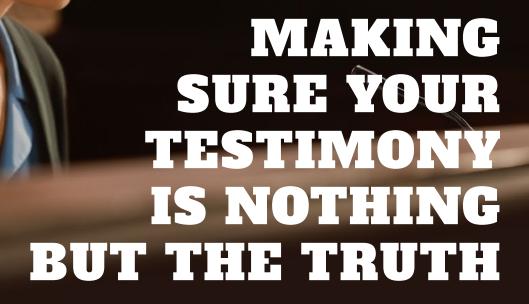


# GRACE (in) FOCUS



Changing Your Testimony
The Cap on the Gospel
Paul's Blueprint for Testimonies
A Miracle Baby

The Missing Resurrection
Weeping at the Bema
The Church at Laodicea
And much more!

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Address changes? Comments? Prayer requests? Testimonies? Send them to **ges@faithalone.org** or write to **Grace in Focus, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202**.

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# Letter from the Editor



n late January the GES YouTube channel went over 7,000 subscribers. We added nearly 1,000 subscribers last year.

Our magazine has over 7,000 subscribers to the physical magazine, and nearly 4,000 more subscribe to the electronic version. And thousands read our magazine articles online each month.

I'm unsure how many read our blogs and listen to our podcasts daily. Last I heard, the number was over 3,000. And that includes blogs translated into eight foreign languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Filipino, Russian, Italian, German, Polish, and Chinese).

My point is this: we are reaching many people with the dual messages of grace: the gift of everlasting life by faith in Christ apart from works and earned eternal rewards for those believers who faithfully serve Christ in this life.

Speaking of our books, booklets, and other grace materials, the response to our new FREE SHIPPING policy for all U.S. orders over \$10 has been fantas-

tic. Many of you have taken advantage. If this policy continues to be popular, we likely will make it permanent at the end of the year.

Thank you to those who support GES through your prayers, gifts, purchases, and social media involvement. We appreciate you and your fellowship in this ministry (Phil 4:17-19).

You may have noticed several new authors in our magazine. Students from my class on soteriology and Ken Yates' class on tough texts have begun writing (e.g., Doug Potgeter and Anneka Muller). Former missionary Nancy Rempel has started sharing moving stories from decades of ministering in Pakistan and India. Pastor Bruce Zimmerman shares excellent insights into Jesus' resurrection. Joe Conaghan, a member of my Sunday School class, writes about his passion for sharing assurance of eternal security when he evangelizes.

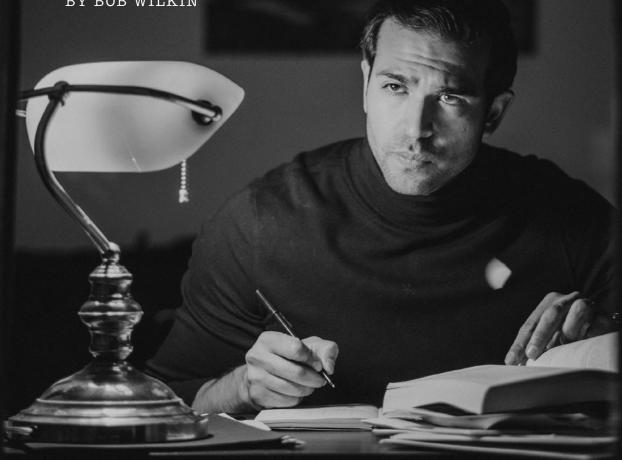
I hope you enjoy the new look and the new contributors.

Robert N. Wilkin

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO

# Change Your Testimony?

BY BOB WILKIN



Christian testimony is a person's story about how he became a Christian.

Testimony in a criminal case is a person's account of what he heard, saw, and experienced.

Some testimony in court is based on faulty memory, fuzzy vision, or poor hearing. A well-in-

tentioned person may unintentionally give false testimony. How would he know it was false? When other evidence presented in court proves that his testimony is wrong. At that point, he needs to change his testimony because he realizes that his original testimony was false.

The same is true with a Christian testimony. If other evidence comes out that proves that your original testimony is false, then it's time to revise your testimony.

Let's start with a really simple example. John grew up in a Mormon home. At thirteen, he felt a burning in his bosom that confirmed that he had become a Christian after turning from his sins, being baptized, and receiving the Spirit. At the time, he believed that salvation required belief in Christ, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit by laying on hands, turning from one's sins, and enduring a life of obedience to God's commands until death. So his testimony was that at thirteen, he became a Christian by faith plus works and started on the path that hopefully would lead to final salvation.

While in college, John was evangelized by a campus evangelist. His beliefs changed. He came to believe that he was saved once and for all, right then, simply by faith in Christ, apart from works. His first testimony had to go because it was a false testimony.

Now let's take a more challenging example. Larry's parents went to a liberal church. They did not believe in life after death or heaven or hell. Neither did their pastor. Or Larry. Then Larry went to college and was confronted by a campus evangelist. Over time, his thinking changed. He came to believe in God and life after death. He turned from his sins and began to follow Christ. He was told that he now had something called *initial salvation*. That meant he was saved for now. He would stay saved as long as he kept following Christ. If he persevered until death, then he would gain *final salvation*.

Larry told his testimony to family and friends. One of his friends told Larry that he was not yet saved. Jesus only offers one kind of salvation. It is permanent salvation. And you can't get that salvation by cleaning up your life and following Christ. You get it by believing in Him as He said in John 3:16. Once you believe that, you will be saved forever.

What? Is it possible I've been wrong? After studying God's Word with his friend, Larry became sure that he was saved forever simply by faith in Christ.

Was it time for Larry to change his testimony? Or could he say that he was saved when he gave his

life to Christ and promised to serve Him for the rest of his life, and then later, he gained assurance about salvation?

Well, Larry's initial testimony was a false testimony. No one is saved by turning from sins and starting to follow Christ. Larry could no longer repeat that false testimony.

I have heard hundreds of testimonies like Larry's. I've even heard pastors and seminary professors give such testimonies.

I call this the two-step testimony. Step one is the person turns from his sins and pledges to serve Jesus for life. Step two is when the person later comes to believe in justification by faith alone, apart from works. This two-step approach argues that regeneration occurred during one's false gospel phase and that later he came to believe the true gospel and gained assurance.

How can a false gospel save anyone (Gal 1:6-9)?

If your testimony is that you were initially saved when you believed you were working your way to heaven by good works, then it is time to change your testimony. No one can be born again by turning from his sins and promising to serve God. The new birth only comes when we believe in Jesus for the salvation He guarantees.

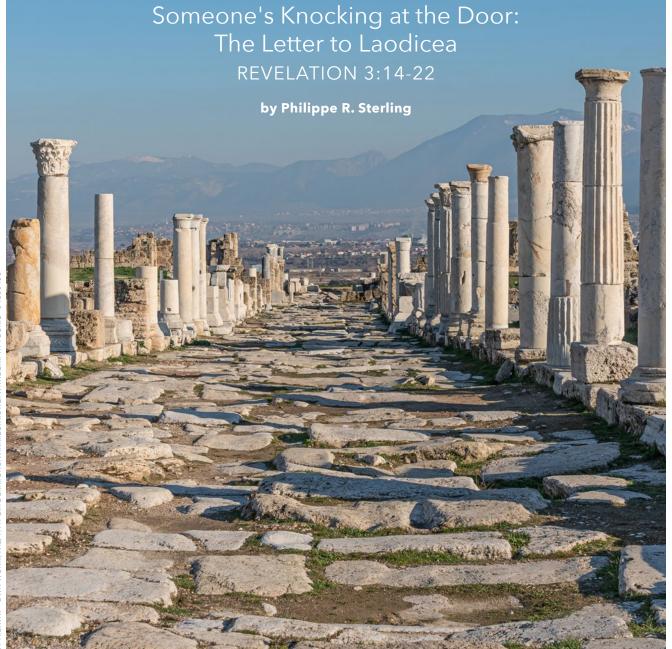
Does your testimony reflect the truth of John 3:16? If not, change it. If your testimony is not a "whoever believes in Him will not perish but has everlasting life" testimony, then it is wrong. Oh, you can use synonyms for faith, like being persuaded or convinced. You can use synonyms for everlasting life, like an eternal relationship with God or being part of God's forever family. But to be a true testimony, it must say that you were saved once and for all when you believed in Jesus for the secure salvation He promises.

Is it time that you changed your Christian testimony?



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.

# WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY?



ne of the games I loved to play as an adolescent was *Monopoly*. According to my sisters, I was ruthless in the acquisition of property and play money. In the context of the game, I was rich. Once the game was over, it didn't matter. What would happen if I went to the store and gave the clerk \$1,000 in play money for an iPhone? It wouldn't work.

A similar thing is true of our earthly lives. In a way, we're playing a game here. Some people acquire a lot of money. For the moment, they're the winners. They can buy many things that are worthless in the long run. It may be a Maserati. But step out of this world, and that car doesn't mean a thing. All that wealth is just play money when you look at it from God's eternal perspective.

For the winner of *Monopoly* to think, "I'm rich!" because he has a handful of play money would be foolish. It's just as foolish for a billionaire to think a portfolio of expensive real estate and blue-chip investments makes him rich in God's eyes. The church at Laodicea made that mistake.

The seventh church of Revelation was at Laodicea. This city was forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia. It lay along an important trade route stretching from Ephesus through the inland area of what is now Turkey. It was located in a valley along with two sister cities, Colossae and Hierapolis.

Antiochus II founded Laodicea and named it for his wife, Laodice. The Ro-

mans took control of the city in 129 BC. It became large and prosperous.

There were three major industries in Laodicea. The first was banking. It was an extremely wealthy city. After an earthquake in AD 17 devastated the area, the Roman Empire pitched in financially to help many of the cities. Laodicea refused this aid and chose to rebuild itself. A second major industry was eye care. There was an ointment produced in Laodicea that was famous for curing eye ailments. A third major industry was textiles. The city produced a special wool which was popular throughout the empire.

Laodicea was a popular place for wealthy people to retire. The wealth of the city led her to be proud and self-sufficient. Unfortunately, the material prosperity of the city helped produce a materialistic church.

Another thing we can note about this city is that for all its wealth, it had a frustrating water problem. There wasn't a fresh water source nearby. Water had to be brought in by an aqueduct from a spring six miles to the south. We're not sure whether this was a cold spring or a hot spring. But it didn't matter, because as the water traveled the six-mile aqueduct, it cooled or heated to a lukewarm temperature. Cold water refreshes. Hot water has many useful benefits. Lukewarm water needs to be cooled to be tasteful or heated to be useful.

Jesus called Himself the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning

(Origin or Source) of God's creation. The solemnity of the titles prepared the way for the searching and severe criticism that followed. *Amen* is a Hebrew word for "Yes!" What Jesus says stands. Jesus is trustworthy. What He promises, He will do. What He threatens, He will carry out. Jesus is the Origin and Source of all that there is. Everything and everyone answer to Him.

Jesus knows the deeds of His people. There were no words of commendation for the Laodiceans.

Jesus called the church lukewarm. Both cold and hot water were useful; lukewarm water was not. The believers were so wishy-washy that they were distasteful and useless to the Lord.

The believers considered themselves wealthy and in need of nothing. Jesus described them as "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." They had the finest eye medicines; how could He call them blind? They produced beautiful clothing; how could they be naked? All their material wealth was insignificant in light of their spiritual needs. In fact, their material wealth blinded them to their spiritual needs.

In language these commercially prosperous believers could understand, Jesus counseled them to buy gold from Him that they might become rich, acquire white garments that they might clothe themselves, and anoint their eyes with eye salve that they might see.

There will be gold in the age to come. We acquire it by our refined character in this age. We may wonder what need we would have of gold. Our dwelling will be made of gold. We may have gold threads in our clothing. We may have a crown made of gold. There will be gold in many facets of life. We will want that gold.

Jesus counseled the acquisition of white garments from Him. In Rev 3:5, He mentioned the white garments and now mentioned them again. Instead of "white," we could use the word "bright," bright shining garments. There will be many facets of these garments, not just one layer, many layers indicating a life of faithfulness. Unfaithful believers will be naked in the sense of lacking these garments. I do not want to be lacking the garments which indicate

a dedication to the Lord in this age. Every believer has the robe of Christ's righteousness as a free gift, but I also want garments which depict my love for Jesus in this age. He said that to lack those garments would be shameful in the age to come. It's great that we are grounded in the free gift of eternal life to all who believe, but let us not lose sight of the value of what we do after we are born again.

Jesus counseled the believers to anoint their eyes with eye salve, that they might see. They needed to ask God's Spirit to help them understand and apply God's Word. God might then remove their spiritual blindness and help them to see (2 Pet 1:9).

Jesus still loved this church and was concerned about its future. There was hope, if they would repent, or change their spiritual course.

Jesus called the church lukewarm. Both cold and hot water were useful; lukewarm water was not. The believers were so wishy-washy that they were distasteful and useless to the Lord.

Jesus reproves and disciplines those He loves. He reproves us through His messengers, our pastors and teachers. This letter to Laodicea is a reproof. He disciplines us by allowing us to reap the fruit of our sinful deeds.

The believers needed to be zealous and repent. They were to get excited about the Lord and turn back to Him. No more of this wishy-washy stuff!

Jesus disciplines us because He wants to have fellowship with us. He wants to be welcomed in our

lives, to be a friend to us, like someone we'd invite for dinner.

Verse 20 pictures Jesus as standing at the door of the church, knocking and seeking entrance. This is not an evangelistic appeal to the unsaved. The Lord of the church pled with this particular body to open the door of the church to Him for fellowship with Him. Jesus extended the gracious promise that if any believer opened the door, He would come in and fellowship (dine) with him.

Paul McCartney wrote the song "Let 'Em In," in which he spoke of various people knocking on the door and how he was asking a friend to open the door to let them all in.

We can dine with the Lord in this age through worship and prayer. We can dine with Jesus now figuratively, but in the age to come we will literally eat meals in His presence and talk to Him.

Jesus promised the overcomer a seat with Him on His throne. Among the many believers of this age, only overcomers will be granted that honor. Not everyone will have a crown and sit on a throne with Christ.

Every believer will have the righteousness of Christ. We will all have a glorified body. We will all be citizens of the kingdom. There might be a few other things which we will all have in common. But after that, for most of the things which we will have, there will be great differences in the measure of glory and of our capacity to serve and of intimacy with the Lord.

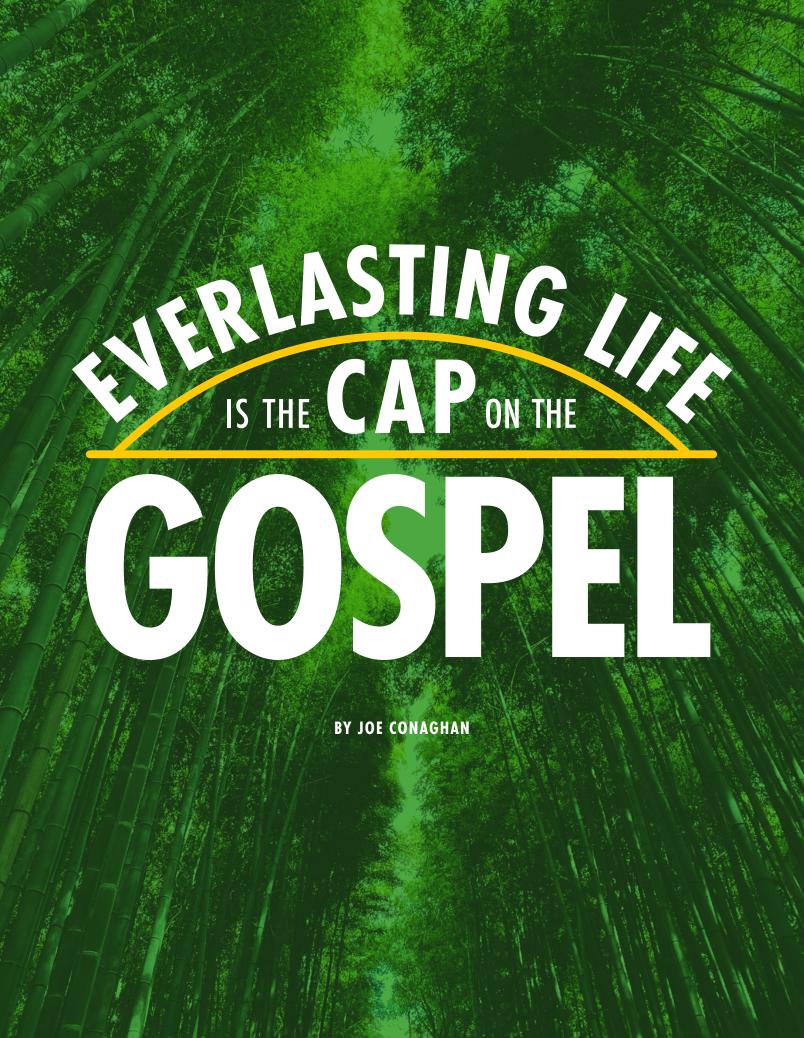
Our relationship with the Lord will be different for each one of us. There are some who will have a close physical proximity to the King of kings. They will have access to His immediate physical presence in a way that others will not. It will not be based on how famous we were in this age or how big our ministry was. It will be based on our faithfulness and love for Him. The overcomer rewards include the type of the dwelling place we will have in the New Jerusalem, the garments we will wear, the food we will enjoy, the intimacy we will experience with Christ, the status and authority we will have. These privileges will not be solely for our benefit. We have been created to glorify God by loving and serving others. These privileges will enable overcomers to do just that in the millennial kingdom and in the new heaven and the new earth.

What Would Jesus Say (WWJS) to the materialistic church: "Let me in!" Jesus stands at the door and knocks. He calls out, "Let Me in. I want to dine with you."

The letters to the seven churches of Asia constitute a comprehensive message to every church. Churches today can "hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Like the church at Ephesus, we are exhorted to renew continually our love for Christ. Like the church at Smyrna, we are exhorted not to be afraid when persecuted and remain faithful. Like the church at Pergamum, we are exhorted not to succumb to false teaching or tolerate it. Like the church at Thyatira, we are exhorted to say "No!" to immorality and "Yes!" to holiness. Like the church at Sardis, we are exhorted to wake up from spiritual slumber, watch for the return of the Lord, and make a good reputation for ourselves. Like the church at Philadelphia, we are exhorted to keep up our good work and watch for the coming of the Lord. Like the church at Laodicea, we are exhorted to be spiritually vibrant and to fellowship with the Lord. Christ will reward overcomers and grant them the privilege of co-rulership with Him.



Philippe Sterling is the pastor of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, TX. He and his wife of 45 years, Brenda, live in Denton, TX, near their daughter, Sarah, son-in-law, Ben, and grandkids.



# Was this short ride really about to end so soon?

y doctor said my symptoms were all indicative of possible colon cancer, so he ordered the tests. I was fifty years old. Was this short ride really about to end so soon? Faced with an uncertain future, I wanted some assurance that I would go to heaven after I died.

For reasons I can't explain, it entered my mind to call a childhood friend who I heard had become a pastor, and with whom I hadn't spoken since junior high school. I was afraid to even make the phone call. What if he told me something that was too difficult? I had to find out, so I called anyway. I'm so glad I did because Pastor Ryor walked me slowly and methodically through Eph 2:8-9, which reads, "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 had read these verses numerous times before, but until this phone call, I had never really heard them. "Joe," he said after getting to the end of verse 9, "if you could do anything to earn salvation, you'd have a reason to boast. So it has to be a gift!" I was so excited and relieved to hear this that I actually started laughing because I couldn't believe I had never heard this before in all my years among various denominations. He shared a few more things in relation to finding a good church and

other matters that he indicated were separate from my salvation in Christ. Then Pastor Ryor prayed, and we said our farewells.<sup>1</sup>

That night we went out as a family to play Putt-Putt golf. I missed so many shots, even two-foot putts. My daughter looked at me quizzically, as if wondering, "Why is he so happy? Does he not know he's losing!?" The happiness I experienced that night was really wonderful and I've never forgotten it.

However, only a day later, this thought entered my mind: "Can I lose my salvation for any reason? I mean, is that a possibility?" My heart fell into my stomach. Now my hopeful outlook turned into uncertainty, and my happiness into anxiety. This was too important to ignore so I set about to discover the truth, while praying to God for guidance.

Since Pastor Ryor was on the West Coast and I on the East, he had asked me to reach out to a certain local pastor after our phone call. I called this pastor up and told him I had questions, and he agreed to meet me at a coffee shop in Centreville, Virginia. The meeting was very pleasant, the discussion was stimulating, and although my question on eternal security remained unsettled in my mind, I thanked the pastor for his time and the coffee, and we said our goodbyes.

As I was driving home, I was reminded of John 3:16. I quoted the words slowly: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" and when I got to the second half of the verse, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," I paused. Once more I replayed those words "but have everlasting life." Suddenly, the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw it. I yelled, "Irrevocable! That's what 'everlasting' means!"

I realized right then and there that my salvation was completely secure! I realized God, by His own words, was permanently stuck with me! As I pulled into the driveway, I knew everything had changed. I was finally completely secure in my salvation by grace through faith in Jesus because God has promised in John 3:16 (and many other places) that the life He gives by believing in Jesus will never, ever be taken back.

It's been seven years since my new birth in Christ, and I now have the benefit of examining the entire experience, one which I've come to understand is not that uncommon among born-again believers today, in light of what the Scriptures actually teach. The truth is that the gospel that Jesus preached was always clear on eternal security. He was not sent to offer anything else. Over and over and over again, He repeated the same promise, that anyone who simply believes in Him has *everlasting life* (John 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:35, 37, 47; 10:28; 11:26; etc.) Not temporary life. Not probationary life. *Eternal life*. As the One who is from everlasting to everlasting, it should not surprise us that He only offers this type of life.

So why, you may ask, do so many confess to similar experiences of not being clear on the eternal security of the believer until weeks, months, maybe years after first placing their faith in Christ? Well, it's simple really. I would submit that the reason, in most cases, is that the gospel being preached is not the one that forever saves.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is a "capless gospel." That is, it leaves open-ended the question of eternal security, treating it as a peripheral issue, when in fact it is the very nucleus of the atom of saving faith. For until we have been convinced that because we have believed on Jesus, we are se-

cure, we are still working for our salvation. We're still unsaved. Contrariwise, the moment we believe ourselves to be inextricably "trapped" in the mighty hand of God, with no possible way out, all inner striving comes to a screeching halt, and we are forever saved, ushering in a permanent peace that surpasses all understanding.

Let's not proclaim a capless gospel. Eternal security should not be hidden when we share Christ. As ambassadors of Christ to a dying world, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, let us make clear to each and every person that the only kind of life God offers them is His life that never ends. Let's show people that the sin issue is done away with because Jesus *paid it all* on the cross, and that once they have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for the free gift of salvation, they are saved and saved forever, with no possibility of God rescinding the gift, as it is written, "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).

Let us always remember to put the cap on.



Joe Conaghan works as an Architect at Microsoft. He lives in Northlake, Texas, with his wife, Linda, daughter, Christine, and dog, Daisy.

- 1 A final word on Pastor Chuck Ryor, my beloved brother in Christ who tragically passed away a few years ago in a motorcycle accident. I will always be grateful that he showed me Eph 2:8-9, explaining that salvation had to be received as a gift to prevent any boasting and ensuring God receives all the glory. He then introduced me to his friend in Centreville, VA who helped me to see the irrevocability of that gift. I look forward to thanking them both in heaven. To God be the glory!
- 2 People who give that sort of testimony are confused about when they were born again. They were born again when they believed that their by grace through faith salvation was irrevocable, not before. The great joy I had when Pastor Ryor shared Christ with me was fantastic. But at that time I did not yet see in Eph 2:8-9 that my salvation was final. Days later that hit me, and at that time I was born again.



Bob's new Sunday School class at Coppell Bible Fellowship on answering Bible questions



Kathryn gives Alla Kristina, one of our European translators living in Italy, some GES materials.
There may be a conference in Italy in the future.



Bible Study home group in Mexico with John and Alysse

# WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?

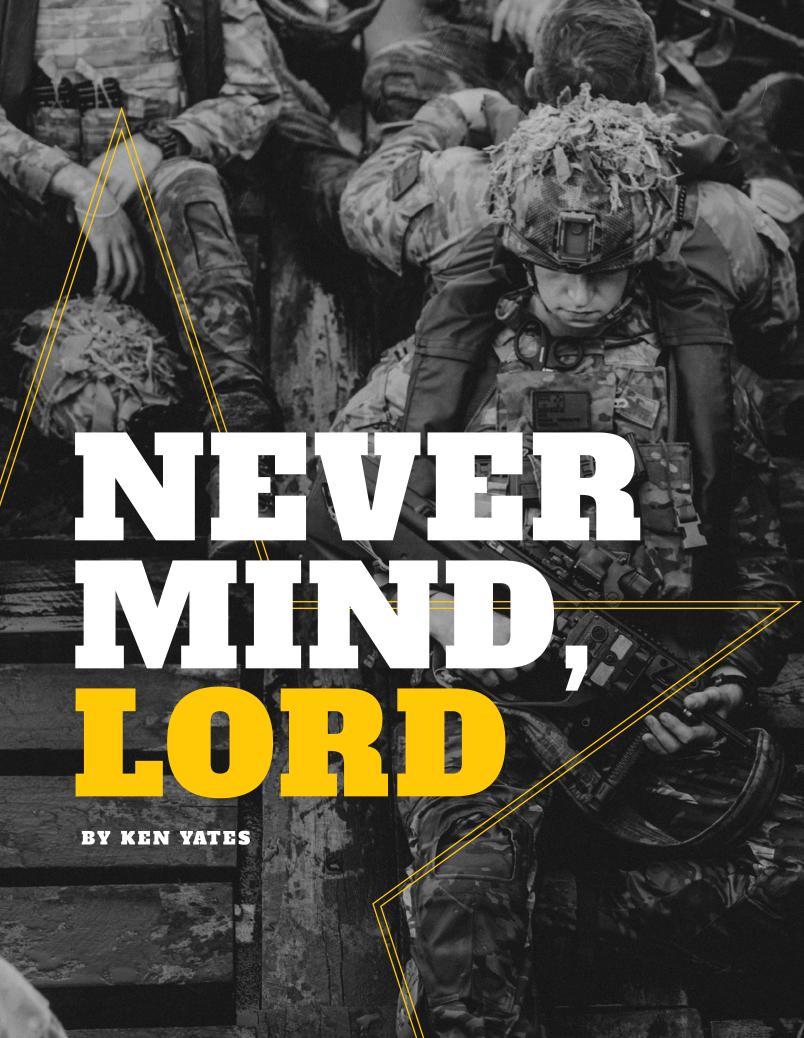
Kathryn and Dewey Wright sit down with Spanish translators, Oscar and Georgie



Ken teaches the book of Hebrews at a Men's Bible study near Bonham, TX



Sunday School class in Aldama, Mexico with Ken Gates





#### INTRODUCTION

e have all heard the phrase, "there are no atheists in foxholes." What that means is that when a man is facing death, he often finds religion. He will promise God all kinds of things if God gets him through the danger he finds himself in. A soldier, for example, might promise to go to church, stop drinking, or stop swearing, if he survives his time in battle.

Of course, what usually happens is that when the soldier does survive, he doesn't keep the promises he made to God. When the danger has passed, he no longer needs God's assistance. Those promises of turning over a new leaf were literally made in the heat of battle, and that battle is now in the past.

Most readers can relate to this experience, even if they have never been in combat. If we go through a particularly hard time, like losing a job or having a loved one who is sick, we might bargain with God or make promises to Him. If He makes our problems go away, we will love and obey Him in some kind of way. But these fervent prayers are often forgotten when the troubles have disappeared. If we later think about what we said we would do, in a roundabout way, we say, "Never mind, Lord."

There is a clear example of this human tendency in Jeremiah 34.

#### **HELP US, LORD!**

The people in and around Jerusalem are in trouble in Jeremiah 34. In fact, they are like the soldier in the foxhole. The prophet Jeremiah had preached to them for over three decades. He told them they needed to repent of their sins or God was going to judge them. God told them they would die by starvation, disease, and the sword. The people did not listen, and now the Babylonian army was invading their land. Jerusalem and the lives of the people in it were in danger.

This situation got their attention. They decided to make some promises to God. In the covenant Israel had made with the Lord, they had agreed to set their Jewish slaves free after so many years of service (Exod 21:2). This was a way for the Jews to be merciful to those who were poor and weak, and a reminder that God had set their ancestors free from their slavery in Egypt. By releasing their slaves, they were being like God.

Evidently, those in power had not obeyed the Lord in this matter. But in light of their present circumstances, they decided to bargain with Him. Jeremiah had told them to turn from their sins to avoid God's punishment, and this was an example of what they could do to obey the Lord. Perhaps, they thought, God would deliver them from the Babylonians if they would do what the Lord had commanded them and be kind to their fellow Jews.

Jeremiah tells us that this is exactly what they did (Jer 34:8-10). Some have suggested there was another reason they let their slaves go free: they needed more soldiers to fight against the Babylonian army. If these slaves were released from their servitude, they would be much more likely to fight for their country. Whatever the reasons those who owned slaves set them free, they were hoping God would reward them for doing the right thing and spare their city and lives.

#### **WE REALLY PROMISE TO DO IT!**

The Jews wanted to make sure the Lord knew of their sincerity when it came to obeying Him in this matter. They made a public declaration of the promise they had made. The leaders of the people held a ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem. They called upon the name of the Lord and made a covenant with Him (34:15). They swore by His name, in His house, that they would release their slaves.

To show how committed they were to keep their promise, they put on quite a show, taking a calf and sacrificing it. Then they cut it in two, and the political and religious leaders then walked through the pieces of the body (34:19). This signified that God should do to them what happened to this calf if they did not keep their promise. In other words, they were so serious they told God to kill them if they didn't allow their slaves to go free. They would deserve to die if they reneged on what they said they would do.

When we look at the actions of these Jews, we have to be impressed. They did the wise thing. They turned to the One who was able to get them through their difficult circumstances. They had no other place to turn. We understand why a soldier in combat calls out to the Lord. That is what these Jews did. We can also conclude that they were completely sincere.

But we also know that the promises made in those circumstances can soon be forgotten.

#### WE DIDN'T REALLY MEAN IT

In the Book of Jeremiah, some of the things written are not in chronological order. The prophet tells us what happened after the people let their slaves go free. We don't know how long afterwards, but they went back on their promise. They forced their former slaves back into slavery (34:11).

We are also not told why they reversed course. But we have a really good idea. God had told the king and the people not to rely on others in the war against the Babylonians. However, we are told in other places that they disobeyed. They asked Egypt to help them. King Zedekiah wanted the army of Egypt to fight against the Babylonians.

The Egyptians did just that. They were moving toward Jerusalem to provide aid, and it seemed to be a harbinger of great things. The Babylonian army left Judah to meet the Egyptian army in battle (Jer 37:5; Ezek 17:11-16). When the Babylonian soldiers left their land, the Jewish people thought all was well.

It didn't take them long to forget what they had promised the Lord. Maybe they rationalized that their decision to release the slaves had been a rash one. Maybe releasing their slaves had nothing to do with the Babylonians leaving. Maybe the Egyptians, and not God, had delivered them from danger. Their decision certainly cost them money. With the Babylonians gone, they didn't need more soldiers to defend the city. They wanted their slaves back.

It is hard to find a clearer example of hypocrisy. It is so blatant, it is almost comical. The Jews showed that their oath at the temple, their gestures of mercy toward their slaves, their expressed desire to obey God, and their sacrifice of an animal, were all a show. They did not do any of these things out of love for the Lord or their neighbor. They obviously did what they did as a way to trick God into giving them what they wanted. Now that they thought they had it—now that they thought they were out of danger—they could go back to doing what they were doing before the Babylonians had threatened them.

It is like the soldier who promises to quit drinking when he is in the midst of battle. After he returns home, he is eager to go to a local bar and celebrate with his friends.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

Hopefully, none of us will be as boldly hypocritical as the Jews in Jeremiah 34. Maybe they did what they did because of their exposure to, and participation in, idolatry. They saw the God of Israel as just another god that they could placate. Once they received from Him what they wanted, it was business as usual. They could treat all the idols around them in that way. Unfortunately for them, God was not like those idols; He held them accountable for what they had promised. The Babylonians soon returned after dealing with the Egyptians, and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. Many of the Jews of the city lost their lives, just like the calf they sacrificed.

Even if our hypocrisy is more subtle than theirs, we are still subject to that sin. How often do we "get serious" in our relationship with God when we find ourselves in a tight spot and we need something from Him? When things are going well, we are much more likely not to see the importance His Word and Spirit have in our lives. After the trial has passed, we can take the attitude of "Never mind, Lord."

All of us can look at what the Jews did in Jeremiah's day and conclude that it was wrong. That should lead us to an obvious conclusion: our love for the Lord, and the obedience that flows from that love, should not depend upon our outward circumstances. Wouldn't it be great if our desire to please Him did not just depend upon Him getting us out of some kind of trouble?

That kind of attitude will not come automatically. In our flesh, we are not wired that way. The Jews in Jeremiah 34 are a striking example of that fact. But let's ask the Lord to transform our minds so that we realize He is worthy of our love and obedience in both good and bad times.



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(Acts 22) BY KATHRYN WRIGHT

any ministries, churches, and Christian organizations train believers to give their salvation testimonies as a tool for evangelism. In this training, the apostle Paul is often seen as the gold standard when it comes to how we are to share our own testimonies. His example in the book of Acts is used as our blueprint, especially regarding his life before and after meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus.

Using Paul's testimony, a three-step process has become the common format for testimonies today. In Acts 22, for example, Paul describes his sinful state prior to salvation. He was a Pharisee. Not only that, but he was actively involved in persecuting the early church, killing many (vv 3-5). This is often seen as Step One in how all believers should start our personal testimonies: we should begin by describing our sinful lifestyle prior to faith.

Paul demonstrated Step Two when he described how the Lord came to him with a bright light on the road to Damascus (vv 6ff). Again, many are trained via this format to imitate Paul's experience and to describe the moment they came to faith as an extreme encounter with the Lord.

Finally, Step Three is to describe your life after coming to faith, again imitating Paul's description. After he was saved on the road to Damascus, Paul became a missionary to the Gentiles (v 21) and an apostle of God, wrote thirteen books in the NT, and established churches throughout the Roman Empire. Finally, he died as a martyr for the Lord.

This method has become so commonplace, many will ask, "What was your Damascus Road experience?" when they want to hear about your own salvation story. However, while Paul's testimony is certainly worthy of our study, and can edify and teach us today, there are flaws in this popular application.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CONTEXT

Starting with the apostle's description of his life prior to salvation, the setting plays a significant role in the application. Just prior to giving his testimony, Paul is in the temple. A group of Jews from Asia create a mob, leading to the apostle's arrest (Acts 21:26-36). At the end of chapter 21, we are told of a noteworthy exchange that occurs. Paul was speaking Greek to the Roman commander who had come in response to the riot, but switched to Hebrew when addressing the mob (v 40). Luke emphasizes this point in 22:1. He said that the mob fell silent when they heard Paul speak in the Hebrew tongue.

Before we even get into the testimony, we see the apostle Paul making this strategic move in addressing the Jews. While they would have been able to understand Greek, Paul identifies himself with his audience by speaking Hebrew, and they respect him more for it. Further, in his first words to them, he identifies himself with his audience by calling them *brethren* and *fathers*. This is a sign of solidarity and respect.

Everything he says from that point on follows this approach. He repeatedly identifies himself with these men. First, he says that he is also a Jew—not just any Jew, but one taught by Gamaliel, a highly respected teacher among the Sanhedrin (v 3). This would have been the equivalent of Paul's letting his audience know he had a Ph.D. in the OT. He goes on to say that he was not only taught in the strictness of the law, but that he is zealous for God—even more so than the mob itself. Simultaneously, Paul compliments the mob for their passion for God, while also claiming that he surpasses their zeal! He then describes his persecution of the Way, leading up to his journey to Damascus.

Was Paul using this first part of his speech to convince the audience of his sinful past? While the persecution of the church was a terrible part of Paul's past from a Christian perspective, that's not the perspective of these Jews in Acts 22. To the mob, everything Paul describes in Acts 22:1-6 would have been considered positive, not sinful.

Paul's point wasn't to describe his state prior to salvation to prove he was "really" saved by a transformation of lifestyle. *Paul was simply trying to show his audience that he, too, once believed what they believed.* He, too, is one of them. He taught the Law and was zealous for God. He, too, can speak Hebrew. He is a Hebrew. He is identifying with them so they will listen. We might say he's buttering them up. This is not a list of "bad" things to the

mob, but prestigious and compelling evidence for them to consider Paul's message. Paul is simply saying, "I once believed the things you believe." Paul's three points all concerned his beliefs, not his actions.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW SHOULD WE APPLY PAUL'S EXAMPLE?

While this passage is often used to illustrate the negative characteristics of the unsaved, Paul is actually listing things his audience would have identified with and respected. He is relating to their way of thinking. That is a completely different application of this passage from how it's normally used in the church today.

Paul also describes his life prior to faith in another book in the NT. In Phil 3:4-6, Paul writes:

<sup>4</sup> Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Again, Paul lists several things: He is Jew, a part of God's chosen people. He had fulfilled the covenantal command of circumcision. He is from the tribe of Benjamin. Perhaps above all, he was a Pharisee, a religious leader, known for his zeal for God.

Does this sound like the testimonies we normally hear? He does not mention sins and does not give a list of depravities that he has overcome. In fact, he does the opposite! He gives a very impressive list of accomplishments. He even goes so far as to say he was "blameless."

This is shockingly different from everything we traditionally hear. What is the apostle's conclusion to this list? All these accomplishments are meaningless when compared to knowing Christ. While the traditional testimony focuses on a transformed life, the apostle flips all of that on its head. Rather than a list of sins, he sidesteps all the moral and racially pure qualifications he possesses, calls it all garbage, and instead points to the Savior. This is an immensely helpful example when evangelizing to a moral unbeliever.

For example, while the traditional way of applying Paul's testimony would be meaningless to a moral Catholic or Muslim, if we apply Paul's testimony like we see in Acts 22, we show the moral unbeliever that he or she has nothing to cling to in regards to works. We can then point the moral unbeliever to Jesus and the gift of eternal life, apart from his or her self-righteousness (Eph 2:8-9; see also John 3:16; 4:10).

## THE TESTIMONY OF BELIEF

There is something worth noting in Philippians. The apostle describes himself prior to salvation as blameless, especially as it relates to the law. However, at the end of his life, the apostle Paul makes another startling statement in 1 Tim 3:15 saying:

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (emphasis added).

# At the heart of Paul's testimony is *belief*.

While we often hear people describe their salvation experience by going from sinful to sinless, Paul's description of himself stands in sharp contrast. The apostle simply does not point to some list of accolades as proof of salvation. He does use his religious background prior to salvation to connect with Jewish unbelievers. In the end though, he does the opposite of the traditional testimony. He paints himself in a very lowly place *after* he was saved. He considers himself the chief sinner, all while pointing to Jesus, and setting himself up as an example of one who was saved by grace. He was not saved by cleaning up his lifestyle.

While Paul certainly describes his life prior to salvation in terms of his sins elsewhere in Scripture—though not while speaking to unbelievers (1 Tim 1:13), he often described his life prior to salvation as very moral. This may seem conflicting. But it is not. His lifestyle prior to and after salvation, while relevant in persuading people to listen, or applying discipleship truths, are irrelevant when it comes to his salvation. When speaking to Timothy, Paul writes:

"However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (1 Tim 1:16, emphasis added).

At the heart of Paul's testimony is belief. It isn't about a grand change in lifestyle, or becoming the next great missionary, or speaking in tongues, or a bright light. If you think that Paul's testimony was one of assurance of salvation based on his works, I fear you will spend a lifetime doubting your salvation. Paul, however, makes it very clear in 1 Tim 1:16 in what way he is a pattern for us. Not in works, but in belief. Therefore, instead of the traditional three-step process, let me suggest a revised version, based on Paul's testimony. Step one, describe what you used to believe before being saved. Step two, describe what you have come to believe. Step three, describe why you find that to be the most cherished belief. If you have believed in Jesus for eternal life, you have followed Paul's blueprint, and should seek to share that faith-alone message with others.



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

1 In part 3, he discusses his promotion of what he came to believe, and what he understands to be the proper understanding of Scripture.

# Does the Word

# Equal Jesus Christ's Death and Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15?

By Dr. John H. Niemelä

irst Corinthians 15's definition of the word *gospel* is important.<sup>1</sup> For brevity's sake, I assume the view that *saved* in 15:2 refers to sanctification, not regeneration. Lowery writes, "As the former message was an essential element in the Cor-

inthians' experience of ongoing salvation (the pres. tense of the verb *saved* focuses on sanctification), so was the latter" (David Lowery, "1 Corinthians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 542).

My goal is modest: determining where in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul *begins* defining the term *gospel*. Most start it in 15:3, but the definition actually begins in 15:2.

All perceive the centrality of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection here, but some make His burial a third point.<sup>2</sup> Most incorrectly limit the definition to the verses discussing these two (or three) elements (15:3-8). However, Paul uses the word *gospel* (*euangelion*) in 15:1, amplifying upon it in 15:2. Excluding verse 2 from Paul's definition is indefensible. Although 15:3 begins a new sentence, verse 2 is what explains why the good news is good news. That is, 1 Cor 15:2 applies His death and resurrection to the original readers: *by which* [gospel] you are saved if you hold fast...Indeed, spiritual health is great news for believers.<sup>3</sup>

If Jesus' death and resurrection did not extend benefits to others, would it be good news? Or would it merely be news? Sanctification for believers makes His death and resurrection *good news*. If Jesus died *only for Himself* and rose *only for Himself*, it would not be good news *for us*.

Paul's gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 is that believers remain spiritually healthy by holding fast to the truths of Jesus Christ's death (which Scripture and His burial prove) and resurrection (which Scripture and many eyewitnesses verify).

Paul's *gospel* reaches beyond Jesus' death and resurrection to how these events allow Him to give believers fullness of life. Verse 2 is what makes 15:3-8 good news, not just news. Sanctification (transformation by the renewing of the minds of believers) is one of the reasons why Jesus was crucified and rose. The good news of the cross and resurrection is that believers in Jesus Christ who hold fast to His death and resurrection are spiritually healthy.



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

- 1 Gospel is not a NT technical term. It does not always refer to the message for unbelievers.
- 2 Verses 3-8 make two points: death and resurrection, not three. The following clarifies:
  - I. Jesus died for our sins (15:3)
    - a. The first proof of His death is that it was according to the Scriptures (15:3)
    - b. The second proof of His death is that He was buried (15:4a)
  - II. Jesus rose on the third day (15:4b)
    - a. The first proof of His resurrection is that it was according to the Scriptures (15:4c)
    - b. The second proof is that many witnesses saw Him afterwards (15:5-8).

Burial was a second proof of His death, not the second of three points (death, burial, and resurrection). Yes, Isaiah 53:9 predicts His burial, but Paul does not cite Scripture to prove burial. He cites burial as a second proof of death. If Paul had said according to the Scriptures after mentioning burial, he would have made three points: death, burial, and resurrection. He only said according to the Scriptures after death and resurrection; those are his two points.

3 "If you grasp it" means: Believing Paul's message saves if one grasps his point and believes it. The phrase "unless you believed in vain [eikē]" does not refer to a (hypothetical) non-saving type of faith. Rather, believing vainly refers to the theoretical possibility that Paul's gospel is devoid of truth. That is, if those who believe Jesus Christ for eternal life do not actually receive eternal life, belief in Him would be in vain. That is Paul's point, as 15:14 clarifies, "If Christ were not raised, then our preaching is empty [kenos] and your faith is also empty [kenos]." Eikē and kenos are equivalents.

# Will You Weep at the Bema?

By Bill Fiess

ecently, my 102-year-old father died and left an inheritance to each of his four children. My parents were not extremely rich, but they were both college-educated professionals, and they left us a very nice inheritance. I would have been extremely disappointed if I had not been included in my father's will.

I think most people would feel sad if their parents did not leave them an inheritance, especially if those parents were very rich. I'm guessing Bill Gates' daughter would be extremely disappointed if she were not included in his will.

Down here on earth, the idea of an inheritance is quite important. Most people have relatives from whom they either have received or will receive a family inheritance. Usually, one's manner of life has something to do with whether he or she might be rewarded with an inheritance. For example, if I were addicted to drugs, there is a strong possibility I would be excluded from a family inheritance.

Many Christians are not aware that the NT also speaks about an inheritance that is available to children of God in the world to come. It would be a great disappointment to miss out on that inheritance too.

## ENTERING VERSUS INHERITING THE KINGDOM

When Jesus spoke to a man named Nicodemus, He spoke to him about *entering* the kingdom of God. The Lord told him that he must be born from above by the Spirit of God (John 3:5-7). In the most famous verse in the Bible, Christ told Nicodemus how to experience that new birth. All who believe in Jesus as the One who gives eternal life are born from above and will enter the kingdom of God (John 3:16). Since entrance to the kingdom is by faith alone, it is completely free.

*Inheriting* the kingdom, on the other hand, is not free. Like an inheritance in this life, the actions of the child of God will determine if he receives it. To put it simply, good works are required.

Paul made that clear in 1 Cor 6:9-11. He told the believers at Corinth that if they lived immoral lives, they would not *inherit* the kingdom of God. He listed a number of sins, including sexual immorality,

that would disqualify a believer from receiving his inheritance from his heavenly Father.

We must keep that distinction in mind. In 1 Corinthians, Paul was writing to Christians who already had eternal life, which he and they both knew they couldn't lose. Based upon many Bible verses, including the Lord's discussion with Nicodemus, they knew they were going to enter the kingdom. But because of the way they were living, they were in danger of losing an inheritance in the kingdom once they arrived. The difference between entering a place and inheriting it involves those who will actually possess part of the place they inherit.

The Lord Himself also made this distinction. In His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, He told His disciples they could actually own a part of His kingdom. The kingdom will belong to those believers who humbly serve Him. The Gentile believer will possess the earth on which Christ rules. The same is true for those who are persecuted by the world because they are faithful to Christ (Matt 5:3, 5, 10).

This ownership in the kingdom will mean that the faithful believer will rule with Christ. Jesus promised that will be the case for those children of His who keep doing good works until the end. They will be given ruling "authority over the nations" (Rev 2:25-29 NASB). Since Jesus' rule will be over an eternal kingdom, the inheritance the obedient believer receives will be eternal as well.

All of this shows the importance of godly living for the believer. The wise Christian is the one who has a daily sensitivity to sin in his life to stay in fellowship with Christ. Such an attitude is well worth the effort in order to gain the phenomenal privilege of obtaining an eternal inheritance.

Paul had that attitude when it came to his own life. After telling the Corinthians about a possible inheritance for them, he told them he wanted it for himself. That was why he lived his life the way he did. He forsook certain things in order to receive the "prize" of the inheritance. He wanted to be approved of receiving that prize (1 Cor 9:24-27). Paul knew eternal life was free, but the inheritance would involve work.

Luke records an event in Paul's life where the apostle said the same thing. He told a governor who was putting him on trial that he knew there would be a resurrection from the dead. Because he knew he would rise from the dead some day and appear before the Lord to see if he would receive an inheritance, he was compelled to do what he did. He said he always strived not to give offense to God or men (Acts 24:15-16).

#### LOSS AND TEARS

Clearly, some believers will experience the loss of this inheritance. Some will not be faithful. Some will not persevere in good works. Some will not be sensitive to the sins in their lives. The NT tells us that the inheritance for some, and the loss of that inheritance for others, will be determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ, often called by its Greek name, the *bema* (2 Cor 5:10).

Many think that all believers will inherit the kingdom and rule with Christ. They are convinced that all believers will only rejoice on that day. However, the Bible says that at the Judgment Seat, there will indeed be a loss experienced by many. Those who lose their inheritance will be in the kingdom of God forever, but when they see Christ, they will see what their lives caused them to forfeit.

Jesus warned His disciples that on that day, when He evaluates how they lived, nothing will be hidden from His eyes. If they have not listened to what He has said and acted upon it, they will have their inheritance taken away from them (Luke 8:13, 16-18; 19:20-26). Paul states that the bad works¹ of the believer will be burned up at that judgment as well. When that happens the Christian will "suffer loss" (1 Cor 3:10-15).

In describing how the resurrected believer will feel about this loss, the NT often uses the imagery of weeping. Whether we will be able to actually cry in glorified bodies or not, weeping over such a loss is an appropriate illustration that we can readily understand. The author of Hebrews reminds his readers how Esau wept when he lost his inheritance from his father (Heb 12:16-17).

In four instances, the Lord spoke about weeping at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Those servants of His, which is a description of believers, will cry when they see what their unfaithful lives have cost them. He will call them hypocrites and unprofitable servants. They will lose an eternal inheritance and the privilege of ruling with Christ forever, even though they will be in His kingdom. The Lord described the sorrow and weeping on that day in graphic detail (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

#### CONCLUSION

No matter how I lived my life, I would always be my father's child. But I also wanted to gain his approval. When his will was read, I was pleased that he left me an inheritance. If he had written in his will that I had greatly disappointed him, and he had not left me an inheritance, I would have been devastated. I am sure I would have wept.

I can imagine Bill Gates' daughter would feel the same way. She would lose a lot more than I would have if I had lost what my father left me. Her father is one of the richest men in the world. Even if it is purely for selfish reasons, she wants her father to be pleased with her. If he were not, she would experience a great loss and would certainly cry a river.

As believers, our heavenly Father is richer by far. The inheritance He offers His children is eternal and far outweighs any earthly riches. Imagine being left out of that will.

But no child of God needs to experience such a thing. If we are faithful to the Lord, He is generous and will give us a rich inheritance. If you are a believer, what will it be for you on that day? Will you rejoice at the approval of the Lord and the privilege of ruling with Him? Or will you weep at your loss?



Bill Fiess teaches mathematics at Southwest Virginia Community College.

1 Editor's note: It is possible that the wood, hay, and stubble refers to works that lack eternal value, not bad works. Things like watching TV, playing video games, and recreational activities lack eternal value. Gold, silver, and precious stones would refer to works with enduring value, works that pass the test of fire. That is my understanding of the passage and I first gained that understanding from Zane Hodges.

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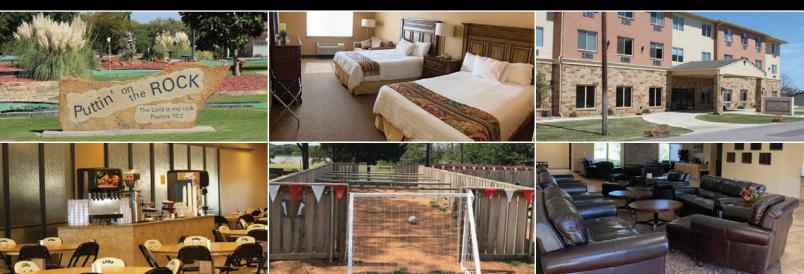
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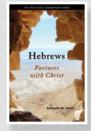


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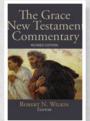


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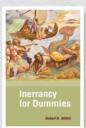


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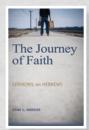


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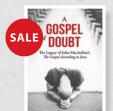


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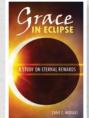


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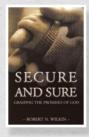


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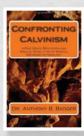


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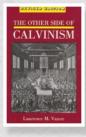


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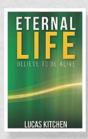


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A Chihuahuan college class that Ken taught



Bob taught Robby Dean's Zoom class







# WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?

GES Youtube vids are rockin'!



Praising the Lord at Honey Grove Baptist Church



The GES Board gets together to accomplish tasks and Sharon heard there would be a camera there.



Bob's Sunday School class (new room)

**By Nancy Rempel** 

#### **PART ONE**

rs. Mahsud squeezed her 15-year-old daughter Razwana's arm like a vise as they hurried out of the mission hospital. February temperatures in northern Pakistan had dipped to near-freezing, but their brows were wet with sweat.

The delicious smell of beef kababs wafted on the air as the pair threaded their way through the crowds of Al Marjan market. Bundled in several layers of woolen clothing, they kept their eyes down, imagining everyone knew their secret. A tsunami of emotions and thoughts frothed inside Mrs. Mahsud as they scrambled home. How had they all missed it? Her unmarried daughter was 36 weeks pregnant, and she had to find out through a foreign infidel nurse? Mrs. Mahsud had spat out Razwana's future to nurse Anitra. "She will go home to her grave." In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, unwed pregnant girls are dead women walking.

Anitra's words, like a life raft in a storm, had trailed behind them as Mrs. Mahsud had marched her daughter out of the examination room, "Wait... can help... delivery here... complete secrecy."

Razwana's maternal aunt, Surat Jan, slid the chain off the inside of her door to admit her sister and niece. She studied their faces and pushed them into a private room. Cloistered there, the three of them did what Muslim women do best. They schemed a way to survive.

For two weeks, amidst lies and excuses, Mrs. Mahsud—paralyzed between maternal instinct and family honor—kept the rest of the family in the dark about the pregnancy and the rape that had caused it.

With the birth imminent and Razwana's blood pressure at dangerous levels, Surat Jan grabbed her niece and made a run for the life raft at the mission hospital.

Nurse Anitra spotted Razwana and her aunt in the patient lineup and ushered them into a private room. Any of the locals could have identified them. Maybe already had. Razwana was malnourished and terrified, too exhausted to protest the prayers of the Pakistani nurses who had gathered in her room—prayers in the name of Jesus.

After two days of deliberation and waiting, Anitra induced Razwana's labor. Things progressed well during the first stage of labor then ground to a halt. The baby was stalled in the birth canal. Anitra carefully eased the baby's head out with forceps, then guided the body into the world. The tiny boy cried out quietly as if he, too, sensed the danger.

Razwana never looked at her baby. Tears welling up in her dark eyes slid down her cheeks when she turned her head away. While Anitra repaired Razwana's minor injuries from the delivery, nurses whisked the baby off to a secret location.

Hospital staff prepared legal forms reflecting the family's wishes to put the baby up for adoption.

A staff member took Razwana's right hand and rolled her index finger on an ink pad before pressing it on the line marked "Mother of Baby." As the fingerprint dried on the form, Razwana and Surat Jan slipped out of the hospital compound, afraid to breathe. This drama had just begun.

"And looking at them, Jesus said to them, 'With people, this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'" (Matt 19:26 NASB).

#### **PART TWO**

On February 21,1992, Dr. Luke scribbled out a note between surgeries. He stapled it, sealed it in a Bach Christian Hospital envelope, and gave it to his colleague, Naz. After a journey on rugged roads, Naz would deliver the envelope with its explosive contents 12 hours later.

As Naz began his journey, 15-year-old Razwana was on her own journey. Through a crowded bazaar, she crept home from Bach Hospital with her aunty, Surat Jan. She cuddled a woolen shawl around her to cover her pain and shame. A full-term baby had just been pulled out of her by forceps—a baby conceived through rape.

Blood from the placental site in her womb was soaking through the cotton wool pad under her baggy pants. She felt the wetness and shortened her steps. Strips of cloth, bound around her to conceal her swollen breasts, restricted her breathing.

Thirsty and dazed from blood loss, she stumbled and grabbed for her aunt's arm.

The plan concocted by Razwana's mother and aunt to survive the dishonor of the pregnancy was a masterpiece of deceit. They would blame the girl's ill health and hospital stay on high blood pressure and a urinary tract infection. Her mother would conceal bloody pads in plastic bags and carry them to Surat Jan's for burning. Despite her wretched condition, Razwana would do her house chores so that things appeared normal.

The long game involved snaring for Razwana, a husband inexperienced in sex—one who would be oblivious to her lack of virginity. Her Muslim groom would not see her before the wedding, so Razwana's depression and neurotic behavior would be unknown to him. Her terror at the prospect of sex was irrelevant. A son, a second one, would solve all their problems.

On the Karakoram Highway, 325 miles away from the drama in Razwana's home, my husband and I were in the Thal Desert trying to communicate God to Pakistanis in a language not our own.

After five years of marriage and a long season of infertility, Don and I opened our hearts to the idea of adoption. We had added our names to lists at a couple of Christian hospitals in Pakistan—lists of those wanting to adopt babies.

When our screen door slammed shut on the chilly evening of February 22, 1992, we were about to learn how good and generous God is.

Don walked into the front room, locked eyes with me, and pressed a small envelope into my hand. It was unopened. "This just came with Naz from Bach."

Standing together in our living room, we opened the envelope and eased the staple off the letter. Hunched over the small note written by Dr. Luke one day earlier in anticipation of a birth, we read, "Baby due in the next few days...they say they will not keep it...available to you...Can you care for it?"

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen 50:20 NASB).

#### PART THREE

On February 24, 1992, veteran missionaries Dave and Synnove Mitchell answered the door of their home in Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city. This was an intervention.

Two days earlier, in Layyah, a voice in northern Pakistan crackled on the other end of the phone, "Baby boy born at 4:45 p.m."

Still clutching Dr. Luke's note, I had leaned into the receiver and asserted myself as a mother. "His name is Christopher."

The following day, after a nine-hour drive to Islamabad, Don and I trudged into the Mothercare baby store. Snapping up an array of baby items, we shuffled back to the Jeep with our bags.

We left the parched capital the next day and drove three hours on spiraling roads amidst terraced hillsides, closer and closer to our baby. I studied the faces of the locals we passed on the roadside, wondering if Christopher would look like them.

Like newlyweds, we did not know what we were getting ourselves into when Mrs. Cutherell placed Christopher into Don's arms at Bach Christian Hospital. Unlike newlyweds, there would be no honeymoon.

Cloistered in the Cutherells' bathroom that evening, no one was happy. Not the howling baby. Not Don, white and faint from the sight of blood. And not me, all thumbs. Urine-soaked bandages from Christopher's recent circumcision had to be changed, and well, we were his parents. We passed the night listening to baby sounds.

We began the 327-mile trek back to our desert home the following day. Blankets wound around Christopher's tiny body were like bumpers in the



large car seat. His head bobbed along in time to the bumpy, curvy roads. My body swirled backward and forward as if on a swivel, checking on our son.

Just 75 miles into the trip, Christopher was the only one who had it together. Our minds worked overtime. Were we keeping the circumcision wound clean enough? Would Christopher's staph infection respond to the medicine? Were we mixing his milk formula correctly? Was he wet? Was he cold? Who did we think we were?

Finally, when we realized that our drinking water supply would never last the journey, the last of our brave efforts at parenting deflated like a balloon. In 1992 you could not buy bottled drinking water in Pakistan. You sterilized your own or went without.

Like three mismatched china cups in a hurricane, we huddled on the Mitchell's doorstep and rang the doorbell. Dave and Synnove welcomed our bedraggled family inside and delivered us—from ourselves.

When we loaded our four-and-a-half-day-old baby into the Jeep to resume our journey the next day, we were standing. Standing on the shoulders of ordinary people who did brave things. Fragile people in the hands of God. Fragile, like a fingerprint.

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;" (1 Cor 1:27)



Nancy and her husband, Don, served as missionaries in Pakistan and India for many years before relocating to Canada in 2017. They continue to share Christ with Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in Kelowna, B.C.

# Ву Bruce Zimmerman



have a friend named Mike who went on a missions trip to Colombia to share the gospel using the Evangecube. Similar to a Rubik's cube, the Evangecube, through various manipulations, portrays different pictures sharing the elements of the gospel message of Jesus. The unfolding pictures help keep the attention of the person listening to the presentation. As my friend Mike was unfolding the story of Jesus before the Colombian man, he noticed the man started to weep. When Mike asked him why he was weeping, the man replied through his tears, "Nobody told me that part of story. Nobody ever told me that Jesus rose from the grave and is alive!"

The Colombian man knew that Jesus had died on a cross, but never knew that Jesus rose from the dead in a victorious resurrection. How is it possible that the resurrection of Jesus could have been overlooked?

Unfortunately, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is often overlooked as a serious topic for contemplation, study, and application in the Christian community. Tim Keller in his book *Hope in the Midst of Fear* sites Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* as an example of resurrection underemphasis. Hodge devotes 124 pages to the death of Jesus Christ and its significance, but only four pages to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its significance.

Even more overlooked in preaching and teaching today than the resurrection of Jesus is the coming resurrection of believers!

The apostles proclaimed that they were witnesses to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32). They proclaimed Jesus as not only the Passover sacrificial lamb, but also the living, resurrected Savior. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was central to their message. It was the resurrection of Jesus Christ that changed the disciples into incredible preachers and missionaries of the living Lord.

1 Corinthians 15 is the great resurrection chapter. The first eleven verses show that the resurrection is a vital element of the gospel message. After Paul outlined the facts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and all the eyewitnesses who testified to His being alive (vv 3-11), he went on to explain the theological significance of His resurrection and its application to believers. His explanation of the resurrection seeks to bring clarity to the Corinthians by answering a number of questions (1 Cor 15:35-55). The essential application questions of the resurrection for believers—those who will have the glorified resurrection that Paul is discussing—are how, what, when, and where.

#### HOW ARE THE DEAD RAISED? (1 COR 15:35-41)

Paul clarifies that the resurrection is possible only after there is a death. This at first would seem obvious, but it is worth pointing out that death for the believer is the necessary step toward the resurrection. The beautiful illustration given is of a seed like wheat, which is totally separated from life until it is planted in the ground. At the point of the planting, the dead seed begins a remarkable transformation. Life begins to sprout out of the ground when touched by a remarkable, unimaginable power. It's a wonderful illustration that is common to all cultures around the world.

I remember my son as a child struggling with this concept of resurrection after death. Everything he saw that died stayed dead—it never came to life. He had a hard time believing this central doctrine of Christianity. It was the seed-in-the-ground illustration that helped him understand that life can spring forth from death when touched by God.

#### WHAT WILL THE RESURRECTION BODY BE LIKE? (1 COR 15:42-49)

Paul next moves to the "what" question. What kind of body is the resurrected body? In a series of four couplets, Paul clarifies for the believer what kind of body to anticipate in the future.

The first couplet says that the "perishable must put on the imperishable." Everything of this life and this world is perishing. The second law of thermodynamics declares the downward spiral and the deterioration of everything in this world (Matt 6:19). Life is a constant fight and struggle to maintain and slow down the decaying process of all that is perishable. Someone said the moment we are born we are beginning to die. It is the result of the fall of Adam. But Paul reiterates that the new resurrected body will not suffer the decaying process of life we all know too well.

The second couplet defining what kind of resurrected body we will have states that the body which is sown into the ground in dishonor will be raised in glory. Having witnessed the death of people very close to me, I saw that even when they went peacefully, there was not much glory there. Oftentimes their bodies were racked with disease or the effects of aging

or a serious injury, and it was anything but glorious. But the resurrected body will be absolutely glorious. There will be no more indications or marks of death or pain or disease. Believers will have the vitality of a young athlete who is at the maximum capacity of his physical abilities. Young athletes today are able to perform amazing and incredible feats during gymnastics or track and field events. This a foreshadowing glimpse of the glory of the life believers will have in their resurrected bodies. There will be no more aches, pains, and moans when we are trying to get up out of a chair!

Continuing that theme, the third couplet stresses what was "sown in weakness will be raised in power." Old men generally do not compete in weightlifting and other strenuous activities. Strength belongs to the young (Prov 20:29). This became clear to me recently as I was trying to lift a sheet of concrete board over my head to repair a damaged patio ceiling. I managed to get the board up one time on my own and then I had to take it down to recut it. After I made another cut, I was unable to bring it up a second time to the ceiling because of my lack of strength. A few years ago, I could easily have done that. I hate having to face the reality of the loss of strength in my body. But I know that in my resurrected body I will have the power to do what frustrates me now.

The fourth couplet has to do with a natural body versus a spiritual body. This is probably the most mysterious of all the couplet statements, yet it holds great imaginative possibilities. I have never seen a spiritual body, but the resurrected body of Jesus Christ gives us an idea of what a spiritual body is like: Jesus' resurrected body could be touched; He ate and drank with His disciples; He was able to walk through walls and appear miraculously at different places and times as needed. He was able to transcend the physical limitations and barriers that affect us now. There is still great mystery in my understanding about what the spiritual body will be like.

#### WHEN WILL THE RESURRECTION OCCUR? (1 COR 15:50-54)

Paul then addresses the third question of the significance of the resurrection body by answering the "when" question. The moment is clarified as being "at the last trump" (not Donald, Jr.), referring to the

coming of Jesus Christ for His Church. First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is the great Rapture passage of Paul's writings. The trumpet blast of the Lord with His shout calling for the dead in Christ to rise from the dead will mark the coming of Jesus Christ for His Church. As Lazarus responded in John 11 to the command of Jesus to "come forth," so also the Bride of Jesus Christ will come forth from the graves to meet the Lord in the air at His command. Those who are alive will be transformed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, when the corruptible bodies of this life are transformed into the incorruptible bodies of resurrected life.

I have visited New York City several times. People often joke that "the twinkling of an eye" is the time between a light turning green and the time that the horns start honking telling people to go! However long the twinkling of an eye is, it communicates the quickness and speed of the Lord when He will resurrect His Church. The reason for this transformation is the believers' place in the kingdom. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit [i.e., rule]" the kingdom. Christ's kingdom will be ruled by His transformed believers who have put on the imperishable. Believers will be raised when Jesus Christ returns for His Church before the kingdom begins. What an incredible day that will be when we shall see our glorified Savior Jesus Christ and He will share His glory with us just as promised.

#### WHERE THEN IS THE STING OF DEATH? (1 COR 15:55-58)

The last question Paul addresses, then, is "where is the sting of death" and the sin that leads to so much death and sorrow in our world? The answer is given in the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ, who completely vanquishes the sting of death. Even for the believer now, because of the victory of Jesus in the resurrection, there is no more sting of sin or of the law, which condemned the sin in us. Don't believers experience the sting of death now? Yes, in a sense we do. But since we know that death is not the end, but merely a departure (2 Tim 4:6), and that our resurrection is coming soon, death does not have the same sting for us as for unbelievers (1 Thess 4:13).

Paul concludes his chapter on the resurrection with appropriate application responses to our great fu-

ture—an overflowing gratitude, an ongoing goal, and an outrageous guarantee.

#### AN OVERFLOWING GRATITUDE

We are to live in a constant spirit of gratitude for the greatness of the future that God has for every believer. That is why Paul says, "but thanks be to God who has given us the victory."

#### AN ONGOING GOAL

Secondly, we have a goal set before us now to serve the Lord in abounding works flowing from our heart of thankfulness. This is not the time for slothfulness or a lackadaisical approach to living for the Lord and serving Him. Paul's call is for believers is to press on and persevere until this life on earth is over.

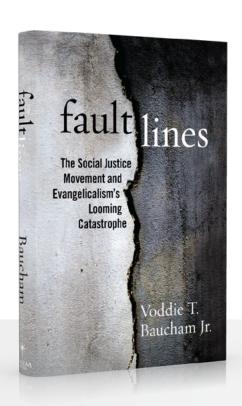
#### AN OUTRAGEOUS GUARANTEE: ETERNAL REWARDS FOR OUR LABOR IN THE LORD

Lastly, Paul states in the last verse of the chapter that we have a guarantee from the Lord: "knowing that our labor in the Lord will never be in vain [i.e., empty]" (1 Cor 15:58). God is not so unjust as to forget the work that we have done for Him (Heb 6:10). There will be a great reward for those who are serving the resurrected Savior now. The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees that for each person who chooses to serve Him with our short lives here on earth, there will be a remembrance and a reward in the future!

Let's not minimize the doctrine of the resurrection. Let's resurrect this cardinal tenet of the Bible and our faith all year round, not just on Resurrection Sunday (aka Easter Sunday).



Bruce Zimmerman graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1985 and has served as Senior Pastor of Waxahachie Bible Church for 38 years. He is married to Sheila, and they have four grown sons. Bruce enjoys his cattle, snow skiing, and working on his model train layout. Out of over 16,000 alumni of DTS, Bruce holds the distinction of having only 19 people listed after him alphabetically in the alumni directory.



#### A Review of Voddie Baucham Jr.'s Book, Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe.<sup>1</sup>

BY KEN YATES

**B** aucham addresses the problem of critical race theory, intersectionality, and critical social justice, and their impact on our society and Evangelicalism. These ideas view racism as being engrained in the very fabric of America. They see white privilege and white supremacy at the root of all our problems. Taken together, these ideas are the greatest threat to the gospel in our lifetime. The United States is on the verge of either a race war or a complete cultural breakdown (pp. 3-5).

Few people could write this book, and Baucham is one of those few. He is a black man who grew up poor and in a single parent home. During his early years, he experienced his share of racism. He is also an Evangelical, having graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He says that the social justice movement in our country, including Black Lives Matter, is contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures. In addition, many of the cases they say point to racism in our society, such as the killing of black men by police, grossly misinterpret the evidence (pp. 43-61). Whites are more likely than blacks to be shot by police (p. 49).

Baucham is a strong Calvinist. He says he became a believer when he believed the gospel and repented of his sins (p. 24). He points out that the antiracism movement is a religion that does not offer any salvation because it sees racism as incurable (p. 67). In their view, white people oppress people of color even when they do not realize it. A professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary states that white people created whiteness in order to enslave black people (p. 71).

One problem in Evangelicalism is that many leaders are falling for the teaching that being white is the problem and that America and the American church are indeed racist to the core. Racism is no longer seen as a problem with certain individuals or a matter of the sinful heart but is systemic. We must confess our sins of white racism, supremacy, and privilege (p. 77). Even when we do, it will remain. We must acknowledge this sin that can never go away or be forgiven.

Oppressed minorities include more than people of color. Women, LGBTQIA, non-citizens, the disabled, the obese, the poor, and non-Christians, among others, are part of the group. All of the oppressed have special knowledge and are able to see things that whites cannot. Baucham calls them "ethnic gnostics" (p. 92). Baucham says that Scriptures are our source of truth, not the personal feelings of oppressed groups (p. 120). He says we should pursue justice, peace, and unity, but they cannot be obtained by associating ourselves with movements that are contrary to the Scriptures and distort the gospel.

One of the strong points of the book is how Baucham describes what is going on in Evangelical seminaries and denominations such as his own Southern Baptist Convention. Seminary professors are warned not to say things contrary to the social justice mantra. Pastors must watch what they say as well. These leaders risk being fired for telling the truth (p. 138).

Americans in general, and even Evangelicals, feel the same fear that their leaders do. Over 60 percent of Americans admit that they do not say certain things because others will find them offensive (p. 154). White people are told that their inability to see what the social justice movement is saying only proves they are racists. Baucham says the problems in the black community are not systemic racism. Out of wedlock births, poor education, rising crime, and abortion, not white privilege, are four major factors hurting that community.

Baucham calls out conservative Evangelicals for bowing to the pressure.

The Black Lives Matter movement is discussed by Baucham at length. He decries the fact that many Evangelical leaders have lent their support to it. But the organization is openly pagan and feminist and pro-LGTBQIA. It seeks to destroy the family. He calls upon pastors to bravely speak the truth (p. 223).

Baucham's use of the Scriptures is questionable when he applies certain passages to social issues. However, this is not a major part of the book. His main point is that conservative Evangelicals do not see the war raging in our midst. Our leaders, as well as the people in the pew, are succumbing to cultural movements. They either fear being called a racist or have accepted the false notion that they are, simply as the result of being a white Christian. A massive earthquake is coming, and we are already feeling the distinct rumblings underneath us. This book makes us aware of what we are confronting. I highly recommend it.



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# Is It Possible Your View of the Gospel Is Wrong?

By Bob Wilkin

ohn Carlson asked me that question. A few weeks later, I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life. That was no coincidence. His question led to my new birth.

Countless people over the centuries have come to faith in the same way. They lacked assurance and someone came along and asked them to consider something different from what they believed up to that point. The Holy Spirit then used that witness to guide the confused unbeliever who lacked assurance to ask God to show him if assurance is possible.

You may have heard how people learn how to spot counterfeit \$100 bills. They must study the real thing very carefully. Once they know precisely what the real thing is, the counterfeits become easy to spot.

The same is true in terms of the promise of everlasting life. Once you understand and believe it, you can spot false gospels easily.

But what of the person who is believing a false gospel and who is unaware that it is a false gospel?

That is where people like John Carlson step in to help the confused person see the light.

Here is an odd suggestion. When you are sharing the promise of everlasting life with someone, you might ask something like, "Are you aware of the top five false gospels today?" I bet that will interest them. I know it would interest me. That is certainly not a common approach.

Here is my suggestion for the top five false gospels today:

- 1. Turn or burn.
- 2. Trust and obey.
- 3. Follow Christ.
- 4. Submit to Christ.
- 5. Pray the sinner's prayer.

You might then ask them if they know why those five are all false gospels.

Here is the key. You are seeking to get them to think about what a person must do to have everlasting life. If they begin to wonder if they might not know the answer, they become interested.

Here is a simple way to deal with those five false gospels: compare them to the real deal. Compare them to the true gospel as found in John 3:16 or Gal 2:16 or Eph 2:8-9.

The true gospel says that whoever believes in Jesus will never perish but has everlasting life that can never be lost.

The false gospel focuses on our deeds, good and bad. We need to turn from our bad deeds and commit to a lifetime of good deeds in order to pay the price for our salvation. False gospels do not focus on Christ. They do not focus on the fact that He paid it all and there is nothing left for us to pay. They do not focus on His promise of everlasting life that can never be lost.

Nearly all false gospels say that a person must persevere in faith and good works until death to gain what they call *final salvation*. But the true gospel says salvation is final the very moment we believe in Jesus for everlasting life.

Malls have anchor stores like Sears, Macy's, JC Penney, and Nordstrom. I suggest the same thing for showing people the true gospel. Pick a verse or two that presents the promise of everlasting life to the believer. I suggest verses like John 3:16; 5:24; 11:25-27; Acts 16:30-31; Gal 2:16; or Eph 2:8-9.

Now don't expect that the minute you mention your anchor verse(s) the person will see the light. It took me multiple one-hour appointments with a Cru staff member, Warren Wilke, before I was persuaded of the truth of his anchor verses, Eph 2:8-9.

But what you should expect is objections like "That's too easy." "If that were true, then bad people would go to heaven." "If I believed that, then I'd go out and live like the devil."

"But what about James 2?" "Didn't Jesus tell us to deny ourselves and follow Him?"

When you hear such objections, it is time to rejoice. The person is thinking. Now if they are closed and hardened of heart, you will soon discover that, and your joy will turn to sadness. But if these are genuine questions from someone who is open and who wants to be sure of his eternal destiny, then they are not far from the kingdom of God.

Is it possible that your view of the gospel is wrong?

If you do not know for sure that you have everlasting life that can never be lost, then the answer to that question is yes. In fact, it is not just possible your view is wrong. It is certain that it is wrong. That is because the Lord Jesus and His apostles taught that anyone who believes in Jesus is eternally secure with no strings attached.

Know and believe the true gospel. Then be available to share that message with hungry people who want to be sure of their eternal destinies. There are millions of people like that, and God is in the business of linking up people like John Carlson with people like me. Carry the living water with you every day so that when you encounter thirsty people you can be used by God to quench their thirst.



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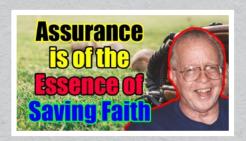
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