to the bottom. This included Scott Fisher,

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The team had indeed made it to the top of the tallest mountain in the world. It was such a great accomplishment. Many of them, however, died while returning to the bottom.

.....

the leader of the team, who was America's most accomplished mountain climber. If it could have happened to him, it could certainly have happened to me.

Documentaries were made about that trip and what happened. Those old enough to remember may recall the news. Obviously, I was glad I had not made that trip with them.

MOUNTAINS HIGHER THAN EVEREST

It has been 26 years since that terrible day on the descent from Everest. Through those years, I still have wondered what it would have been like to look down from that peak. It must be quite the thrill.

At the same time, however, I have come to realize that there are higher mountains to climb, and greater mountaintop experiences than what one can find on Kilimanjaro, McKinley, or even Everest.

Those experiences involve serving the Lord. After a person believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life, he becomes a child of God forever. That life can never be lost. But there is even more. The believer can now walk in fellowship with the Lord and can be a part of what He is doing in the world.

In my case, I became involved in prison ministry around 18 years ago. During those years, as I saw many men come to faith and grow in that faith, I have had numerous thrills. To be honest, nothing this world has to offer compares to these kinds of blessings. How could I even compare the sight of looking down on the clouds from the top of Kilimanjaro with the sight of what the Spirit of God was doing in the lives of those men?

If I could compare such experiences to climbing a mountain, I would say that on those mountaintops, Mount Everest seems like a small hill. The top of that earthly mountain is very far below.

WE CAN ALL CLIMB TALL MOUNTAINS

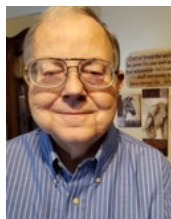
For various reasons, I was not able to be a part of the team that climbed Everest in 1996. Few people ever get that opportunity. It takes a great deal of effort as well as a commitment of time and resources to engage in something like that.

But every believer in Jesus Christ has the privilege of climbing much higher mountains in His power and grace. Physical problems or a lack of financial resources can prevent a mountain climber in this world from reaching his goal, but it is not that way with serving the Lord and climbing on His team. We can be His hands, feet, and voice in the world in which we live. Such work will take us to unbelievable heights.

How thrilling it is to see Him not only in our lives, but in the lives of fellow believers around us! We live in a fallen world, but in Him we can look down from the heights He takes us to. Such thrills can be an ongoing experience for the disciple of Christ, as He teaches us more and more and reveals more of Himself to us in His Word. We can climb a lot of mountains with Him.

Every believer will be in the kingdom of God. As we wait for that day, however, let us have the wisdom to climb with Him to whatever heights He takes us. What views we will see as we climb with the Lord! Then, if we persevere in our climb with Him, when we stand before Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Imagine the thrills felt on that mountaintop! ■■■



Gene Greeson graduated from Florida Bible College in 1975. He and his wife, Dori, have led a prison ministry in Florida prisons for 18 years.

Can a Christian Quit?

By
Lucas
Kitchen

A reader recently claimed that it would be wrong for God to force a Christian-turned-atheist into heaven because it would violate his or her free will. This raises an interesting question. This is my response to that claim.

If someone has believed in Jesus for salvation, then these verses apply to him even if he no longer believes.

Jesus said, “I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28). He said *never perish*.

He also said, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out... This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” (John 6:37b, 39). Once anyone believes in Jesus (= comes to Him), he is included in what is not lost and what is not cast out.

Paul said, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). Can you break God’s seal? Nope. It’s sealed by God, not man. Anyone who has come to faith in Christ has been sealed for the day of redemption. That’s a done deal, a closed transaction.

The Lord Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

The believer has passed from death to life. A believer cannot commit spiritual suicide. It’s not in the ability of a man of flesh to kill that which is spiritually alive.

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again”

(John 3:3).” Can you become unborn once you’re born? Nope. It’s a one-time event.

If you claim that you can lose salvation by becoming an atheist, then you don’t believe in what Jesus promised, everlasting life that cannot be lost. That’s because you don’t really know if you’ll become an atheist before you die. You might. So, you can’t be sure if you’re saved (with the logic that you presented). Nonetheless, John said, “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

If those who fall away don’t have everlasting life, then John shouldn’t say that we can know that we have everlasting life that cannot be lost. If someone can lose eternal life, then John is wrong.

The bottom line for me is this. I care about the simple promise of Jesus. Jesus promised eternal life for all those who believe in Him. He promised that we get that eternal life now, not later: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has eternal life” (John 6:47).

Notice that the person who believes *has* eternal life *now*. So how long does eternal life last? If it doesn’t last forever, then Jesus lied. You get everlasting life the moment you believe, and it lasts forever. That’s a promise of Jesus, and I believe it. Do you? ■



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WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY?

The Seven Churches of Revelation:
The Letter to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17)

by Philippe R. Sterling



BEWARE OF DOCTRINAL AND MORAL COMPROMISE

There are similarities between the New Testament world and ours. When the apostle John wrote down Jesus' message to the seven churches, philosophies from the East, from Egypt, and from the hills beyond Pergamum were sweeping through the Mediterranean world. People were spiritually hungry, but not morally disciplined. Some of the spiritual practices involved sexual rites and the use of wine or drugs. Today, people are spiritually hungry, but many ignore the true source of life. Instead, they dabble in astrology, mysticism, eastern philosophy, or the worship of money, sex, and power.

Pergamum had believers within the church who were succumbing to false teaching. The same is true of believers today. We can learn from the message of Jesus to the believers at Pergamum and reorient ourselves to truth.

Forty miles north of Sardis sat ancient Pergamum. It was the center of Roman authority in the province. It became the site of the first temple of the Caesar-cult, erected in honor of Augustus Caesar. The city also housed an ancient temple to the God Zeus. The altar from that temple is in the Berlin Museum and was often visited by Adolf Hitler.

Pergamum was known for its Asklepon, a healing and medical center. Here, religious meditation, dream interpretation, snake-handling, and medical arts were combined for healing purposes. The

Sacred Way led from the Asklepon, built in honor of the god of healing, toward the Acropolis, which rose a thousand feet above the plain. Near the summit stood the immense altar to Zeus.

There was little distinction between religion and politics in Pergamum. The city's coins depicted intertwined serpents to represent the interconnection between the sacred and the secular. For the pagans in this city, politics was religion, and religion was politics. For the believers in Christ, there was a constant temptation to compromise their beliefs and practices for political and economic gain.

Jesus described Himself as the One who has the double-edged sword (see Rev 1:16). Hebrews 4:12 compares the Word of God to a "double-edged sword." Jesus wields the powerful and true Word of God which keenly discerns thoughts and motives.

Jesus told the church at Pergamum, "*I know where you live.*" He assured these believers that He knew they dwelt in a city under Satan's control. He understood the persecutions and temptations they experienced from the rampant Satan-inspired religions. He praised them for holding fast to Him in the face of danger and persecutions.

Some believers in the church of Pergamum died for their faith. Jesus singled out one man, Antipas, and called him

“My faithful martyr.” The word “martyr” meant “witness” and has come to mean those who witness by their death. Church tradition tells us that Antipas was brought before a statue of Caesar and told to swear that Caesar was God. But Antipas proclaimed that Jesus alone is Lord and that there is no other God but Him. Antipas was put to death for that.

Jesus had a severe criticism for the church. They were tolerating those who followed Balaam’s teachings and that of the Nicolaitans.

Balaam is most often remembered for the talking donkey incident. He was a prophet hired by a king named Balak to utter a curse on Israel (Num 22–24). God would not let him do this and even made

Balaam’s donkey talk back to him to restrain him. Balaam then advised Balak to send women to seduce the Israelite men and draw them into the worship of false gods, thus incurring the judgment of God (Num 25:1–3; 31:16). Balaam’s clever notion was to bring down Israel by an indirect attack on their morals and faith. Balaam is a prototype of corrupt teachers who betray believers into fatal compromise in morals and beliefs.

Knowing this about Balaam helps us to know what was going on in Pergamum. Several religions of the area involved festivals and temple prostitution. Apparently, some of their practitioners had infiltrated the church and were leading some believers into sexual immorality and idolatry.

WWJS TO THE CHURCH TOLERATING FALSE DOCTRINE:

*“Don’t succumb to false teaching,
and don’t tolerate it.”*

The Greco-Roman world looked upon sexual promiscuity as an acceptable way of life. For example, Demosthenes stated, “We have prostitutes for the sake of pleasure. We have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation. We have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian of our household affairs.” Cicero argued, “If there is anyone who thinks that young men should be forbidden to love a prostitute, he is extremely severe. He is at variance, not only with the license of what our age allows, but also with the customs and concessions of our ancestors.”

There were those in the church who said, “Live like everyone else around you.” They asserted that the standards of the world could also be an accepted

pattern of life for believers. This doctrine of Balaam is also around today.

Jesus referred to the eating of food sacrificed to idols. We are free to eat or not to eat such food (see Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8; 10:20–30). Why was it such a problem here? Apparently, believers were being drawn into pagan practices by participating in their feasts. As such it would have been better to avoid these feasts altogether.

Jesus condemned the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Irenaeus said that they were followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, a proselyte who was among the seven men chosen to serve the Jerusalem congregation (Acts 6:5), and who had forsaken true doctrine and lived in unrestrained indulgence (*Against Heresies* I, 26:3). Hippolytus confirmed this by noting that

Nicolaus abandoned correct doctrine and had the habit of indifference as to what a man ate and as to how he lived (*Refutation of Heresies* 7:24). Although Clement of Alexandria defended Nicolaus by explaining that his followers had misunderstood him, he observed that the Nicolaitans abandoned themselves to pleasures like goats in a life of shameless self-indulgence (*The Miscellanies* 2:20). They advocated license in matters of Christian conduct, including free love.

It may be that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was dualistic. They reasoned that the human body was evil, and the spirit was good. A believer, therefore, could do whatever he desired with his body because it had no importance.

These false teachers believed that a little idolatry or a little immorality or a little compromise of the truth couldn't really hurt anything. When believers commit adultery, cheat in business, or compromise their doctrinal or moral standards to fit the situation, they fit into the Pergamum mentality.

Jesus exhorted the believers to repent! They were to turn from their compromise and separate themselves from those who taught things contrary to the truth.

Jesus threatened to come quickly and with the sword of His mouth to make war against the false teachers. Twice in the text, He talked about His "sword." The sword of His mouth is His powerful word of judgment.

To those who overcome, Jesus promised three things: 1) hidden manna, 2) a white stone, 3) a new name.

Jesus does not want believers to be lured away from fellowship with Him. If we refuse to be drawn away by the enticements of false religions, Jesus promises "hidden manna," special fellowship meals with Him.

Jesus will also give us a white stone inscribed with a new name. Such a white stone with one's name on it was the basis for admission to special events. It was also a custom to reward victors at the games with such a token enabling them to gain admission to a special feast. The "hidden manna," the other part of the reward, also suggests a reference to the Messianic feast. The white stone is, then, a personalized *tessera*, which would serve as a token of admission to this great future feast. The giving of the white stone to the believer indicates that he has been favored by Jesus. The new name might reflect the proven character of the overcoming believer.

WWJS to the church tolerating false doctrine: "Don't succumb to false teaching, and don't tolerate it." He who keeps himself from spiritual and moral error will receive a double blessing in the life to come. The one who overcomes will enjoy special fellowship meals with the Lord Jesus and will be honored with a special name. Feast with Christ today, and feast with Him in glory. ■■■



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THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

(JOHN 8:30-32)

By Bob Wilkin



Johns Hopkins University, Ottawa University, and Southern Methodist University all have as their motto the Latin translation of “The truth shall set you free”: *Veritas Liberabit Vos*.

A 1975 Syracuse, NY, newspaper article about a treatment program for alcoholics quipped, “The truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable.” That quote has been much displayed and often repeated.

This is one of Jesus’ most well-known sayings.

Yet it is not well understood. In fact, it is much *misunderstood*.

What did the Lord Jesus mean when He said, “The truth shall set you free”?



JESUS WAS TALKING TO BELIEVERS ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP

In verse 30, John tells us, “As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.”

The words, “many believed in Him” are the same as what we find in John 3:16. Since whoever believes in Him has everlasting life, we know that the people Jesus was addressing in verse 31 were believers.

Yet many commentators say that neither verse 30 nor verse 31 refers to “true” believers.¹ Why? They have three reasons:

1. What Jesus went on to say about abiding,
2. What He said about being His disciples and being set free, and
3. The ensuing acrimonious dialogue in the rest of the chapter.

But that involves a misunderstanding of all three concepts (found in points 1 and 2) and of verses 33-59 (point 3).

THE 3 KEY CONCEPTS IN JOHN 8:31-32 CONCERN SANCTIFICATION, NOT JUSTIFICATION

Abiding. To abide is to remain or to dwell with. It is found in John 15 and in John’s first epistle. Believers are commanded to remain in Christ’s Word and to remain in fellowship with Him. But that is neither guaranteed nor is it a condition of everlasting life. It is a condition of discipleship.

We know from 1 John 1:7-9 that abiding in His words means not only that we are walking in the light of His words (1 John 1:7), but also that we confess our sins when we become aware of them (1 John 1:9). We do not deny our sin. We admit it, and that is part of the transformation process which occurs as we abide in Christ.

Being disciples of Jesus. A disciple is not the same thing as a believer, as these verses clearly show. A disciple is a learner. If a believer is in Christian instruction, then he is a disciple of Jesus. If, however, he stopped following Christ and learning more about Him, he would remain a believer, but he would no longer be a disciple, a learner. To be a disciple of Jesus, one must abide in His teachings.

Being set free. The issue here is not being set free from eternal condemnation. The issue is being set free from bondage to sin, as stated in verses 33-36.

Unbelievers are enslaved to sin, and if they do not believe in Jesus before they die, then they go to the grave still enslaved. See John 8:21, 24. Compare Rom 6:18.

When a person comes to faith in Christ, he is no longer a slave of sin in his *position*. He has a new master. But in order to experience that freedom in his *experience*, the believer must abide in Christ and in His teachings. Compare Rom 6:19.

JESUS' WORDS IN JOHN 8:33-59 WERE DIRECTED AT THE LARGER CROWD, NOT THE SMALL GROUP OF BELIEVERS WITHIN IT

Verses 45-46 indicate that there were other Jews in the crowd who didn't believe in Jesus. He was not addressing the remarks of verses 31-32 to them.

On my written exams for my doctorate at DTS, I was asked how I could explain that verses 30 and 31 indicate that Jesus was speaking to believers, and yet verses 33-59 and especially verses 45-46 directly indicate that He was speaking to unbelievers. How can you reconcile this seeming discrepancy?

The answer is simple. There was a large crowd of unbelievers, and some of them came to faith. He addressed the new believers in verses 31-32, and he addressed the unbelievers in verses 33-59.

Richard Lenski, a Lutheran scholar who died in 1936, in his commentary on John, wrote,

Jesus has a word for [the new believers] in particular. No sooner does he utter it than the hostile crowd of Jews raises further objection. They act just as they did from the

start: they pick at some point to which to object (compare v. 22 and 25; also v. 13 and 19). John does not need to say in v. 33 who these objectors are, for we have heard them from the very start, and their objection is of the same type as before. Jesus answers them in v. 34, etc. But they go on. The clash becomes more and more intense until these Jews take up stones, and Jesus leaves them (p. 628).

Clarke agrees that Jesus was speaking in verses 31-32 to people who indeed believed in Him. Clarke says that verse 32 refers to having "a constant experimental knowledge of its [the Word's] power and efficacy" (*The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, Volume 5, p. 579). Concerning verse 33, Clarke says, "They answered, that is, the other Jews who had not believed—the carping, caviling Pharisees already mentioned; for the words cannot be spoken of the simple people who had already believed. See ver. 30."

Verses 30 and 31 are clear that born-again people are in view. The Lord's point is that believers are not automatically set free from sin's bondage in our experience. We must abide in Jesus' teachings in order to experience that freedom.

WHY IS ABIDING IN CHRIST'S WORDS SO VITAL TO DISCIPLESHIP?

There are many theories about how we are to live the Christian life.

Some point to contemplative practices like prayer labyrinths, meditating on your Christian mantra, and silent retreats.

Some point to speaking in tongues and being part of a charismatic assembly.

Some think that dedication is the key. You need to daily dedicate yourself to please God.

Others go the other way and say that letting go is the key. *Let go and let God*, they say.

Still others suggest that we can pray and ask the Holy Spirit to take control, and then we will gain special power and will no longer be in control of our own lives.

But the Bible teaches that following Christ is accomplished by abiding in His teachings. Paul said as much in Rom 12:2. We are transformed by the renewing of *our minds*. Discipleship is a battle for our minds. Paul said the spiritual believer is one who has “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

Remember 2 Cor 3:18. Paul said that with unveiled faces we behold in the mirror that is God’s Word the beauty of Christ and thereby we are transformed into His image by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s say that you were in line to become the assistant White House Press Secretary. What would need to be true of you in order for you to get that job?

You would have to abide in the words of the President. You would need to believe that his words are true, and you’d need to be able to communicate them to others. Being a good speaker and an attractive person would not be enough. You’d have to agree with the President, and you’d have to know his words backwards and forwards.

It is the same with being a disciple of Jesus. You must abide in His words.

Discipleship is not identical to salvation. That can be clearly seen in John 8:30-32. It is also clear in Romans 6-8 and in 1 John and in the book of Galatians.

Believers who abide in God’s Word are not in bondage to sin. They are set free from it.

This doesn’t mean sinless perfectionism. Compare 1 John 1:8, 10. Christians sin.

What it means is that the abiding believer is not enslaved to sin. He is seeking to please God in all that he does (compare John 8:29).

The first mate on a ship relieved the captain of his command. Now the first mate was in charge. The old captain had no power to make anyone obey him anymore. Yet the old captain was allowed to roam the ship and to command the sailors to obey him. They were free. But they had to abide in the promise of the first mate in order to experience that freedom.

THIS PASSAGE IS SAYING...

Abiding in Jesus’ Words results in being set free from bondage to sin in one’s experience. The believer is already free from slavery to sin in his position (Rom 6:17-18).

Christians who don’t abide in Jesus’ words are enslaved to sin in their experience. (Unbelievers, of course, are slaves of sin in both their position and experience, as the Lord said earlier in John 8:21, 24.)

Fullness of life is found in abiding in Christ and pleasing God. Walking in the flesh is not fulfilling, and ultimately it is not enjoyable. The passing pleasure of sin is far outweighed by the pain it brings.

We can and will be certain of our eternal destiny as long as we believe Jesus’ promise of everlasting life.

CONCLUSION

What a powerful truth the Lord expressed in John 8:32. *The truth shall set you free.*

Man was created to be free. True freedom allows us to glorify God and thereby enjoy fullness of life. When we are born again, we are set free from sin’s bondage in our position. But in order *to experience* that freedom, we must abide in Christ and His teachings.

If we are open and honest before Christ and walk in the light of His Word, then we will be fulfilled, happy, and contented, though not necessarily healthy, and wealthy. If we abide in Christ, then we will be ready for His soon return as John said in 1 John 2:28, “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” ■



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1 See, for example, Ed Blum (John, *BKC*, pp. 304-305), Leon Morris (John, p. 404), Raymond Brown (John, vol. 1, p. 354), and D. A. Carson (John, pp. 346-48).



Irene

By Ken Yates

OUR INTRODUCTION

“My name is Irene.” Those were the first words she spoke to me. I was in Kenya and had just completed a very long Bible study on the parables of the Lord. The study was conducted in a very humble church in the countryside. It was made of crude sheet metal, with no windows, no running water, and had a dirt floor. Old timers will understand when I say there was an outhouse about 30 yards from the church.

There were about 90 in attendance, and all of them had been exposed to free grace teaching. They had heard the gospel of grace and were now interested in learning more about rewards. These were dedicated and new believers, some of whom had traveled for hours to be there.

After the study, my Kenyan host asked me to get into the van to rest a minute before we went to the next location to teach. As I sat in the van, I heard my host, who was standing outside, say that someone wanted to meet me and take a picture with the teacher from the United States. I got out of the van to meet that person.

I had not noticed her in the church building. It had been packed with people, and I am sure she sat in the back. The lighting was bad in there, and I am beginning to develop cataracts. But it was impossible not to notice her as she walked towards the van. She obviously had severe physical disabilities. I am pretty sure she had cerebral palsy, but I think there were other things involved in her condition as well. With every step she took, her feet protruded out in strange angles. Her body would move in jerky motions every time she took a step. Her head would turn in odd directions, looking off in different places. The ground was uneven, with no pavement. There were rocks on the ground as well. I thought she would fall every time she took a step towards me.

After she introduced herself, I told her my name is Ken. We then had a short conversation.

PLEASE DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR ME

Other than her name, the first thing Irene told me was that she “had not always been like this.” She said it in a matter-of-fact way, as if she were telling me she was going to the grocery store. It was of some importance to her for me to know that there was a time in her life when she did not have her physical limitations.

I don't know the reason for her wanting me to know that fact. Perhaps she was being apologetic because, even though she was easily understood, her disease caused some of her words to sound strange. Maybe she was telling me she was sorry I might have

some difficulty understanding her, and she wanted me to know that hadn't always been the case.

I got the impression that she thought it would make me a little less uncomfortable if I knew that she had not been born with her condition. I would guess that she was around 16 years old. Maybe, in her mind, if I realized that for at least part of her life she did not have the difficulties she had now I would be a little less likely to feel sorry for her. It was clear she did not feel sorry for herself. She wasn't looking for sympathy. The whole time we talked, she had a large grin on her face, even as her face would occasionally jerk off to the side as we continued our conversation.

Whatever reason she brought it up, I didn't know how to respond to that statement. I quickly changed the subject. I asked her how she enjoyed the discussion on the parables of the Lord. She was much too polite to say anything negative about the study to the guy who had led it, so it was no surprise that she said she really enjoyed learning more about the teachings of Christ. We had a very brief discussion about those parables. She seemed genuinely happy that she had just sat through four hours of teaching on the Bible in a very humble setting. I am pretty sure that sitting that long would have caused her discomfort, but she didn't even come close to complaining about it.

Another attendee approached us while we were talking. He asked her about her education for the year coming up. She said that she could “not find a place to live.” In her country, a person her age would go off to boarding school. The students stay at school during the week and come home on the weekend. What she was saying is that no school would take her as a student because they couldn't cope with her many disabilities. They couldn't meet her needs. While someone from our culture might not have understood, what she was saying is that her future educational opportunities were non-existent.

Once again, she said it in such a way that did not reflect the tragedy of her statement. She may as well have said she thought it might rain tomorrow. There wasn't even a trace of disappointment in her voice. It seems that she didn't want the person who asked the question to comment how sad it was that

she would miss out on such an important phase of her life.

Irene then asked me if I wanted to come to her house and meet her grandmother. I assumed that is the woman who is her primary caregiver. I didn't know if her grandmother would want a strange American visiting unannounced. But it didn't matter. The van was getting ready to leave, and I had to go with it. I told Irene I would love to meet her grandmother, but my Kenyan host was telling me I had to leave. I then told her that if I came back to Kenya, I hoped to see her again, and if I did return, I would meet her grandmother then. She seemed pleased with that possibility.

She started walking down a dirt path towards her home. I watched her walk away, and once again I thought that with each step she took, I would find myself running to lift her up from the ground. I kept an eye on her until the van pulled away. Even though I don't know how she did it, she kept upright the whole time.

If I would characterize our conversation, I would say it was a happy one. Irene did not emit any emotions of pity at all. But as I thought about our encounter the rest of the day, it sure raised certain emotions in me.

GOOD AND BAD FEELINGS

I think the first feeling I had as I drove away was a good one. How I wished the Lord had been at that church that day. Obviously, His teachings on His own parables would have been infinitely better! But more than that, unlike me, He would have noticed Irene sitting in the back of the room. With His word, He would have made her whole. He had done it before when teaching people about the kingdom of God (Mark 1:21-27; 2:1-12).

But I have to admit I had some bad feelings that day as well. I am pretty sure hatred would qualify as such a feeling. When I read about how the religious leaders in Jesus' day were angry when Jesus healed people like Irene on the Sabbath day, I at the very least bordered on having feelings of hatred toward them (Matt 12:9-14; Luke 13:10-17). I wondered how they could be so cruel.

If hatred towards myself would qualify as a bad feeling, I was guilty of that as well. Looking at Irene's attitude and her circumstances in life, I realized how ungrateful I am. I have been given so much, and I could not comprehend how difficult just one day of her life must be. I reflected on the fact that the vast majority of the things I complain about are nothing, especially in light of what she faces. We are told in the Scriptures that angels observe what believers do (1 Cor 11:10; 1 Pet 1:12; Heb 1:14). I don't know what that looks like, but after meeting somebody like Irene, I can imagine a scenario. When an angel hears me complain about so many insignificant things in my life, he must turn to a fellow angel and say, "I sure wish he would shut up."

I must admit, however, that I ended on a high note. My strongest emotion was a good one. I understood that meeting Irene was a gift from God. Everything led me to believe that she had believed the message of eternal life. She will be in the kingdom of God. My guess is that this is the main reason why she had such a great attitude.

The parables we studied that day taught about Christ's coming kingdom. Surely, Irene makes all of us more eager to say, "Lord, please come quickly." Isaiah the prophet looked forward to that day. On that day, the lame will "leap like a deer." The blind will see. The deaf will hear. The tongues of those who could not speak will sing (Isa 35:5-6). Irene will walk straight, and the Lord will certainly give her a very nice "place to live" (John 14:2).

I know that when we believers get to the kingdom, we will look up our close friends and family members who are there. I only met Irene for a few minutes. But I am certain that on that occasion, I am going to visit where she lives. What a glorious demonstration she will be of what the Lord has done for all of us who have believed in Him for eternal life. ■



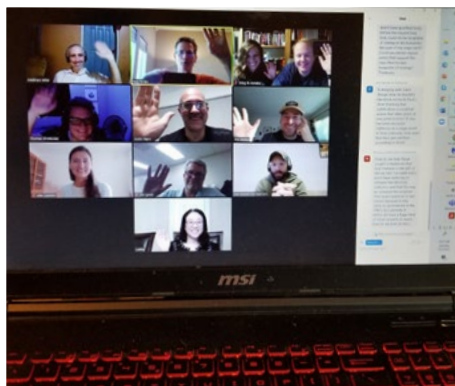
Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Elisabeth*, comes out soon. He and his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



Bob, Ken, and Philippe Sterling showing off their life accomplishments and really lighting up the room with those smiles. Way to go, guys!



Bob's Sunday School class on James. A lot of cool cats!



Bob's online class covering the doctrine of salvation

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



A nice picture of good ol' David Renfro recording a pod... Holy mackerel, there's Bob's head!




Kathryn Wright with a most graceful pose and grace-filled teaching



Bob and Bethany after completing a quarter marathon



Ken spoke at First Baptist Church of Honey Grove



WHY CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?



By Kathryn Wright

INTRODUCTION

The NT constantly warns disciples that the world will hate them (Matt 5:11-12; John 15:18-19). Any believer who seeks to follow the Lord in discipleship, obeying His Word, can expect opposition. We see this principle not only in the teachings of the NT, but also in the OT. An example of this is found in the Book of Ezra.

HERE COME THE SAMARITANS

In Ezra, the Israelites are back in the land after the Babylonian captivity. Under the careful leadership of Zerubbabel, they have begun to rebuild the temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. The Israelites are a small group but determined in their mission to rebuild the temple and faithfully follow the Lord and His Word.

It is in this setting that opposition descends upon the repatriated Jews. In chapter 4 a group of Samaritans comes, seeking to help the Israelites rebuild (4:2). The history of the Samaritans is significant. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Assyrian king Esarhaddon had brought in pagans to intermarry with the Jews who remained in the land after the captivity (2 Kgs 17:23-33). At first glance, the Samaritans appear genuine, and seemingly innocent in their request to help rebuild the temple. They not only want to work, but also claim to seek God and want to offer sacrifices to Him. They have a lot to commend themselves to the Jews. One could argue that what the two groups have in common is greater than their differences.

The Israelites need able-bodied workers, as their numbers are low, and the project is extensive. In addition, working with the Samaritans would foster goodwill between the two groups. Unity is in the best interest of both parties. In short, the offer is a tempting one.

However, Zerubbabel refuses to allow the Samaritans to join. While potentially helpful in the short term, the risk of syncretism—the mixing of pagan worship with true worship—is too great. While seemingly harsh, the rejection of the Samaritans by the leadership is an example of righteous exclusion by wise elders.

THE SWORDS COME OUT

Unfortunately, the backlash is great. The Samaritans discourage the Israelites and trouble them as they work to rebuild the temple. They hire counselors and seek to disrupt the Israelites' work "all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius" (Ezra 4:5). What follows is a myriad of attacks by these adversaries. First, during the reign of Ahasuerus, letters are sent to oppose the Israelites' efforts to rebuild. Another letter is sent during the reign of King Artaxerxes (4:6-10). Sadly, this final letter causes the Persians to force the Israelites to stop rebuilding. Their ministry is seemingly destroyed, all because of the Samaritans' opposition.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

In chapters 9–10 we see the theme of exclusion once again. The timeline has jumped roughly 60 years. A second wave of Jewish exiles from Babylon has now come to the land, this time under the lead-

ership of Ezra. However, upon arriving in the land, Ezra is faced with a serious problem. The Israelites have been marrying Gentiles—a devastating turn of events, as this was the catalyst for the Babylonian captivity. God had told the nation to stay separated from pagans, but His people had ignored His command, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and a 70-year captivity under pagan rule. What would cause the Jews to fall into this sin once again?

The Gentiles offered two things: peace and prosperity (Ezra 9:12). Like the initial interactions with the Samaritans, these marriages seemed to be a good idea. Through intermarriage, the Gentiles were seeking the good of their people and of the Jews as well. Since marriage was often coupled with peace treaties, intermarriage could guarantee that wars would cease. Undoubtedly, it would have been argued that their children would reap the benefits of these unions. Additionally, trade deals would be made, and prosperity would increase for everyone. From a worldly perspective, intermarrying with the Gentiles was wise.

However, what the world calls wise, is foolishness to the Lord (1 Cor 3:19). These temporal blessings pale in comparison to the promises of the Lord. He could offer the Israelites true prosperity in which they would “be strong and eat the good of the land.” Moreover, God was offering the Jews a peace in which their children could inherit the land forever (Ezra 9:12). Through Ezra’s leadership, the nation ultimately repented of its sin, and the men divorced their pagan wives (Ezra 10). Undoubtedly, this was a difficult and costly decision for the Israelites.

In this example, it is clear that the Word of God would have been compromised in order to maintain peace with the pagan Gentiles. As Israel’s previous history showed, not only would the land be invaded as the result of God’s discipline, but the Jews’ faith would be adversely impacted. To be friends with the world is to be enemies of God. This is a transcendent truth that applies to every generation of believers (Jas 4:4). Therefore, by these unions, the Israelites were incurring the wrath of the Lord as had the generation before them.

IT IS CLEAR THAT TRUTH AND SOUND DOCTRINE ARE NOT TO BE COMPROMISED FOR THE SAKE OF UNITY.



LESSONS LEARNED

One might look at these events and think Zerubbabel and Ezra were being mean and unreasonable. Why couldn’t they put their doctrinal concerns aside? Couldn’t Zerubbabel see that the Samaritans wanted to help and that they were seeking God? Shouldn’t Ezra have given priority to the families of the men who had intermarried? Why couldn’t these leaders follow the immortal words of Rodney King, “Can’t we all just get along?” Some go so far as to rebuke Zerubbabel and Ezra, saying they were wrong to be so exclusive. We hear similar retorts in the church today regarding doctrinal issues. We live in a time where “unity” is the rallying cry for many. Since the Bible teaches that we should be unified (Eph 4:1-6), some conclude that it is sinful to draw doctrinal lines in the sand.

However, there is an important distinction to be made. Yes, believers are called to be unified. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord exalts the peacemakers, calling them “sons of God” (Matt 5:9). However, it is clear that truth and sound doctrine

are not to be compromised for the sake of unity. A common excuse for allowing false teaching to continue is the desire for unity, especially when family is involved. Thus, holy separation is often sacrificed on the altar of so-called “peace.”

In 2 John we see church-age teachings on this topic. The Apostle John is writing to believers about false teachers in the church who were rejecting the doctrine that Jesus came in the flesh (2 John 7). He makes a startling statement in 2 John 10-11:

¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

In the first century, many teachers traveled, and often stayed in private homes during their journeys. In this passage to “receive” someone refers to those who were opening their homes to these teachers. To host such a teacher meant you not only supported him monetarily, but that you also supported his message. John is very clear that when it comes to doctrine, believers are to have no fellowship with a false teacher. We shouldn’t even greet one. To do so means to “share in his evil deeds.” Like the Israelites, we can become culpable by our association with false doctrine.

As with the examples in Ezra, many see these verses as being harsh. But let’s consider the alternative. In Ezra’s case, it could have meant another captivity. The exiles would have been taken from the land once again. Families would have been separated; many would have been killed. Whatever they had managed to rebuild would once again have been destroyed. In John’s case, if false teachers were not dealt with, it could have led to the ruin of that

church and the loss of rewards in the coming kingdom (v 8).

Regarding this passage, Zane Hodges writes:

If false doctrine is allowed to intrude a church, it has the potential to stop that church’s progress or even to destroy the church. John’s concern, expressed in terms of losing a full reward, shows that this, not the loss of salvation, was the consequence of failure to maintain the truth. [Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 260.]

As Hodges points out, this is not an issue of salvation. Eternal life is a free gift, given to those who simply believe in Jesus alone for it (John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9). However, maintaining the truth is a costly endeavor for the believer. For those who do, the Lord will approve of their work, and they will be rewarded for their efforts (2 Tim 2:15). But it will cost them friendships and sometimes even relationships with their families (Matt 10:35-39). Following Christ often means sacrificing peace and prosperity in this world. Sadly, in seeking to hold to sound doctrine, part of the suffering that believers experience may even be found within the walls of the church. John is warning that even among believers, friendship with the world is a common temptation. “In a tolerant age, believers must learn a true measure of holy intolerance!” (Hodges, *Epistles*, 267). ■



Kathryn Wright and her husband, Dewey, live in Columbia, SC. She is the GES missions coordinator, women's conference speaker, writer, and Zoom teacher.

BIBLICAL

HA-
HA!

MOMENTS

Part 1

by Marcia Hornok



At a Bible study early in our ministry, my husband, Ken, asked our group what Bible person we would most like to be. I said, “Eve, when Adam woke up.” We like to think about Scripture’s real-life events, where people expressed the emotions we know—from despair to ecstasy, from weeping¹ to belly-laughing. Of all God’s creatures, only those who bear His image engage in humor. God’s image includes laughter.

Early in Genesis, Abraham bowed and laughed in God’s presence (17:17). Sarah also laughed at the thought that her barren, 90-year-old body would have a baby (18:12-15). But God had the last laugh, telling them to name their son *Isaac*, meaning “laughter” (17:19). Afterward, Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me” (21:6).

MOCKING HUMOR

Psalm 2:4 says God laughs (derisively) at the way mere mortals exalt themselves against Him. Psalm 37:12-13 and 59:7-8 reiterate God laughing at the self-importance of the wicked. Similarly, Elijah ridiculed the prophets of Baal to showcase their folly. He implied that their god could not hear them. “Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself, or he is on a journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened!” (1 Kgs 18:27 NLT.)

For 40 days, morning and evening, Goliath mocked the armies of Israel. King Saul and his soldiers ignored their secret weapon, “the living God.” But young David took up his sling to go against the nine-foot-tall giant, clad in a bronze helmet, wearing a coat of mail on his chest and legs, carrying a javelin and spear, and preceded by a shield-bearer.

When David’s stone struck the giant’s forehead, he should have fallen backward. Oh no, David had told Goliath, “The Lord does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord’s.” God made him fall facedown (1 Sam 17:49).

Psalm 115:4-8 and 135:15-18 poke fun at idols that cannot speak, see, hear, etc., saying those who

make them become like them. Jeremiah goes further, chiding the people for carefully crafting a graven image that had to be carried about and fastened down so it would not totter. He compared it to a scarecrow in a cucumber patch—it could do neither harm nor good (Jer 10:1-5 NASB).²

Isaiah mocked idolaters by saying, “The person who made the idol never stops to reflect, ‘Why, it’s just a block of wood! I burned half of it for heat and used it to bake my bread and roast my meat. How can the rest of it be a god? Should I bow down to worship a piece of wood?’” (Isa 44:19 NLT).

SARCASM

Did you catch the sarcasm in Isa 44:19?

Gideon might have thought the Angel of the Lord was being sarcastic when he addressed Gideon as a “mighty man of valor” (Judg 6:12). There he was threshing wheat in a wine press. Say what? How could the wind blow away the chaff? Turns out Gideon was hiding in fear from the Midianites. Nevertheless, the Angel’s words did become true.

In John 9, Jesus healed a blind man—something the Hebrew Scriptures said Messiah would do—but it happened on the Sabbath. Messiah would not violate Sabbath, would He? The Jewish religious leaders questioned the healed man and his parents. Repeatedly. I imagine his sarcasm when he asked them if they wanted to become Jesus’ disciples too (John 9:27). Then he, who had never learned to read, schooled the religious scholars in theology—asserting that only God can heal blindness. The result was they expelled him from the temple, even though that had been the first day of his life he was qualified to be there.

Sarcasm appears again in Galatians, where Paul poses the question of how those freed by the promise of God could want to be under legalism again. “Who has bewitched you?” (3:1). The double entendre in 5:12 is unmistakable: “I could wish that those who trouble you [about circumcision] would even cut themselves off” (implying castration)! This was

a sarcastic but dramatic way of saying they should stop bothering the Galatians. The only law God imposes is the Law of Love, which the Galatians lacked: if they kept biting and devouring one another, they would become spiritual cannibals (5:15).³

LOL

My favorite Biblical humor involves the Laugh-Out-Loud events. A donkey says to Balaam, “Why are you beating me? Have I ever mistreated you like that?” (Num 22:28-30). The beast could see the Angel of the Lord, but the prophet of God could not. Although Balak had hired Balaam to curse Israel, he kept uttering blessings until Balak told him, “Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!” (Num 23:25).

The Philistines of Ashdod thought they were clever for capturing what they supposed was Israel’s god. They placed the Ark of the Lord in the house with their idol Dagon, perhaps as a gift for Dagon. The next morning they found their god fallen on its face before the Ark of the Lord. They set the idol back up, and Dagon again bowed down to the Ark, only this time with its head and hands broken off (1 Sam 5:1-5). Divine Show-and-Tell.

I cannot resist a modern-day parallel. On March 18, 2020, a small earthquake hit the Salt Lake City area. A statue of the Latter-Day-Saint angel, Moroni, sits atop the main temple in downtown SLC. The statue held a trumpet to its mouth, symbolizing the spread of the Mormon “gospel.” The earthquake made Moroni’s trumpet fall right out of his hands!

Back to the Ashdodites. They recognized that the God of Israel’s “hand was heavy on them,” so they sent the Ark to their neighbors—Gath and Ekron. God’s judgment followed the traveling Ark in the form of tumors (hemorrhoids?) and rodents (1 Sam 6). Thanks for nothing!

BATTLEFIELD HUMOR

When King Saul and 3,000 of his best warriors were pursuing David and his band of misfits (1 Sam 24), Saul entered a cave to relieve himself. David was hiding in the back of that very cave. While Saul was thus engaged, David stealthily cut off a corner

of Saul’s robe. When Saul “got up from the cave and went on his way,” David came out of the cave after him and called out, “My lord the king,” and held up the missing piece of Saul’s robe. He was not showing the joke he had played; he was proving his own innocence by sparing Saul’s life. It did appease Saul for a time.

And consider God’s preposterous military tactics. He used suspense and sound at Jericho (Josh 6:5). Light and sound against Midian (Jud 7:20-22). Battle sounds making the enemy run for their lives in 2 Kgs 7:6-7, with the abandoned camp and spoils discovered by four lepers. A wall that fell on 27,000 escaped Arameans (1 Kgs 20:29-30). The Angel of the Lord striking 185,000 Assyrians during the night. Second Kings 19:35 actually says, “When men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead” (NASB).

Finally, God told Jehoshaphat not to fight the three nations coming against him. Instead they sang and praised God. The enemies thought they were being attacked by Judah and fought back. When Judah came upon them, “they were all corpses lying on the ground” (2 Chron 20:24). Hmmm...can praise songs sound like combat?

I think Elisha gives me more chuckles than any other Bible person, but I’ll save him for Part 2.

We Free Gracers have a reputation for scholarly Bible study, but we should not miss its lighter moments. We can enjoy God’s generous sense of humor. After all, He created the manatee, platypus, and hammerhead shark! 🐡



Marcia is Ken’s grateful wife, serving with him in Utah where he pastored for 39 years and they raised six children. Now they enjoy 13 grandkids. Her latest work is a guilt-free Bible study of Proverbs 31.

- 1 See this author’s article, “The View from Ziklag,” *Grace in Focus* magazine, Sept/Oct 2019.
- 2 Scarecrows are useless, since birds do not peck cucumbers due to the rind.
- 3 From *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2, Robert N. Wilkin, ed. (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society), 2010, p. 848.

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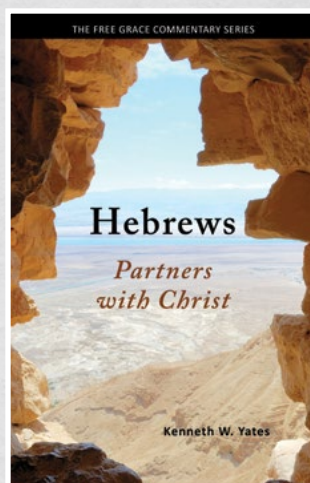


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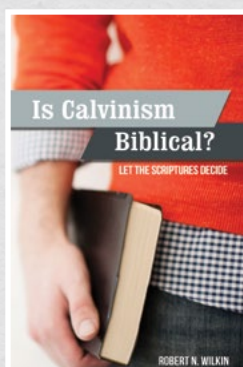


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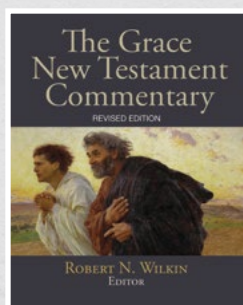


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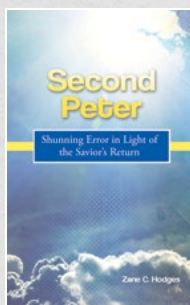


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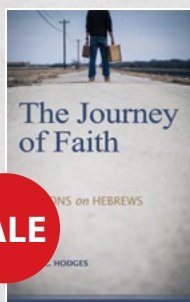


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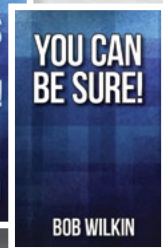
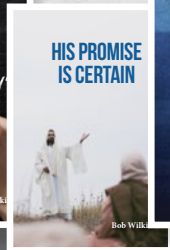
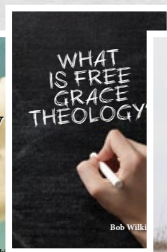
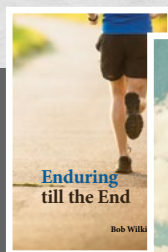


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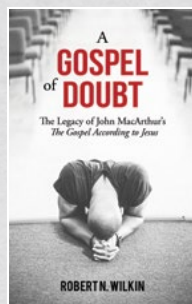


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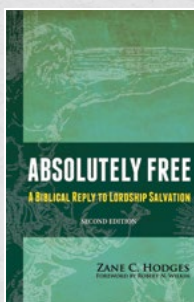


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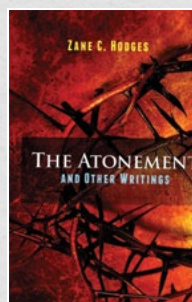


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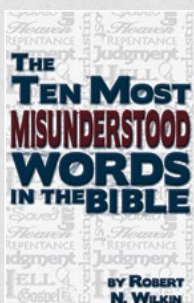


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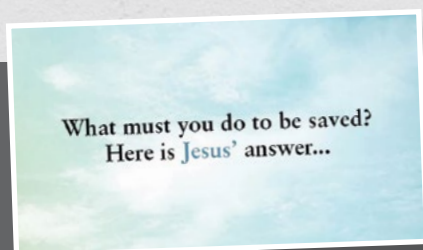
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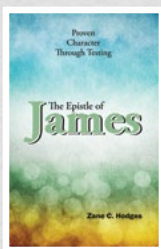
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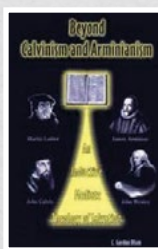
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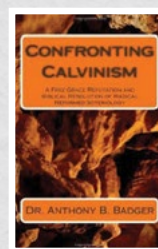
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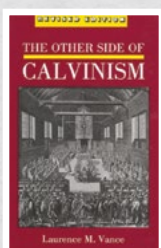
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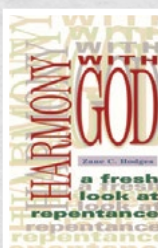
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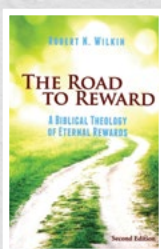
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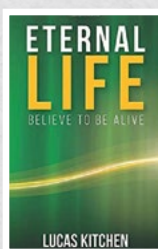
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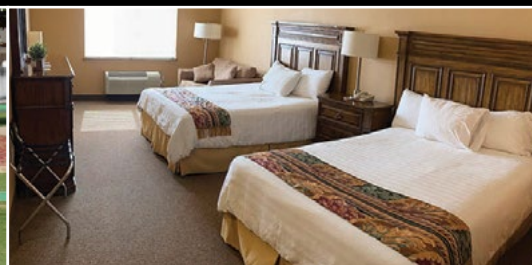
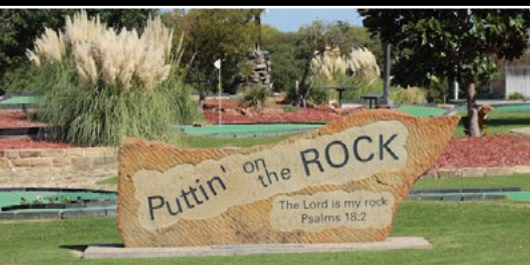
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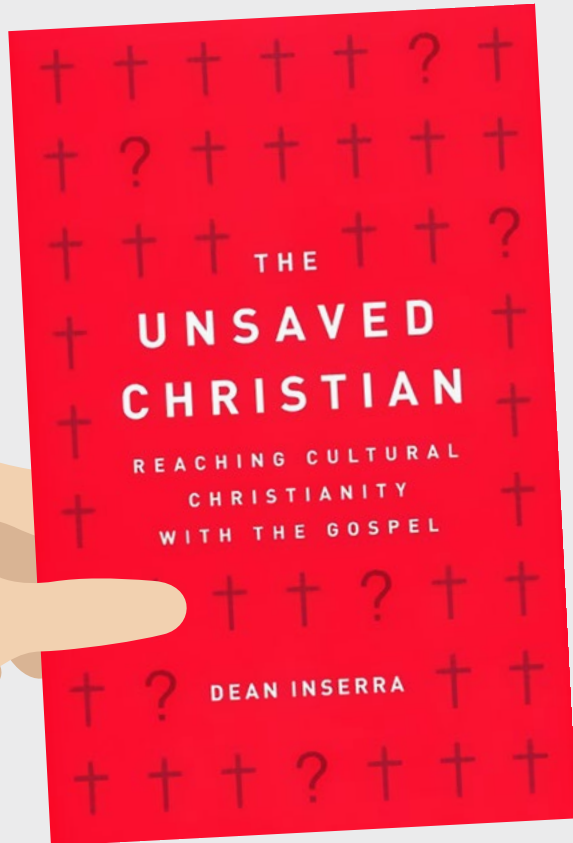
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BOOK REVIEW

By Bob Wilkin



The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel.

By Dean Inserra.

Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019.

203 pp. Paper, \$14.99.

I have often said and written that most Evangelicals need evangelizing. So, I agree *in principle* with Inserra. However, there is a major difference in how he and I identify Evangelicals who are unregenerate.

Inserra identifies unsaved Christians *by their failure to live holy lives*. The born-again person is self-sacrificing, obedient, and is continually surrendering and submitting to Christ

(pp. 38-39). He differentiates between *those who admire Jesus* and *those who are following Him* (pp. 38-40). The cultural Christian, the unregenerate church goer, admires Jesus but does not follow Him faithfully. The born-again Christian follows Christ. Inserra does not discuss how well one must follow Christ to be saved. That opens the door for an inability to be sure of one's eternal destiny. If one bases his

assurance on his lifestyle, then he is looking to himself and not to Christ alone for his salvation.

The Bible, by contrast, identifies the unsaved Christian as a person who identifies himself a Christian both verbally and by going to church and yet who has never believed in Jesus for everlasting life that cannot be lost (cf. Matt 7:21-23; John 5:39-40; 6:28-29; Gal 1:8-9 [compare 5:4 re. the false teachers]). *The issue is a lack of faith in Christ for the salvation He promises*, not a lack of commitment, obedience, and perseverance.

Inserra goes so far as to say, “Do you want to go to heaven when you die?” is the wrong question to ask (p. 109). Though he never *explicitly* tells us what the right question is, he is clear via his repeated calls for the need to follow Christ for a lifetime that the correct question is: *Have you decided to follow Christ as His disciple for your lifetime?* (pp. 110, 111, 112, 169, 170). He says, for example, “Faith in Christ is costly. Jesus wasn’t looking for crowds but rather a commitment” (p. 111). In the closing part of his chapter on “Making Decisions vs. Making Disciples” (pp. 105-117), Inserra writes, “Make a decision to obey or follow God with an awareness that choosing to do so might be costly” (p. 112). On the previous page he had said that “Faith in Christ is costly.” Why he now says that it *might be costly* is confusing. But the point is clear. In order to be a saved Christian, one must follow Christ for life.

When discussing false assurance (pp. 63-71), he favorably cites John Stott as saying that “nothing less than this [total commitment] will do” (p. 63). What is “total commitment”? Obviously, one’s commitment cannot be measured, partial or total. Inserra says that one’s commitment is seen in the fruit that a person

produces (pp. 67-68). There is truth in that. But since commitment is not the condition of everlasting life or of assurance of everlasting life, Inserra is promoting a basis of assurance that can never produce assurance. In fact, his concluding chapter is entitled: “A Heart Check for Us All: How Do I know I’m Not a Cultural Christian?” (p. 187). He then proceeds to give a checklist that presumably can give us assurance by examining our lives to see if we have “A Life of Repentance” (pp. 188-89), if we are “Eternally Minded” (p. 189), if we believe “Sound Doctrine” (pp. 189-90), if we practice the “Spiritual Disciplines” (p. 190), if we practice “Generosity” (p. 190), if we have a “Heart for the Lost” (pp. 190-91), and if we have “Love for God and His Church” (p. 191).

That is the typical approach that Lordship Salvation people have to possess assurance. No one could ever be certain of his eternal destiny based on assurance by lifestyle analysis since none of us is perfect.

The Biblical way in which a false professor is identified is by what he believes, not by what he does (e.g., Matt 7:21-23; Acts 15:1). We are called believers, not behavers.

I do not recommend this book by Inserra for anyone wanting to know the truth. However, I do recommend it for pastors, elders, deacons, and Bible teachers who wish to be able to identify the confusion and error that is so prevalent in our pulpits, Bible colleges, and seminaries today. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 46 years, Sharon. He is an avid race walker and marathon walker.

Why Is Christ's Impeccability Essential?

BY ANNEKA MULLER

The fact that Jesus never sinned is indisputable. But was it even possible for Him to sin? In His human nature, He was subject to temptation, and some say temptation implies the ability to actually sin (known as peccability). In this article, we will explore the view that Christ was, indeed, impeccable—that is, unable to sin—and why His impeccability matters when it comes to our salvation. Christ's impeccability is essential for regeneration since only an unblemished sacrifice would remove the sin barrier (John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21). His impeccability was essential for Him to remain loyal to His divine nature as well. Christ had to be impeccable to fulfill the OT prophecies regarding the Messiah. His impeccability assures the salvation of all who believe in Him for it. Additionally, it serves as a beacon of encouragement and joy for us as saved humans because we, too, will one day be impeccable.

IMPECCABILITY DEFINED

Merriam-Webster defines impeccable as “being free from fault or blameless: flawless” and “not capable of sinning or liable to sin.”¹ Therefore, when we refer to Christ's impeccability, we are referring to His inability to sin. Not only did He choose not to sin, but due to His divine nature He was unable to do so. In a blog post, Bob Wilkin presents two reasons for Christ's impeccability: the inability of God (and by extension, Christ) to sin, and also perfect humanity's inability to sin.² We will discuss this further below.

im·pec·ca·bi·li·ty (im-pe-kə-bi-lə-tē) n.

1. being free from fault or blameless: flawless;
2. not capable of sinning or liable to sin.

CHRIST IS THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

In the OT, frequent sacrifices of unblemished animals were required to temporarily cover sins. Christ came as the impeccable sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world (Heb 9:22-28). The Bible tells us in Hebrews 10, Christ only had to offer one sacrifice for sin to forever perfect and sanctify us. We also see the picture of Christ as the perfect sacrifice in the unblemished Passover lamb in Exodus 12. John the Baptist identifies Christ as the Lamb in John 1:29 when he proclaims, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

CHRIST’S IMPECCABILITY IS LOYAL TO HIS DIVINE NATURE

When Christ came as the incarnation of God, He was fully God, but also fully man. The Bible tells us in James 1:13 God cannot sin: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” So, if Jesus is God, He also cannot sin.

Jesus was born of a virgin, so He was born without a sin nature inherited from Adam. The Bible tells us in 1 John 3:9, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” Therefore, if anyone born of God cannot sin because it is against God’s divine nature, Jesus could not sin as that would be a violation of His deity. If at any point Jesus is without sin, including eternity past or eternity to come, He was impeccable during His incarnation. This is supported in Heb 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

CHRIST’S IMPECCABILITY FULFILLED PROPHECY

The OT prophecies of Christ’s impeccability. In Daniel, it says the Messiah will put an end to sin (Dan 9:24). In order for this to be true, the Messiah would have to be sinless in His first coming, as well as in His eventual second coming that will fulfill this prophecy. The unblemished Passover lamb of Exodus 12 was a picture of Jesus, as well as the unblem-

ished sacrifices through the book of Leviticus. Isaiah 53 discusses the Savior who “had done no violence” and who will “justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” The impeccability of Christ fulfills these prophecies.

CHRIST’S IMPECCABILITY GIVES ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

If Christ were capable of sinning, our salvation would be precarious. Our remission of sins is based on the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb (John 1:29, 2 Cor 5:21). If at some point Christ were to sin, His sacrifice would be insufficient. If Christ had sinned during His temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4), for example, the belief of Abram in Gen 15:6, the belief of Adam and Eve in Gen 3:15, as well as

**It is impossible for God
to break His promises;
therefore, Christ’s promise
of eternal life to those who
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Understanding impeccability
reinforces assurance of
salvation for all believers.**

the belief of all other OT believers would have been in faulty sacrifice, and salvation would be unavailable to any NT believer. It is impossible for God to break His promises; therefore, Christ’s promise of eternal life to those who believe in Him is assured. Understanding impeccability reinforces assurance of salvation for all believers.

CHRIST'S IMPECCABILITY WILL USHER IN OUR OWN IMPECCABILITY

Some would argue that Jesus could not fulfill Heb 4:15 (“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”) unless He was peccable, or capable of sinning. This is a false assumption as Christ was tempted in Matthew 4, yet He resisted. Whether or not He was capable of sinning has no effect on His ability to be tempted and to sympathize with us in our temptations. In fact, Jesus faced greater temptation than we ever have. Ken Yates discusses this in his Hebrews commentary:

The difference between us and our High Priest is that He went through these things **without sin** (emphasis his). Because He never sinned, He felt the full power of sin’s temptation. Only the One who has never sinned has felt the full force of temptation. When a person sins, he gives in to the temptation before it was fully felt. Since He is the only One to have never sinned, He is now able to understand the weaknesses we have when we are tempted to fall away.³

The Bible tells us in 1 John 3:2 that we will be like God because we will see Him as He is. This points to the fact we will eventually be impeccable. In an article in *Grace in Focus*, Bob Wilkin states:

**Christ’s impeccability
will usher in our own
impeccability, and what a
great promise that is.**

The impeccability of Christ should motivate us to abide in Him so that one day we will hear Him say, ‘Well done, good servant’ (Luke 19:17), and so that we will not be ashamed before Him.⁴

Christ’s impeccability will usher in our own impeccability, and what a great promise that is.

CONCLUSION

Christ’s impeccability is essential to a proper interpretation of Scripture. Christ provides a perfect sacrifice for our sins. He was loyal to His divine nature in His impeccability. It was a fulfillment of the prophecy that the Lamb of God would be unblemished. Christ’s impeccability reinforces assurance of salvation. Finally, it gives us cause for rejoicing, as we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). ■



Anneka Muller is a pediatric nurse practitioner and homeschool mom of four. She and her husband, Greg, enjoy studying theology together.

- 1 “Impeccable Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Accessed October 8, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impeccable>.
- 2 Wilkin, Bob. “Was Jesus Able to Sin?” *Grace Evangelical Society*. Last modified January 16, 2018. Accessed October 8, 2022. <https://faithalone.org/blog/was-jesus-able-to-sin?>
- 3 Yates, Kenneth Wayne. “Hold Fast or Miss Out on Ruling with Christ.” In *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 71.
- 4 Wilkin, Bob. “The Impeccability of the Lord Jesus Christ Makes the Life to Come More Thrilling.” *Grace Evangelical Society*. Last modified September 1, 2010. Accessed October 8, 2022. <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/the-impeccability-of-the-lord-jesus-christ-makes-the-life-to-come-more-thrilling/>.



And then they lit a fire and some lady yelled, "Let's get this party started!"



Pizza in Costa Rica?!



I refuse to make a "Weekend at Bernie's" joke. Instead...



Board member, Bernie, his wife, Julie, and Ken smile reluctantly after trying to cross the rope bridge, stepping through a rotten board, barely hanging on, and dangling above 30 blood-thirsty alligators for half an hour before a sweaty man with a whip came along and rescued them.

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Bob speaks about God's justice at Upland Bible Church in Las Vegas

Here's that congregation at UBC



Women everywhere!



THAT IS ONE UGLY PICTURE

(JEREMIAH 19)

By Ken Gates

INTRODUCTION

There is a board game called *Telestrations* that my family and I love to play. A major part of the game is that the players draw a picture of a word, and the other players must guess what you drew. There is absolutely no doubt that I am the worst *Telestrations* player in the history of the world. Very simply, I cannot draw. In the game, my pictures are universally mocked, with people saying they don't look anything like what they are supposed to represent. On many occasions, the other players, after laughing, comment, "That is one ugly picture."

In the OT, the Lord sometimes had His prophets draw a picture for the people to whom they were sent. They would "draw" the picture through their actions, kind of like a game of charades. One such example is found in Jeremiah 19. Unlike the other players who view my pictures, the people knew exactly what Jeremiah was saying with his actions. However, even though it was for different reasons, in one way, Jeremiah's picture was like mine in the game of *Telestrations*. The people who saw it commented that it was a very ugly picture.

PROPS ARE ALLOWED

In the game of charades that Jeremiah takes part in, as he draws a picture, he is told by the Lord that he can use a prop. He is to bring a ceramic water jar. He invites the leaders of his people to play the game. Evidently, there is water in the jar.

Jeremiah draws a picture for these leaders. In front of them, it seems he pours the water

from the jar on the ground. The NKJV says that Jeremiah tells them what it means. God is going to "make void" all the plans that these leaders have for Judah and Jerusalem (19:7). The verb for "make void" is a Hebrew word which means *to pour out*. It is a word that sounds like the noise that water makes when it is poured out of a bottle. In English, it is like our made-up expression, "glug glug."

The leaders thought Jerusalem was safe because the temple of God was in her midst. That was the centerpiece of their plans. But Jeremiah tells the people that their enemies were going to destroy them. The act of the water pouring out on the ground was a picture of that coming destruction. Perhaps we could say that God was going to pour out His anger on them.

That is not a pretty picture. But the more we study what Jeremiah does and says, we see that it gets much worse.

HOW BAD CAN IT BE?

We can only appreciate how bad Jeremiah's picture was for the people of Judah when we look at the whole game he plays on this occasion. First, he chose a particular place to act out this charade. It was outside of the Potsherd Gate, to the southwest of Jerusalem. There is disagreement among scholars about some of the details, but we can be fairly certain of what is generally happening. The Potsherd Gate was the place where potters threw their garbage, such as broken pieces of pottery. It is likely that this gate is what would later be called the Dung Gate (Neh 12:31). Whatever that gate was used for, it suggests more than pottery was discarded there.

Jeremiah also tells us that this gate led out to the Valley of Hinnom. This is the place where some Jews had previously sacrificed their own children to the idols they worshiped (19:5). Many innocent lives were lost there because of the sin of the people of Judah. We are told that one of the kings of Judah “defiled” this valley (2 Kgs 23:10). Many believe that means he turned it into the town garbage dump because of the horrible acts that took place there. We can be fairly certain, whatever the exact historical circumstances were, this was not a pleasant place.

But Jeremiah says it will get worse. The valley will soon be called the Valley of Slaughter (19:6). So many of the Jews were going to die there at the hands of the Babylonians, that there wouldn’t be room to bury the bodies. They had killed their children there, so they would die there as well. It was an extremely disgraceful thing in the ancient world not to be buried after one died. Jeremiah says that many of them will lie in that valley and be eaten by animals. Others will see what happened there and be amazed at how horrible those events were.

This Valley of Hinnom was such a terrible place that the name is used in the NT for a place of immense suffering. The word used in the Greek to describe it is *Gehenna*. Many English translations simply call it “hell” (Mark 9:43).

Before all this happens to the people in Judah, they will suffer other indignities. The enemy will surround their city and cut off their food supply. Inside the walls, they will resort to cannibalism to try to survive. They will even eat their own children (19:9).

As the leaders of Judah saw Jeremiah act this out and explain his actions, we can only imagine what they thought. The picture was so horrible, I am sure that their minds could not comprehend what they were seeing and hearing. The depressing location of this game made it all the darker.

But Jeremiah still was not finished with his picture of what was going to happen. He broke the water jar, after he had poured out the water. The ceramic pieces were left with the other garbage around them. He told the other players that the jar represented their beloved city and the people in it. God was going to break them. He was going to make their city like the defiled valley before them. The beautiful houses in Jerusalem will be filled with the dead as well. Just as they had served idols in the valley, so they had committed their sins on the rooftops of these homes. Their capital, where the temple of God stood, would be as cursed as the valley they were standing in would be.

For good measure, Jeremiah puts the final touches on his picture. He says that all the towns around Jerusalem will suffer the same fate (19:15). Death and destruction will rule the day. They will be everywhere.

NOTHING TO LAUGH AT

Jeremiah drew a very ugly picture about the future of those in his country. Unlike those who see my pictures, the people knew exactly what he meant. He told them in plain words. When I play *Telestrations*, my pictures bring forth laughter. As ugly as my pictures are, that is the only price I have to pay. Jeremiah, however, did not have the same experience. His picture of Jerusalem and Judah was so terrible, the leaders beat and tortured him (20:1-6). They did not find him amusing at all.

Clearly his painting was so bad because he was trying to draw a picture of what the sin of the people had caused. To the southwest of their city, they looked out on a valley in which innocent children had been burned alive. In that place, they had turned their back on God and worshiped other gods. They brought such worship, with all its degradations, into Jerusalem, the city which carried with it the name of the

Yes, the cross reveals His grace. We see how He is able to give eternal life as a free gift by faith alone in Him for it because of His sacrifice. But when we look at Him on the cross, we also see how ugly a picture of sin would be.

holy God of Israel. How would such a God respond to such things?

Why did Jeremiah draw such an ugly picture of the future of his people? He was painting a picture about their sin.

A PICTURE OF SIN IS ALWAYS UGLY

GES firmly maintains that eternal life is given as a free gift by God when a person believes in Jesus Christ for that gift. It can never be lost. That is why it is called “eternal.” No sin of any kind can cause the child of God to forfeit that gift. The unbeliever does not have to give up any of his sins to obtain it. With such teaching, we are often accused of not seeing how bad sin is.

But that is not the case. We understand how ugly sin is. When the believer walks in the darkness, he is out of fellowship with God. Living a lifestyle dominated by the flesh and the sins that flow from it brings all kinds of spiritual destruction into a life. The NT says that it is best described by walking in darkness and death. It leads to the loss of eternal rewards. It leads to the lack of growth into being more like Christ. It would be impossible to paint a picture of just how ugly sin is.

I can’t even imagine how, if I was playing *Teletestrations*, and I was asked to draw “sin,” what I would draw. I know it would be a picture nobody would be able to interpret. But in this case, even the best artist in the world could not accurately depict it. Look at Christ. On the cross, He paid for the sins of the world. A person reading any of the four Gospel accounts is able to get a glimpse of what that involved. Yes, the cross reveals His grace. We see how He is able to give eternal life as a free gift by faith alone in Him for it because of His sacrifice.

But when we look at Him on the cross, we also see how ugly a picture of sin would be. ■



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VOICE FROM THE PAST

What If It Doesn't Work?

By Zane Hodges*

* This article originally appeared in what was then called *The Grace Evangelical Society News* in the November 1989 issue. (The four-page newsletter came out monthly back then.)

Quite a few years ago I was giving the gospel to a young Hispanic man. After a while he said, “It’s no use, Zane. Another preacher saved me, and it didn’t work.”

I admit this response caught me by surprise. Still, I knew what the young man meant. It didn’t take any theological sophistication to figure out that he had gone through what might be called a “false profession.”

In those days the Hispanic teenagers and young men of South Dallas never said, “So-and-so led me to Christ.” Instead they would say, “So-and-so saved me.” I often felt this kind of remark reflected a touch of Catholicism, as though the minister of the gospel was a sort of Protestant “priest” who had played some sort of official role in their conversion. But I tried not to read too much into such words. The remark might also be harmless.

After all, Paul himself declared that he became all things to all men that he might by all means “save some” (1 Cor 9:22)!

But the words “it didn’t work” really struck me.

Of course, my young friend *might* have been saying that he thought he had *lost* whatever he might have received when he got “saved.” He might have thought his salvation had been forfeited.

On the other hand, it was equally possible that he meant that his supposed conversion didn’t really occur since his life had continued to be sinful. Or,

perhaps he himself did not quite know which of these things he meant.

But one thing was sure. He certainly did not understand what the experience of being saved really was.

After all, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life *always* “works.” The Bible, and our Lord Himself, clearly says so. To go no further than John 3:16, we are assured that “WHOEVER believes in Him” has eternal life and thus cannot perish. There is no such thing as trusting Christ for the free gift of everlasting life and not getting it.

But some forms of theology claim that there is such a thing. According to this way of thinking, a person may actually be conscious of trusting Christ for salvation, but over time this faith may prove to have been in some way defective if the life does not manifest sufficient “fruits.” What the supposed convert has done, therefore, is to exercise a “false faith” rather than a “true saving faith.”

It is a major goal of the Grace Evangelical Society to remind people that this way of looking at things is both unbiblical and psychologically invalid. As long as the true Biblical offer of eternal life by faith alone in Christ alone has been made clear to people, there is no way one can believe it and not be saved. Indeed, psychologically speaking, I either believe that message or I don’t. If I do, I am saved. If I don’t, I stand condemned as one who “has not

believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

There is no such thing, Biblically speaking, as believing in the name of the Son of God (in the Johannine sense) and not having eternal life. John himself declares: “But these are written that you might *believe* and that *believing* you might have life in His name” (John 20:31). John and the NT as a whole know nothing about believing this truth “falsely” as over against believing it “truly.”

We are not talking here, of course, about believing something that has no application to ourselves. No one could possibly believe that John 5:24 is true, for example, without knowing that he himself is saved. For if I do believe that the person who hears God’s Word and believes the One who sent Jesus has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment, then I *also believe* that I myself have this life and am safe from judgment.

And if I do *not* believe that about myself, I have *not believed* John 5:24, since John 5:24 applies without exception to everyone who believes.

Which brings me back to my young Hispanic friend. Obviously his words to me signaled clearly that he did not understand that the believer has eternal life and cannot come into judgment. In fact he was telling me that he himself *would* come into judgment inasmuch as his sinful life proved that somehow his conversion was invalid.

In short, my friend had never understood the gospel. Hence he had not believed it and

was therefore unsaved. What he needed from me was a clear explanation of the simplicity and certainty of the salvation offer. Once he understood it, he could then believe it or disbelieve it. But if he believed it, it was going to “work.” He would be miraculously born again.


Yes, this young man did confront me with a case of “false profession.” But his profession was not false for the reason that *he* thought it was. His failure to change was not the real problem. The real problem was that he had not yet understood God’s gracious gift in His Son. And since he had not understood, he had not believed.

No wonder that the “god of this world” works long and hard to blind “the minds of them that believe not”! He does not dare let the truth dawn on them in its utter simplicity and he labors “lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ...should shine unto them” (2 Cor 4:3-4). How grateful, then, can we be as believers that “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

Let us make no mistake about it. Believing in God’s Son for eternal life always works! ■



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



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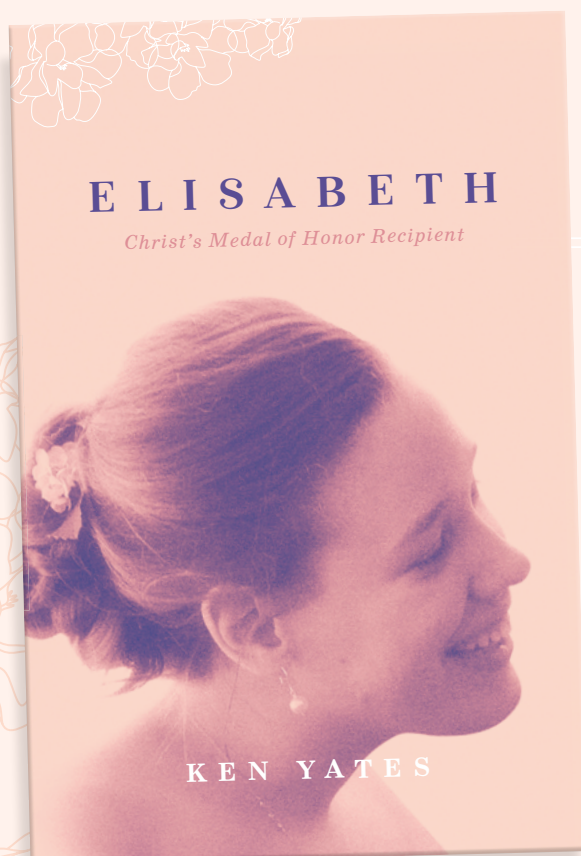
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