

# GRACE (**in**) FOCUS

## ADVICE FOR SINGLE MEN AND WOMEN IN TODAY'S CULTURE

It's About Time

Credible Claims of Christ

How Can Regular Peeps Be Sure?

I Could Never Commit *That Sin*

Was Ironside a Lordship Teacher?

The Sufficiency of John's Gospel

The Siege Continues

And much more...

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# Letter from the Editor

What some people call *climate change*, I call *winter, spring, summer, and fall*. Based on Scripture, it is clear that God guarantees to preserve our planet until the Lord Jesus returns. That is the true meaning of the rainbow.

Of course, we are called upon by God to take care of the planet He has given us dominion over. Christians should be exemplary citizens in every way, including driving, camping, hunting, fishing, policing our own trash, recycling, and caring for the environment.

But we must always remember who is in control. God is in control. History is His story.

So in the dog days of summer, let's not forget our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer.

Recently at my church, Coppell Bible Fellowship, Pastor Barkef Osigian has been preaching through Second Peter. He has shown that we live in a world inconsistent with God's creation mandate. God made us male and female. But our culture today rejects God's design.

The worst rejection of God's teachings is found in the area of salvation. All of the world's religions other than Christianity teach salvation through perseverance in doing good. But of the 2.38 billion professing Christians today, the vast majority teach the same thing, salvation through perseverance in doing good.



We at *Grace in Focus* want our readers to focus on God's grace, His favor. John 3:16 is clear. Whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life and will never perish. What a fantastic promise that is!

And the NT is clear that if believers abide in Christ and His Word abides in us, we will experience the abundant life He wishes for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bob Wilkin". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Robert N. Wilkin

## PSALM 90:

# It's About Time

PHILIPPE STERLING



A man went in for his annual checkup and received a call from his doctor a few days later. The doctor said, “I’m afraid I have bad news for you.”

“What’s the news?” the man asked.

“Well, you have only 48 hours to live.”

“That is bad news!” said the shocked patient.

“I’m afraid there’s even worse news,” the doctor continued.

“What could be worse than what you’ve already told me?” the man stammered.

“I’ve been trying to call you since yesterday.”

That’s not news any of us would want to hear. But we do ourselves a disservice if we don’t remember that our time here is limited. We all have

a limited number of days to live. One of the wisest things we can do is to live in light of that reality. We find encouragement to do just that in Psalm 90.

### A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God

Psalm 90, the oldest psalm in the Book of Psalms, is the only psalm attributed to Moses. He wrote it sometime during the forty years that Israel wandered in the Sinai Desert as a result of God’s judgment on its disobedience (ca. 1440-1400 BC). Two to three million people had left Egypt, and a whole generation died as they made that trek. There would have been constant deaths. You could have tracked the journey by the graves left behind.

In the midst of this, Moses reflected on realities that are as true today as they were then.

Recall the last time you went to a funeral. Do you remember how the incidental stuff of life faded away as you focused on what's actually important?

In Psalm 90, Moses tells us what's important. He arranges the psalm in an inverted parallelism. At the structure's center, he sets forth what is vital for us to do in light of the facts concerning both God's character and the brevity of our lives on this earth.

- A The Eternal God and Our Security (1-2)
- B Our Physical Life Under the Curse (3-6)
- C God's Wrath and Our Wise Response (7-12)
- B' Our Spiritual Life Above the Curse (13-15)
- A' The Eternal God and Our Significance (16-17)

## A. THE ETERNAL GOD AND OUR SECURITY (1-2)

The first two verses provide a starting note of praise for the security that God provides for believers in this world and in the world to come. Our eternal God gives lasting security in all generations.

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

Moses wants us to consider our time on Earth in light of God's eternity. Before Egypt, before the mountains were brought forth, before the earth was formed, God was God. He is God from everlasting to everlasting, with no beginning and no end. He exists from eternity to eternity.

This past year went by quickly for many of us. We don't know what the current year will bring. Whether for people living in tents in Moses' day, or for people living in houses today, God can be a dwelling place.

Generations come and go, but God remains constant in His concern and care for us. The Lord is our refuge in all generations. Jesus is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8). God provides the security we need for life in this world and the world to come.

## B. OUR PHYSICAL LIFE UNDER THE CURSE (3-6)

Verses 3 to 6 are a lament that describes our plight in this world. We live a short and difficult life in a world under the curse.

You turn man to destruction,  
And say, "Return, o children of men."  
For a thousand years in Your sight  
Are like yesterday when it is past,  
And like a watch in the night.  
You carry them away like a flood;  
They are like a sleep.  
In the morning they are like grass which  
grows up:  
In the morning it flourishes and grows up;  
In the evening it is cut down and withers.

Moses invites us to consider our lives on this earth. In contrast to God, who is eternal, Moses says that our lives are short and brutal.

Adam's sin brought hardship and death into the world. God's judgment was: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Man is "dust in the wind."

Enormous amounts of time are insignificant to God. In light of His eternity, a thousand years are like a day to Him. From our human perspective, a thousand years seems a very long time. A thousand years ago, skilled scribes in medieval Europe labored for years to produce a single copy of the Scriptures, for Gutenberg had yet to invent and produce his printing press. We think of this as having been long, long ago, but to God, it's as if it were only yesterday.

A human life—even the longest human life—is short. It's like a three-hour watch in the night, a flash flood, a fleeting night's dream, or some grass that sprouts in the morning and dies at night.

We're here for a fleeting moment, and then we're gone. Death is certain. We're dust in the winds of time. That puts things into perspective, doesn't it?

### C. GOD'S WRATH AND OUR WISE RESPONSE (7-12)

Verses 7 to 9 make it plain that we live under God's wrath. Our lives are short and challenging because of God's wrath resulting from man's sin.

For we have been consumed by Your anger,  
And by Your wrath we are terrified.  
You have set our iniquities before You,  
Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.  
For all our days have passed away in Your wrath;  
We finish our years like a sigh.

Our lives are complicated because of God's anger. Remember why a whole generation of Israelites died in the wilderness. After the twelve spies returned from Canaan, the people had rebelled against God by believing the majority report claiming that the people of the land were too great for the Israelites to conquer. God said, "I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die" (Num 14:35).

The Israelites were living in tents and dying in the wilderness as a consequence of sin. We're not living in tents and dying in the wilderness, but life is hard and short. We're still dealing with the consequences of sin and the mess it has made in this world. We're still having to cope with God's righteous anger over sin. God's opposition to sin consumes us.

God sees and knows all our sins. The thoughts that we harbor in the privacy of our minds and the things that we do in our personal lives are in plain view of the light of God's countenance.

Our days pass away quickly because of God's judgment on sin. They come to an end like a "sigh."

Reflect on the reality of God's eternality and of the brevity of our lives. Our human lives are short and hard. Respond rightly.

Verses 10-12 set out the right response. The proper response to God's wrath is to implore God to give us wisdom in living out our fleeting days.

The days of our lives are seventy years;  
And if by reason of strength they are eighty years,  
Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;  
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.  
Who knows the power of Your anger?  
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.  
So teach us to number our days,  
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Moses notes that normal life expectancy will be about 70 years, and that an extended lifespan may reach 80.<sup>1</sup> Our lives are full of toil and trouble. We soon fly away in death. How should we respond?

Respond by numbering your days.

If you're 25, you have 16,200 days left to live.  
If you're 35, you have 12,775 days left to live.  
If you're 45, you have 9,175 days left to live.  
If you're 65, you have 1,925 days left to live.  
If you're 70, you're in grace time.<sup>2</sup>

Respond by asking God for wisdom in living out your days. Ephesians 5:15-17 exhorts us to redeem the time: "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Treasure time as a valuable asset. Benjamin Franklin said, "Do not squander time, for it is the stuff life is made of."

Invest time wisely for eternal purposes. You can't save time, but you can invest it so that it counts for eternity. Billy Graham encouraged the graduating students at a Wheaton College commencement: "Time is the capital that God has given us to invest."

Manage time well on a daily basis.

Enjoy God's good gifts such as food, drink, and marriage all the days of your life and do good (Eccl 2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 9:9).



## B'. OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE ABOVE THE CURSE (13-15)

Verses 13 to 15 comprise a prayer for God's mercy. We can pray that God would turn to us in compassion. We can pray that God would turn our sorrow into joy.

Return, O Lord!  
How long?  
And have compassion on Your servants.  
Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,  
That we may rejoice and be glad all our  
days!  
Make us glad according to the days in  
which You have afflicted us,  
The years in which we have seen evil.

In light of the brevity and difficulty of life, Moses prays for several things.

First, he prays that God will relent in His anger. It's a prayer that God's anger will not be the final word. It's a prayer that God will show us grace. It's a prayer that has been answered in Christ, who bore away our sin (John 1:29) and has given us grace upon grace (John 1:16). He has promised everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47).

Second, Moses prays that God will give him gladness and joy. God's goodness and mercy can accompany us throughout our lives (Ps 23:6).

## A'. THE ETERNAL GOD AND OUR SIGNIFICANCE (16-17)

Verses 16-17 constitute a prayer for God's favor in life. Our eternal God gives lasting significance to our labors.

Let Your work appear to Your servants,  
And Your glory to their children.  
And let the beauty of the LORD our God  
be upon us,  
And establish the work of our hands for us;  
Yes, establish the work of our hands.

Finally, Moses prays that God's favor will rest upon his life and work. Pray that God will show you His favor daily. Ask Him for His blessing on your life, that He would establish the work of your hands.

Our work in Christ is not in vain and will be rewarded in the life to come. Paul concluded his message on the resurrection with this exhortation: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). Number your days and present to God a wise heart. It's about time.

Psalm 90 moved Isaac Watts to write *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*. His stanzas parallel the psalm's verses. His familiar first stanza is: "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home." The eternal God is our help and our hope. ■



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.

- 1 Editor's note: Moses lived to be 120, and his brother Aaron, 123. Possibly, Moses wrote this when he was 80. In any case, Moses was not saying that these ages were set in stone. Today the life expectancy in America is 77.28. In Botswana, it is 65.65. In India, it is 70.15. People born in Chad, Nigeria, and Lesotho all have life expectancies of between 53 and 55. The people of Hong Kong, Japan, Macao, and Switzerland have life expectancies of 84 or 85.
- 2 Editor's note: I turned 70 last year. While I realize I might live to be 100, I know my time could be up this year. The GES board has made plans for the day when I either die or cannot continue doing this work. To fail to plan is to plan to fail.

# IF CHRISTIAN LEADERS AREN'T SURE, HOW CAN REGULAR PEEPS BE SURE

BOB  
WILKIN

I watch the news for a few minutes each morning before leaving for work. On Good Friday morning this year, I watched Brian Kilmeade interview Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York.

The ending of the interview struck me.

Kilmeade asked Cardinal Dolan if he hoped to become Pope.

Cardinal Dolan replied, "I'm seventy-three years old. I'm very happy here. And as I said earlier, all I want to do is get to heaven."

Kilmeade smiled and said, "You are on your way."

Cardinal Dolan's response was sadly less than what we might expect: "I hope so."

I've heard that before from Calvinist and Arminian pastors and theologians.

I've had debates with three or four prominent Calvinists. They all said they were unsure of whether they'd go to heaven or hell. They believe that only those who persevere in faith and good

works will make it. And they aren't sure they will persevere.

I've debated several Arminian pastors and theologians as well. Same answer. They are unsure of their final destination because they are not sure they will persevere until death.

Here are two examples of prominent Calvinists who say they are unsure of their eternal destinies:

**Dr. R. C. Sproul.** In a November 1989 *Table-talk* article, he wrote:

A while back, I had one of those moments of acute self-awareness that we have from time to time, and suddenly the question hit me: "R.C., what if you are not one of the redeemed? What if your destiny is not heaven after all, but hell?" Let me tell you that I was flooded in my body with a chill that went from my head to the bottom of my spine. I was terrified.

He concluded that though unsure of his eternal destiny, he had learned that "being uncomfortable with Jesus was better than any other option!"

**Dr. John Piper.** At the *Desiring God* website, in an article entitled "Helping People Have the



Assurance of Salvation,” Dr. John Piper says that assurance requires “the painful work of self-examination” and that “assurance is a fight until the day we die.”<sup>1</sup>

Another prominent Calvinist is Dr. John MacArthur. While I’ve not found any example of his coming coming right out and saying he’s unsure, I’ve found plenty of quotes that show he must be.

At the *Grace to You* website, in a message entitled “Resting in the Assurance of Our Salvation,” he says that assurance is found in the objective promises in the Bible *and in our subjective works*. He adds, “What is going on in my life? Am I seeing a transformation in my life? because that’s essential, that’s essential.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, no one can be sure that he will persevere in faith and good works (1 Cor 9:27). No matter how much good people see in their lives, they are imperfect and fallible. Falling away is always possible. But if your theology says that those who fall away will be eternally condemned, then you do not know your own eternal destiny.

MacArthur wrote a book about assurance called *Saved Without a Doubt*. Chapter 6 is entitled “Dealing with Doubt.” There he writes, “Some lack assurance because they are under strong preaching on God’s holy standard. Such preaching forces people to see their sinfulness and acknowledge that the holiness of God calls them to a lofty standard of living” (p. 95).

He continues, “Those who preach as they should will find some in their congregation plagued with doubt. Is that bad? No, *the pulpit is rightly the creator of anxious hearts*. How else can it unsettle those who have false assurance?” (p. 96, italics added).

If the people at the top of Protestant and Catholic ministries are unsure of their eternal destinies, how can any regular folk be sure?

The answer is simple: We need to disconnect assurance from perseverance. Our eternal destiny does not depend upon the level and continuity of our faithful service to Christ.

Of course, doing that requires personal involvement. If we follow a tradition that denies the promise of everlasting life to the believer, then we will

not be sure. We must pray about this and study God’s Word, especially the Gospel of John.

I have written a new book titled *The Gospel Is Still Under Siege*. It is a sequel to Zane Hodges’s 1981 book, *The Gospel Under Siege*.

Brian Kilmeade’s interview with Cardinal Dolan reminds me that the gospel is still under siege.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting that Christian leaders who are unsure of their salvation intentionally attack the gospel. They don’t. They are genuinely unsure. They share their uncertainty with those who will listen. But regardless of their intentions, their traditions—whether Calvinist, Catholic, Arminian, or Orthodox—are all in conflict with the promise of everlasting life to anyone who simply believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I’m not saying that these leaders are necessarily unsaved. Dolan, Sproul, Piper, and MacArthur may all have believed in the promise of everlasting life in the past. If so, they remain eternally secure today despite having lost their assurance. But those who have *never* been sure have not yet been born again. If you believe John 3:16, you are certain you will never perish. You know you have everlasting life.

Are you sure you will be with the Lord and His people forever? It does not take great faith. It only takes faith. Take Jesus at His word and you settle the issue of your eternal destiny once and for all. Check out John 3:16. Pray about it. It really is quite simple. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked ten marathons.

1 Available here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/helping-people-have-the-assurance-of-salvation>. Last accessed April 11, 2023.

2 Available here: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-286/resting-in-the-assurance-of-our-salvation>. Last accessed April 11, 2023.



# Christ Is Credible,

## PART TWO: THE CREDIBLE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

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DIX WINSTON

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Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God. The New Testament presents Him as being fully God and fully human. His death paid for the sins of the whole world. As a result, anybody who believes in Him for eternal life receives it as a free gift.

These are all incredible claims. They would certainly indicate that He was a unique Person in all of history. The question is: Are they true?

For at least four reasons, the answer is a resounding “yes”! Jesus lived a predicted life. He lived a powerful life. He lived a perfect life. Finally, He lived a prevailing life.

### **A Predicted Life**

In the OT, there are more than three hundred prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. They were written over a thousand-year period, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Some of these are miraculous in nature, such as the prophecy that He would be born of a virgin. A skeptic would naturally reject such things. But even those prophecies that do not fall into those kinds of categories point to a one-of-a-kind Man.

One prophecy in the OT was that the coming Messiah would be Jewish, a descendant of

Abraham (Gen 22:18). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy (Matt 1:1).

But the Christ must come from a particular tribe of Israel, which was Judah (Gen 49:10). Jesus was part of this narrower section of the nation (Luke 3:23, 33).

Within the tribe of Judah, the Messiah was to be from a particular family. He was to be a son of David (Jer 23:5). Luke tells us that the Lord was indeed a part of the house of David.

These prophecies did not just deal with His background. They also addressed where He would be born. The Christ was going to be born in a particular small town, which was Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). Because of extraordinary historical circumstances, Jesus was born in that particular insignificant town (Matt 2:1).

Writing about seven hundred years before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah predicted that He would suffer and be rejected by the nation of Israel (Isaiah 53). An example of this suffering was predicted by one of the psalmists, who wrote that the Christ would die by crucifixion (Ps 22:16)—a means of execution that did not exist in his own day.

What were the odds that one man would fulfill these, along with all the other prophecies the OT writers said would be true of a particular Man who would live hundreds of years in the future? When we include the predictions that involved the Messiah's miraculous powers, it is safe to say only one Person fits the bill.

## A Powerful Life

The pages of the NT are full of examples of the power of Christ. He cast out demons. He healed the sick. He exercised dominion over creation itself, by walking on the Sea of Galilee. He even raised the dead.

While unbelievers would scoff at such things, it must be remembered that even His enemies acknowledged that He performed such miraculous deeds. A man named Nicodemus, who at the time did not believe He was the Christ, stated that He was able to do mighty works through the power of

God (John 3:1-2). Later, these healings would lead Nicodemus to believe in Him.

Even those who eventually put Jesus to death could not deny that He possessed supernatural power. Jews of His day had various opinions of Him. Because of the power He exhibited in His healings, many thought He was a prophet, even if they didn't think He was the Son of God.

Other writings outside of the NT also testify that Jesus was able to exercise that power. Of course, the writers of the NT, who were often eyewitnesses of the things Jesus did, attest to their reality.

The evidence is overwhelming. Whatever somebody thinks about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, He was a Man who did miraculous things.

## A Perfect Life

Jesus of Nazareth backed up His claim that He was the Son of God by the life that he lived. The New Testament writers say He lived a perfect life. One of His closest disciples, Peter, would later write that His life was "unblemished and spotless" (1 Pet 1:18). This, of course, would be the case if He was God in the flesh. God, after all, is perfectly holy. It is impossible for Him to sin.

The life of Jesus was on full display, even before His enemies. It is noteworthy that they were not able to accuse Him of any sin. Once, those who opposed Him did so because He was claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God. They were unwilling to believe such things.

At this time, the Lord had been ministering all over Israel. Thousands upon thousands, including His enemies, had seen how He lived. His life was an open book. To those who would have been quick to point out His faults He asked, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:46).

What man would ever ask such a question, especially a man who was well-known to a whole nation of people? Those who spend time around a man can easily identify his weaknesses. But that was not the case with this Man. Not even those who wanted to put Him to death could find any sin with which to charge Him. None of them pointed out any moral shortcoming of Jesus of Nazareth.

The same would be true for the man who would be most responsible for executing Him. Even he knew that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. The charges brought against Him were bogus. The Roman governor Pilate, who was not a believer, admitted that Christ was not guilty (Luke 23:4). In front of those who wanted to kill Him, Pilate famously washed his hands. The act signified that he realized Jesus was completely innocent (Matt 27:24).

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God who had eternal life to give to anybody who believed in Him for it. Coming from any other man, such claims would be preposterous. But He backed it up by living a perfect life.

He backed it up in another way as well.

## A Prevailing Life

Jesus told His disciples that He would prove the veracity of His claims by rising from the dead. Did He?

It was a certainty that He died. All four Gospel writers state it. More than that, nobody could survive what He, a crucified Man, went through. He had been beaten and whipped and hung upon the cross for hours. There would have been a tremendous loss of blood. After He died, a soldier pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water poured out.

A Roman centurion, who had seen many men die, confirmed to the Roman governor that Jesus had died. The men who removed Him from the cross prepared His body for burial and obviously could tell He was dead. They wrapped the body with many pounds of spices and ointment in order to delay the decomposition of the body for as long as possible.

They placed Him in a tomb, which was sealed with a very heavy stone. It would have been around six feet in diameter. The authorities placed guards around the tomb, so that nobody would steal the dead body. There were probably sixteen such guards. Everybody—His friends and enemies alike—knew He was dead.

Without a doubt, the tomb was empty three days later. All four Gospel writers attest to it, and explain that He rose from the dead. Many of His disciples proclaimed that they had seen Him, on many different occasions.

His enemies have concocted different theories as to how that tomb became empty while denying the resurrection of Christ. Some have said He didn't really die and was able to roll the heavy stone away after going three days in the tomb after His crucifixion. He was then able to get past the sixteen guards.

Others have said that the disciples stole the body. They were able to get past the guards, roll the stone away, unwrap the linens around the body, and remove the body, all without the guards realizing what was happening. They then lied, saying He was risen. Afterwards, almost all of them gladly laid down their lives preaching that message.

Any neutral person looking at the evidence will immediately see that such theories defy credulity. The most logical answer—in fact, the only one that makes sense—is that Jesus rose from the dead.

## Conclusion

Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be God. As such, He could give eternal life to anybody who believed in Him for it. Such claims would be rejected out of hand by any ordinary man who made them.

But Jesus was different. He backed it up with four credentials. Those who knew Him best confirmed these credentials. He lived a predicted life, a powerful life, a perfect life, and a prevailing life.

Any one of these would cause a person to investigate His claims. Taking all four together leaves us with only one conclusion: what He claimed is true. ■



Dix is the senior pastor of Crosspoint Community Church in Centennial, Colorado. He and his wife, Cynthia, recently welcomed their first grandson, Gunnar Titus. Dix is unashamedly Dispensational and Free Grace!





*Ken and Kathryn met several of our translators for a beautiful meal outside*



*Bob showed off his height by towering over a few of the great members of Bayside Community Church*



*Bob taught Dr. Robby Dean's Zoom class*

## WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



*Kathryn is either teaching or lettin' her rip at the American Idol finale*



*Bob & Sherry Bryant meet with Bob, Kathryn, Letitia, and Mike*



*Bob and David Renfro recording more podcasts. They've done a few.*

# DON'T THINK YOU'RE SO HOLY THAT YOU COULDN'T COMMIT *THAT* *SIN*

KEN YATES





All my Christian life I've heard people say things like this: "A real Christian would never commit *that sin*." Of course, those who say such a thing differ on what *that sin* would be. However, one of the "really big" sins is to deny Christ. It is common to hear preachers and Bible teachers say that anybody who is truly a believer could never do that.

All of that is arbitrary. Why is denying Christ worse than a host of other sins, like adultery? What if a believer denies the Lord in a moment of anger? What if his life, or the life of a family member, is threatened? What if, especially as a new believer, he is exposed to some teachings by a cult that leads to denial? What if he does it when he is simply having a very bad day, such as after going through painful chemotherapy because of cancer? What if he feels sorry for doing it later, and if so, how much time can pass before it is too late to confess that sin?

Hopefully, if we consider these kinds of questions, we will reconsider our opinion on this matter. The view that a believer cannot deny the Lord springs from a very basic misunderstanding. It fails to see just how sinful we are. As long as we are alive on this earth, we will possess our flesh. In that flesh, in the right situation, a believer can commit any sin, including denying the Lord.

Thankfully, due to the grace of God, eternal life is a free gift we receive by believing in Jesus Christ for it. It can never be lost, even if we deny Him.

Once we understand such things, it is wise to realize the danger we face. While we cannot lose our eternal salvation, we can dishonor the Lord by denying Him. We can look at believers who have done it and learn from their experiences.

There is a famous example of such a believer in the New Testament.

## Meet Peter

The Apostle Peter famously denied the Lord three times. This, by itself, should settle the issue of whether a believer can commit that sin once and for all.

It is easy to understand why Peter did what he did. He was under enormous pressure. He had attacked a governmental official a few hours earlier in a garden, attempting to murder him (John 18:10). Those who were asking him if he knew Jesus, suspected that he had been in the garden. In fact, one of them was a relative of the man Peter attacked (John 18:26). Peter feared for his safety.

This was compounded by the fact that Jesus Himself was on trial, right above the spot where Peter was standing. The Lord would be given a death sentence by the court He stood in. It was dangerous to be associated with Him.

Peter had the natural desire to value his own comfort. He knew that if he spoke the truth about Jesus, he would be punished. He feared what the authorities would do to him. He wanted to avoid any negative consequences. Mark relates how he sought his own comfort in even the smallest detail: while Jesus was being beaten, Peter was warming himself by a fire because of the coolness in the air (Mark 14:67).

Of course, Peter knew it was wrong to deny Christ. As a result, he tried to avoid doing so. In his first denial, he simply walked away from the girl who questioned whether he knew the Lord, saying he didn't understand what she was saying. This did not work. A larger crowd noticed him in his new location. The same girl pointed out to the bystanders that Peter was an associate of Christ. He could not simply walk away, but he had to deal with several accusations. He had to deny it many times. Peter had gotten the attention of a large group, and they pressed the issue. After thinking it over and observing him, they confronted him again. He had to repeatedly and strongly deny that he knew Christ.

Peter was more concerned about what those around him thought and would potentially do to him than doing what was right. Every believer should realize we could all find ourselves in a similar situation and do the same thing.

We also know how he responded. When he realized what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly.

In the Gospel of Mark, we also see in another way just how painful his denials of the Lord were for him.

## “Mark, Put This Next”

There is a long tradition in church history that states that Peter was the source for much of the material that Mark uses in the Gospel of Mark. Mark was not an eyewitness for most of the events in Christ’s life, so Peter’s input would have been extremely valuable.

It would have been difficult for Peter to relate to Mark how he had denied Christ as the Lord faced His death on the cross. Peter was brutally honest about his failings, but his shame concerning his actions intensified as he continued the story.

Peter told Mark what happened to the Lord next. In Mark’s gospel, the account of Christ’s trial before Pilate occurs immediately after Peter’s denials (Mark 14:66-72; 15:1-15). We can almost hear Peter telling Mark to put them side by side. Peter wants the readers of the book to understand his betrayal. He wants us to see he was just like Pilate.

## Meet Pilate

There are a lot of parallels between Peter and Pilate in this section of Mark. Jesus stood on trial before the Sanhedrin. Now, He stands on trial before Pilate. In both instances, His life is on the line. Both trials will result in Him being found worthy of death.

Like Peter, Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent and unworthy of death. But he too is afraid

to speak the truth. He is worried about the people around him and what they will say. As a Roman governor, he had a comfortable and prosperous life. He was in danger of losing that if he did the right thing. He was very concerned about his own personal comfort.

Pilate was in his position in Judah because he was appointed to it by those in power in Rome. He also had to answer for any decision he made to his superior in Syria. Historians tell us that his loyalty to Rome had begun to be questioned by Caesar. In addition, the Jews had made some complaints about him. As a result, Pilate was on shaky political ground.

Now, the Jews were saying that Jesus was claiming to be the King of the Jews. They said He was a threat to Rome. But Caesar proclaimed that he was the king. How would it look if Pilate simply let Jesus go? Pilate was concerned about losing his job and any other possible punishment he would experience if he did not kill Jesus of Nazareth.

Like Peter in the previous section, Pilate tries to get himself out of the situation. He doesn’t want to kill Jesus, so he tells the crowds that He is innocent. He then offers to release Him because it is the Passover, as a demonstration of Rome’s grace to the Jews. He scourges Jesus, hoping that the crowd would be satisfied with that level of punishment and spare the Lord’s life.

None of this, however, works. Like the crowd that prompted Peter to deny the Lord, the crowd in front of Pilate call for the crucifixion of Christ and compel Pilate to crucify Him. Peter wept bitterly. Pilate also regretted what he had to do and washed his hands before those who called for the crucifixion.

Pilate was an unbeliever. Peter was a believer. But they had something in common. When it came to how they reacted to the sufferings of Christ, they were more concerned about their own safety than doing the right thing. They feared what the crowd around them would do to them.

Pilate and Peter were more concerned about their own safety than doing the right thing. They feared what the crowd around them would do to them.

## Conclusion

Anybody who has ever believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life has it. It can never be lost. That is the promise Christ has made to us. It is a gift because of God's grace towards us in His Son. The sins we commit cannot change that in any way.

Throughout church history, however, many have wanted to deny these truths. Certainly, they claim, there are some sins that would cause us to lose eternal life. Others would say there are sins that a Christian could never commit. One of those sins is denying the Lord.

Peter shows us that is not the case. He teaches us that even after we have believed in Christ, we continue to be subject to fearing for our own safety and comfort. We can become more concerned about what the crowds and the world think of us and what they might do, than pleasing the Lord.

In other words, to put it simply, we are still sinners. It is sobering to realize that we can be like Peter, and do what he did. But Peter, through the Gospel of Mark, wants us to see that we can also be like Pilate. We can think and act like the unbelieving world, just as Peter did.

We need to recognize what we are capable of doing in our sinful flesh. The next time you think of a sin you could never commit, look at the portraits of Peter and Pilate that Mark places side by side for us in Mark 14–15. It is only then that we will have the wisdom to ask the Lord to live through us and strengthen us against those temptations. ■



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# What Did I Know?

Mike (Tsung-Tsun) Lii

I didn't grow up in a professing Christian home. When I was an elementary student, our family attended church once or twice a year, not necessarily on Easter or Christmas. During my middle school years, I was taken more regularly to a Taiwanese-speaking Presbyterian church, which should have increased my Bible knowledge. But, due to the language barrier, it did not.

By the time I was a junior in high school, what was the extent of my knowledge of the Bible and Jesus? From my limited exposure, I regarded the Bible as a special book but did not realize it was God's inerrant word. I also believed that Jesus was a special person, and I remembered, from my childhood, the stories of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and walking on water. But I did not know that Jesus was God who had come as a human.

I also did not understand the significance of Christmas. I had no idea that the *Christ* in *Christmas* was Jesus Christ, since the *Christ* in *Christmas* is pronounced differently from the *Christ* in *Jesus Christ*. Christmas was a great time of get-

ting toys, taking a break from school, and watching holiday specials on TV. When I was six or seven, I wrote a wish list for Santa. But when none of my wishes were realized—even though I thought I had been pretty good that year—I knew Santa was just make-believe.

I also had no idea of the significance of Easter. It was fun to dye eggs and get candy, especially sugar-coated marshmallow Peeps. I did not even know why crosses were so prevalent on church buildings or around people's necks. I was Biblically and theologically ignorant in many basic areas.

I began attending a high school church fellowship on Friday nights during my junior year. I had been attending for about a month when, after the fellowship, one night, the counselor asked to speak to three other guys and me.

The counselor—who was giving me rides to and from the fellowship—asked, “If we got into a car accident on the drive home, would you know for sure that you would go to heaven?”

I replied, “I hope so, because I hope I have done more good than bad.” My theology of salvation was based on what I had seen on TV and in the movies. The counselor proceeded to tell me that no one deserved to go to heaven because all had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). I had no issue with this since I knew I was not perfect and had done wrong in the past.

The counselor then told me about Jesus' death on the cross and showed me Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, and John 3:16. He emphasized that we are saved, not by any works like baptism or going to church, but just by believing in Jesus for salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 really struck a chord with me:

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.

It was then that I understood and believed that I would be with Jesus forever when I died—solely as a free gift—because Jesus had promised eternal life to everyone who believes in Him. Nothing else I needed to do to earn or keep it. Nothing I did or failed to do would result in my losing it. I remem-

ber thinking, “Wow! This really is good news. Why did no one else tell me about this before, in all my past visits to church?”

At that moment, if you had quizzed me on my theological understanding, I would have failed miserably. Regarding the Bible, I would have told you that it was a special book and that the stories about Jesus walking on water and feeding the 5,000 were true, as well as the verses the counselor had shown me (Romans 3:23 and 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, and John 3:16), but I would have told you that I didn’t know whether the Bible was word-for-word true and completely without error.

Regarding Jesus’ deity, I would have told you that Jesus was the literal Son of God the Father, since John 3:16 describes Jesus as God’s Son. I knew and believed that Jesus was a special Person because He walked on water and fed the 5,000 from a little boy’s meal, which no ordinary human could do. However, I had no concept of Jesus’ deity as a member of the Trinity and had never heard about the Holy Spirit.

I recall the counselor’s telling me about and emphasizing Jesus’ death on the cross. He may have mentioned Jesus’ rising from the dead, and I just missed it. Regardless, at that point I still hadn’t understood that Jesus rose from the dead after dying on the cross. That night I did understand the significance of Good Friday, but I still did not understand the significance of Easter/Resurrection Sunday.

However, my childhood belief in two of Jesus’ signs: (1) His feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14) and (2) His walking on water (John 6:16-21), had the intended effect spoken of in John 20:30-31:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.<sup>1</sup>

Because of believing that Jesus miraculously accomplished these two signs, I believed that Jesus was a special Person who could fulfill His promise to give everlasting life to anyone who believes in Him

for that life. Those two signs were enough for me to believe that Jesus’ promise in John 3:16 is true:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That night, I believed in Jesus for everlasting life, and I knew for sure that when I died, I would be with Jesus forever, independent of any good works that I did or didn’t do in the future.

Of course, my knowledge of Jesus increased rapidly in the coming weeks and months because I wanted to know more about the One who had given me eternal life as a free gift. I quickly learned the significance of Easter: that Jesus who died on the cross for me came back alive from the grave. The same Jesus, whom I had believed was the literal Son of God, is actually God who came in the flesh, created the universe, existed for all time, and is a member of the Trinity. I learned that the Bible—which I already thought of as a special book that contains the truth of the message of eternal life—was more than that. Every word of the Bible was true and inerrant.

Although I didn’t know a whole lot about Jesus and the Bible, and though I had some serious deficiencies in my theological understanding, I knew enough to believe in Jesus’ guarantee of everlasting life to all believe in Him for that life. As Jesus has promised in John 6:47:

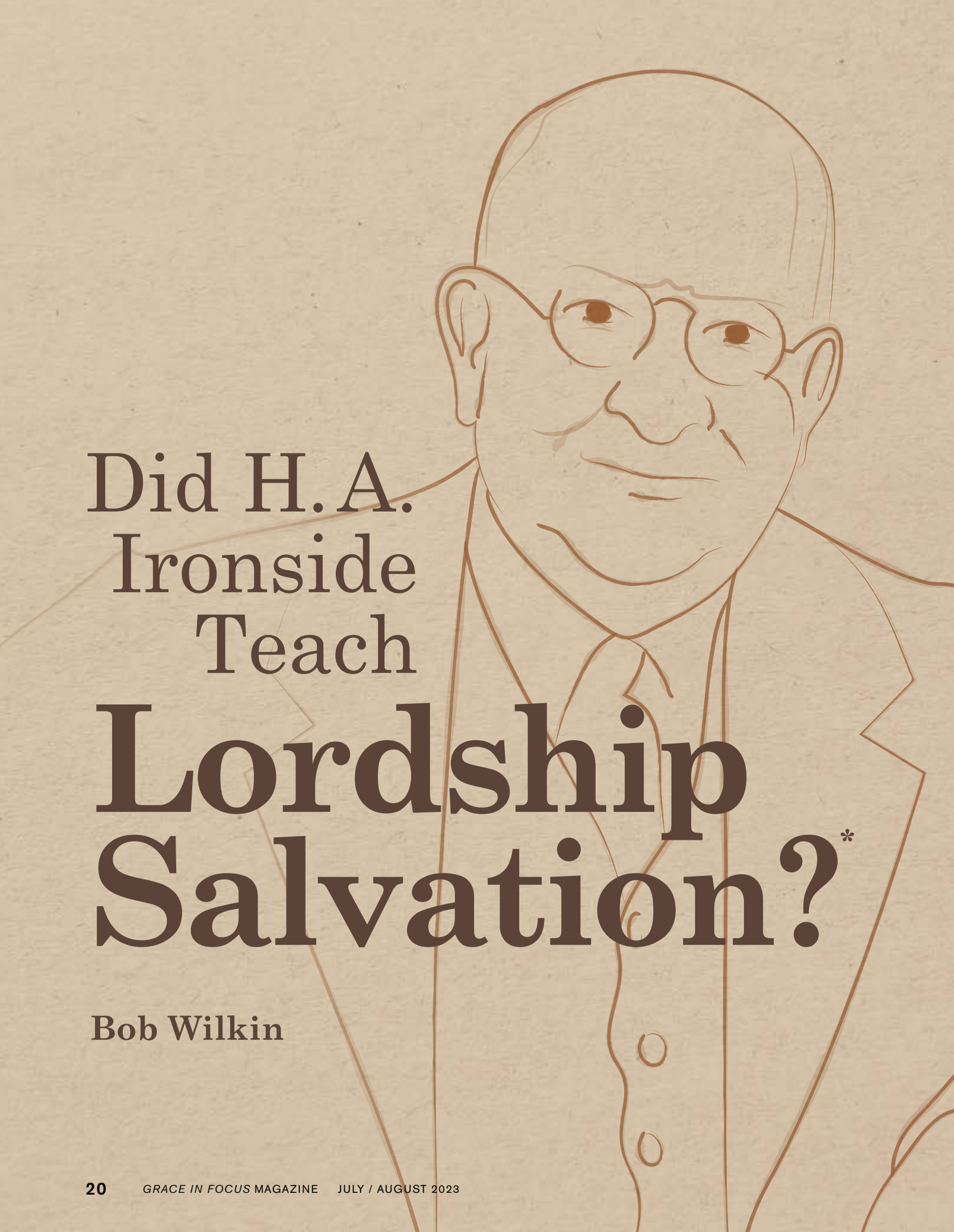
Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

Thank You, Lord, for Your Word. Thank You, Lord, for the Holy Spirit’s use of Jesus’ signs in a child’s life to lead him to believe in Jesus for everlasting life. ■



Mike Lii is a finance attorney. He and his wife, Letitia, a member of the GES board, and their son, Payton, live in Dallas and serve at several Free Grace churches. Mike and Letitia also run the Zane Hodges Library online ([zanehodges.org](http://zanehodges.org)).

<sup>1</sup> To believe that “Jesus is the Christ” is to believe that He gives resurrection and eternal life to every believer in Him. See John 11:25-27.



Did H.A.  
Ironside  
Teach

# Lordship Salvation?\*

Bob Wilkin



\*This article was first published in the June 1989 issue of what was then a newsletter called *The GES News*.

One writer has recently suggested that H. A. Ironside's view of repentance is the same as that of modern Commitment Salvation (i.e., Lordship Salvation) advocates (John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p.160). The impression was given that Ironside taught Lordship Salvation.

This surprised me. I read Ironside's book *Except Ye Repent* as part of my work on my doctoral dissertation. I concluded that he held to the change-of-mind view of repentance, not the turn-from-sins position.

Did Ironside indeed teach Commitment Salvation?

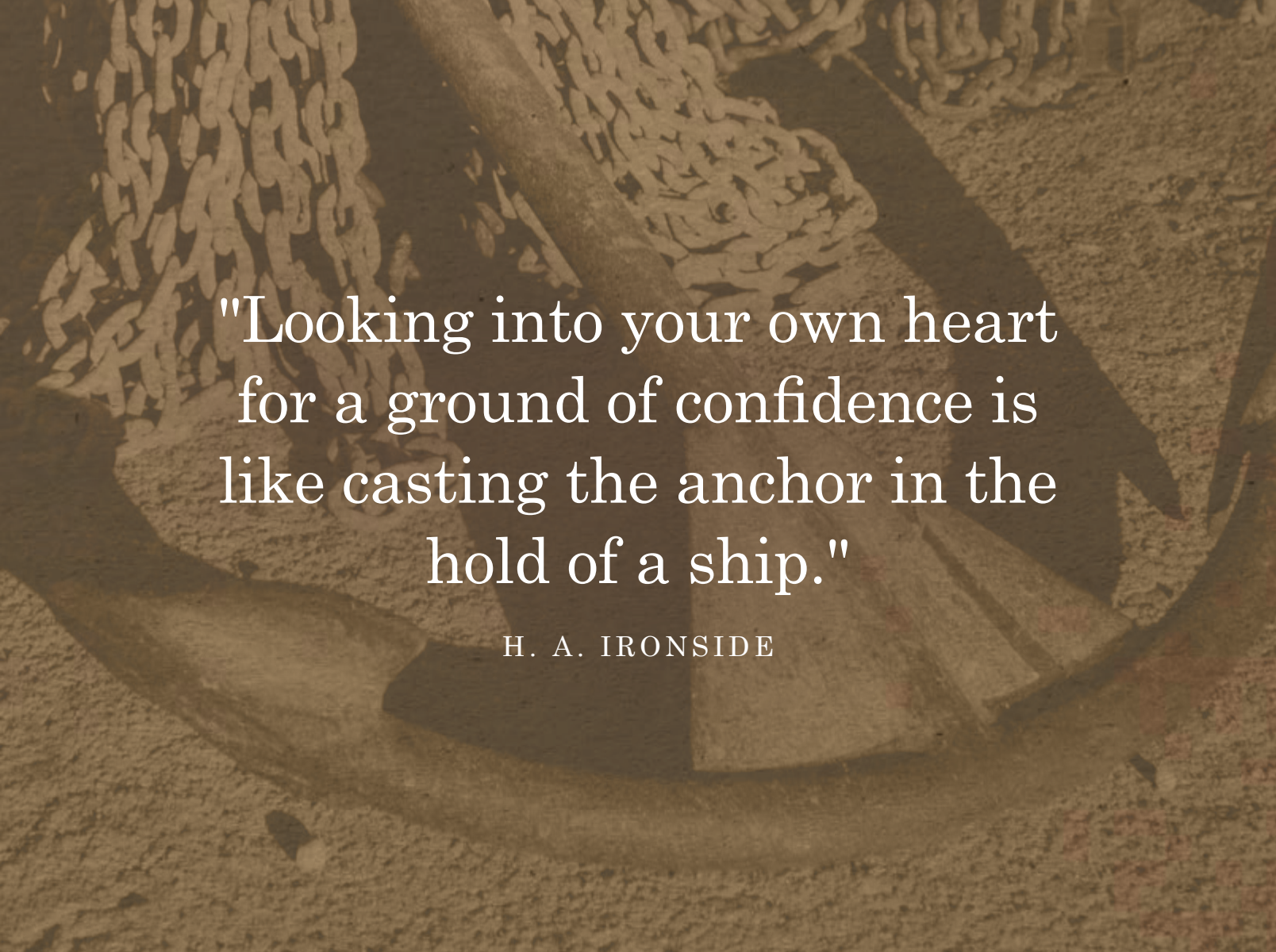
I went back and re-read Ironside.

Here is what I found.

Ironside did, on rare occasions, make statements which, if taken by themselves, could be taken to imply a mild form of Commitment Salvation. He said, for example:

Shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on "all men everywhere to repent," results in shallow conversions; and so we have myriads of glib-tongued professors today who give no evidence of regeneration whatever. Prating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that "faith without works is dead"; and that justification by works before men is not to be ignored as though it were in contradiction to justification by faith before God (*Except Ye Repent* [New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1937], p. 11).

I consulted the immediate and greater context and found that this quote does not prove that Ironside shared the Lordship Salvation view of repentance. The sentences cited are ambiguous as to exactly what Ironside meant. He could have meant that these conversions, though shallow, were real. However, even if he meant that they were false conversions as evidenced by a lack of works, that does not at all prove that he held to Lordship Salvation.<sup>1</sup> We must look elsewhere to see what Ironside had to say on that subject.



"Looking into your own heart  
for a ground of confidence is  
like casting the anchor in the  
hold of a ship."

H. A. IRONSIDE

In his book *Full Assurance*, Ironside answers the question of whether we should look within ourselves for our assurance of salvation:

Looking into your own heart for a ground of confidence is like casting the anchor in the hold of a ship. Cast it outside and let it go down into the great, tossing ocean of strife and trouble, until it grips the rock itself. Christ alone is the rock, and He is the manifestation of the infinite love of God for sinners (*Full Assurance* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, revised edition of the 1937 original], pp.120-21).

Are those the words of one promoting Lordship Salvation? Surely, they are not.

When Ironside spoke of the need to “grapple with the terrible fact of man’s sinfulness and guilt,” there is no reason to assume that he meant that unbelievers need to commit themselves to the Lordship of Christ and turn from their sins to be saved. Elsewhere he taught that one had to recognize his own sinfulness and need of grace (*Except Ye Repent*, pp. 11-12, 34), turn from all other confidences and place his faith solely in Jesus Christ (p. 175), and go from rejecting to accepting Jesus and His Gospel (pp. 53, 174).

That is not the Commitment Salvation view of repentance.

Ironside actually taught a Free Grace view of the gospel. He said:

Repentance is the very opposite of meritorious experience. It is the confession that one is utterly without merit, and if he is ever saved at all it can only be through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, “who gave himself a ransom for all.” Here is firm footing for the soul who realizes that all self-effort is but sinking sand. Christ alone is the Rock of our salvation” (*Except Ye Repent*, p. 36).

And again:

If these pages fall into the hands of any anxious, troubled soul, desirous of finding the way of peace and earnestly seeking to be right with God, let me urge such a one to give up all struggling. Just believe God. Tell Him you are the sinner for whom the Saviour died, and trust in Christ alone *for salvation*.<sup>2</sup> His own word is clear and simple: “Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death into life*” (John 5:24) (*Except Ye Repent*, p. 189, italics added).

If one is not careful, he can misrepresent an author by selectively quoting him. [One could even selectively quote a Lordship Salvation writer and make it appear that he held to Free Grace Salvation.] Such is the case here. It is misrepresenting him to suggest that Dr. Ironside taught Lordship Salvation. He would be deeply grieved by such a suggestion. Let the record show that Dr. Ironside was a proponent of Free Grace Salvation and assurance based on our infallible Savior, not our fallible works. ■



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- 1 Today I think that I was overly gracious in what I wrote in that sentence in 1989. If that was indeed his point, then that statement would reflect mild Lordship Salvation. Of course, people can be inconsistent in their statements. Witness Dr. Ryrie’s two-coupon ticket explanation of James 2:14-17.
- 2 Note that Ironside was clear that one needed to believe in Jesus “for salvation,” which he clarified was everlasting life that can never be lost.





# IS JOHN'S GOSPEL SUFFICIENT FOR EVANGELISM?

DOUG POTGETER

I met a friend for coffee recently, and we thoroughly enjoyed an edifying conversation about the Bible and theology. At one point in the conversation, we started talking about what a person must believe in order to be born again. My friend mentioned 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and proceeded to explain that a person must believe Jesus that died for our sins and was resurrected. After discussing the passage briefly, I brought up the Gospel

of John and its many passages in which it is clear that a person is born again when he or she believes that Jesus is the Christ. I was stunned by my friend's response:

John was writing about the way people were saved in the Old Testament. Now that Jesus has died for our sins and resurrected, we must believe in His work to be born again.

At the time I did not know how to respond to this, but I've since come to understand the importance of both John's purpose and the date the Gospel was written.

## The Purpose of John's Gospel

Someone who is studying resurrection truth will probably use 1 Corinthians 15 at some point. Someone who is studying love will probably turn to 1 Corinthians 13. Someone studying prophecy will more than likely look to the books of Revelation, Ezekiel, or Daniel. The reason is simple: those books and passages deal with those particular topics. And when it comes to the question, "What must a person do to be born again?" we should look to the Gospel of John. Is this because the answer to this question can't be found elsewhere? No. There are other books of the Bible that contain the message of life (e.g. Acts 16:31; Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 John 5:1; etc.). However, while other books of the Bible answer this question, there is only one book that was written *specifically* to answer this question. To put it another way, in the entire canon of Scripture there is only book whose aim and purpose is evangelistic: the Gospel of John. We know this because, in 20:30-31, John clearly stated his purpose for writing:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

No other book of the Bible says what John says here, because no other book of the Bible was written for this specific purpose. Therefore, if a person wants to know how to have eternal life, he or she need read no further than the

Gospel of John. If further revelation is needed beyond John's Gospel, then we must concede that John failed to achieve his purpose.

## The Date of John's Gospel

Some object to the sufficiency of John's Gospel for evangelism by saying that the Gospel's events occurred before Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected. They, like my friend, contend that the saving message changed after that. Now people must not only believe on Jesus for eternal life, but they must also believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins and that He was resurrected from the dead. If they do not believe this, they cannot be saved.

The problem with such a position is that, while the events of John's Gospel did occur before Jesus' death and resurrection, John did not write his account until years after Jesus ascended. Scholars vary in their opinions of the date of John's Gospel. Colin Kruse, in his commentary, mentions one scholar who holds to a date in the 60s, before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Kruse himself holds to a date in the 80s or 90s.<sup>1</sup> Even if one holds to an earlier date, it is still true that John wrote his Gospel long after Jesus' death and resurrection, but if one holds to a later date, the point is strengthened even more.

Since John wrote his Gospel long after Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended, it is reasonable to believe that the saving message did not change and that his Gospel is sufficient to bring someone to Christ. If the saving message changed, why would John have failed to mention such a critical truth? According to John, he and the disciples did not believe a different saving message from the one we believe today. The message is the same, and the critical point to realize is this: if the saving message did change, then John did not succeed in fulfilling his purpose for writing.



George Meisinger makes this very point in the book *The Fundamentals for the Twenty-First Century*:

John was 'moved by the Holy Spirit' to state his purpose, thus we must conclude that he accomplished his goal, recording everything one must do to have eternal life. To suppose otherwise assumes that John either misrepresented, or failed to achieve, his purpose. A proper view of inspiration does not permit such suppositions.<sup>2</sup>

To say that the saving message changed after the death and resurrection of Christ would imply that John failed in his purpose since he did not say that a person must believe Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected in order to have eternal life. And if we hold that John failed in his purpose, then we undermine the reliability of Scripture. When considered in this light, the sufficiency of John's Gospel becomes a serious issue.

## Conclusion

In the words of John Niemelä,

John's Gospel was designed for unbelievers. Let us not perpetuate the great omission by taking the one book designed for unbelievers from them. Let us, instead,

minister with John's Gospel to unbelievers and present it to them.<sup>3</sup>

Based on John's clear purpose for writing, and the approximate date that he wrote, the most reasonable conclusion is that his Gospel is sufficient for evangelization. Ultimately, while other books of the Bible may be helpful, no other book is needed. John's Gospel is, indeed, sufficient. ■



Doug Potgeter lives in Holland, MI with his wife of ten years, Hannah. He loves to read and spend time with his wife and four boys.

- 1 Kruse, Colin G. "Date and Place of Writing." *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, InterVarsity Press, USA, Downers Grove, IL, 2017, pp. 16-17.
- 2 Cited by Shawn Lazar in "Did John Fail?" Faithalone.org, 7 Sept. 2021, <https://faithalone.org/blog/did-john-fail/>. *The Fundamentals of the Twenty-First Century: Examining Crucial Issues of the Christian Faith*, edited by Mal Couch (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel), 2000. Meisinger's chapter is entitled, "Salvation by Faith Alone."
- 3 Niemelä, John. "John's Gospel: Evangelistic or Not?" Faithalone.org, 1 Mar. 2017, <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/johns-gospel-evangelistic-or-not/>.

"John was 'moved by the Holy Spirit' to state his purpose, thus we must conclude that he accomplished his goal, recording everything one must do to have eternal life. To suppose otherwise assumes that John either misrepresented, or failed to achieve, his purpose."

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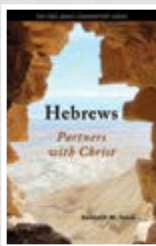


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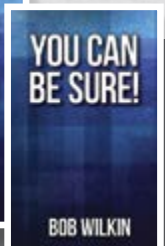
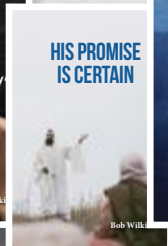
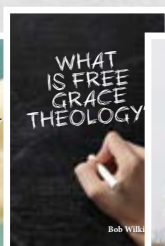
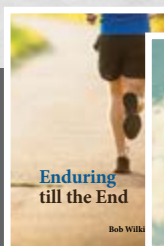


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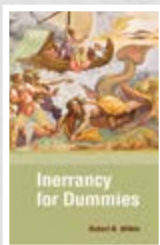


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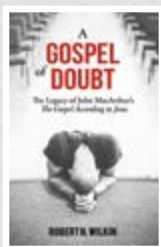


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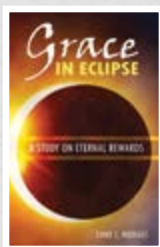


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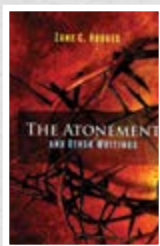


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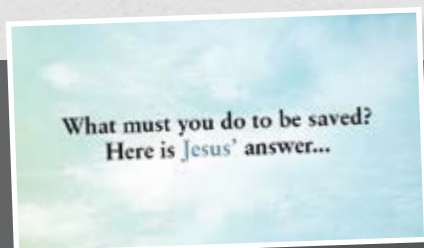


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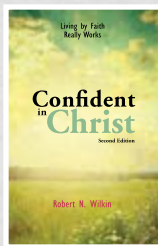


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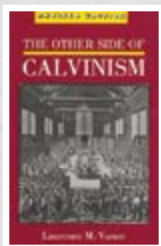


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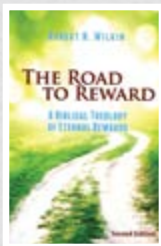


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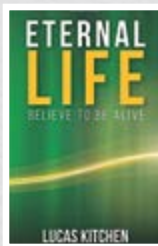


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*Ken and Kathryn visited the college in Zambia. Ken stands with the junior class, while Kathryn smiles with the freshmen.*



*Ken also spoke at a church while in Zambia*

## MORE OF WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



*And Ken took a lot of books with him*



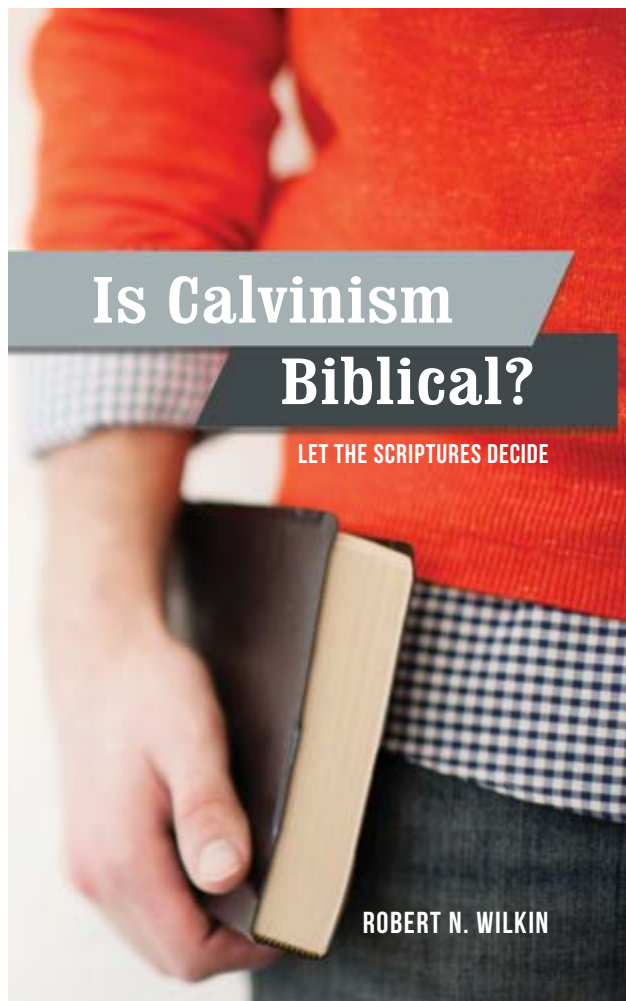
*The great folks at Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship*



*The "Better Together" women's conference. Maybe this is where Kathryn spoke.*

# Review of *Is Calvinism Biblical?* *Let the Scriptures Decide* by Robert N. Wilkin

BY KATHRYN WRIGHT



Calvinistic theology is gaining popularity among Evangelicals today. I have been involved with Southern Baptist churches for much of my life, and this theology is becoming increasingly prominent in the seminaries and pulpits. This especially seems to be the case with young pastors.

When people defend Calvinism, they often deal with it as a philosophical system. It is argued that the five points of Calvinism form a logical unit. In *Is Calvinism Biblical?* Wilkin does not look at Calvinism from the point of view of philosophical logic; rather, he asks whether or not the Bible supports it. The book is written so that the man or woman in the pew can read and understand it. However, the pastor will find it extremely helpful as well.

Wilkin addresses all five points of Calvinism. These five points are popularly known by the acronym TULIP. The letters stand for *total depravity*, *unconditional election*, *limited atonement*, *irresistible grace*, and *perseverance of the saints*. Wilkin says the last point can be—and has been—divided into two parts: the saints' perseverance and the saints' preservation (p. 15).

For each of the points, Wilkin discusses two Bible passages that prove the point to be unbiblical.

Concerning total depravity, Wilkin shows that in John 6:35, faith precedes the new birth. One does not receive eternal life and then acquire the ability to believe. Using the example of Cornelius in Acts 10, Wilkin demonstrates that an unbeliever can respond to the revelation of God (pp. 23-38).

Concerning unconditional election, Wilkin shows that the Jews in Acts 13:46 counted *themselves* unworthy of eternal life. God was not responsible for their unwillingness to believe. A similar thing can be said about the unbelieving Jews in John 5:39-40. Jesus said they were unwilling to come to Him (i.e., believe in Him). He did not say they were predestined to eternal condemnation (pp. 39-56).

John 1:29 clearly says that Christ died for the sins of the whole world. In 2 Peter 2:1, Peter says that the unbelieving false teachers were bought, or redeemed, by Christ (pp. 57-76). The two passages are a death knell for the view that Christ died only for people whom God elected to receive eternal life (the *L* of TULIP).

Regarding irresistible grace, Wilkin appeals to John 12:32 and Matt 23:37-39 to argue against it. In John 12, Jesus says that He will draw all men to Himself. In Matthew 23, it is clear that the unbelieving Nation of Israel (and the people in it) could resist the grace of God offered to it (pp. 77-96).

Using the Parable of the Four Soils in Luke 8 and the account of the woman at the well in John 4, Wilkin shows that believers cannot lose their eternal salvation. From Rev 20:11-15 and John 11:25-27, he points out that the reason people are cast into hell has nothing to do with their works. We find our assurance of salvation in the promise of Christ, not in our persevering in doing good (pp. 97-136).

Wilkin does an excellent job of getting to the heart of the matter regarding each point of Calvinism. He chooses verses that clearly and strongly argue against each point.

No doubt the Calvinist will question Wilkin's exegesis. However, if Calvinism is considered a log-

ical unit, then the whole system comes into question if one point fails.

For someone who is being drawn to Calvinism, the book could prove invaluable in guiding him to question whether the Bible really supports that theological system. Because Wilkin makes twelve separate strong arguments, it would be difficult to claim that he has misinterpreted all twelve.

The book ends with two helpful appendices. The first deals with the ways Calvinists reply to the twelve verses Wilkin discusses (pp. 137-57). This is important because often, when we read verses that oppose a particular theological view, we wonder how those who hold that view would respond.

The second appendix addresses the issue of election or predestination. Wilkin uses Scripture, and examples, to show that in the Bible *election* does not mean that God chooses people to go to heaven or hell before they are born; rather, it means that God chooses people and even groups for service. He has a job for them (pp. 159-70).

This book addresses a highly relevant topic in current Evangelicalism. While many people in our churches are not even aware of the issue, Calvinism robs many of their assurance of salvation. It pictures God as a cruel deity who has chosen people for hell before they were born, leaving them with nothing that they can do about it. It is taught in many pulpits and is found in many popular Christian books. Wilkin wrote this book to help those who struggle or will struggle with these issues. I highly recommend this book. ■



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





# THE SOBERING REALITY FACING SINGLE CHRISTIAN MEN AND THE TOP FIVE WAYS TO STAND AMID THE CURRENT OF CULTURE

NATHANAEL STEVENS

**T**he news industry gained a lot of viewers through the debate on “a war on women”—but the tagline was mere semantics, if not outright deception. The truth is, there was and is a war *on gender*. More specifically, there is a war on *masculinity and femininity*. Women have been encouraged to renounce what is unique to their sex and to embrace masculine traits, and men have been told to renounce masculine strength and to embrace their “feminine side.” And both genders have been listening and responding. Men, in particular, have been shaped by this in startling ways.

Consider some recent research. According to Reuters, the level of testosterone in the average male has declined 1 percent per year since the 1980s—and no one knows why.<sup>1</sup> That means a 50-year-old man in 2023 has 40 percent less testosterone than a 50-year-old man had in 1983. An *Atlantic* article that covers much of the gender issue in education reports that there are now four men enrolled in college for every six women, and the gap is headed to two women for every male graduate.<sup>2</sup> In 2020, the year the pandemic hit, colleges lost massive enrollment, but men accounted for 70 percent of the loss.<sup>3</sup> The Pew Research Center just published this headline: “Women Now Outnumber Men in U.S. College-Educated Labor Force.”<sup>4</sup> Men are changing relationally as well. Almost 30 percent of men under 30 haven’t had sex since they were 18.<sup>5</sup> Bluntly put, women don’t want or admire the men produced by our culture. On their own, statistics like this are hard to put into a narrative. But together, they paint a compelling picture. It seems masculinity is on the decline.

Young men, I have some advice for you. But before I give it, if you haven’t heard it, hear it now. There has been a war to remove you from influencing your families, communities, and world. You

have been given a message from at least the start of your education that you are not as valuable as girls. And, statistics say, you have responded by surrendering to the messaging. I am so sorry. I am sorry that the world is the way it is. That the beauty of the masculine soul has been decried and denounced. I am incredibly sorry for the churches that have promoted this message. I am sorry for the broken homes that reinforced it. I am sorry for the culture that has demanded it.

The masculine soul glories in the strength and resilience needed to provide for others even when life is difficult and the job challenging. The masculine soul rejoices in preserving the sweet tenderness of a peaceful, happy home, even if it means taking up the risky role of protector. The masculine soul’s greatest pleasure is found *through* the pleasure of a spouse, not at the expense of anyone (including the woman on the screen). God made a good thing when He made men. And hear this specifically, your sex drive is a good thing—God has given it to us—to both drive one to marriage and provide delight within it. As a believer in Jesus, your heart is good, and your masculinity is a cause for glory, joy, and delight. I am sorry that such a message has been all but completely lost for a generation.



In this milieu, young men have simply been checking out.

What does that look like? It looks like being over 20 and playing video games for an hour or more daily. It looks like regular viewing of sexually arousing pictures, videos, and movies. It looks like spending most of your recreational time in front of a screen. It looks like rejecting the idea of providing for others and simply finding work that “pays the bills” so you can get back to some form of disengagement, or not finding work at all. It looks like financial dependence on friends and family. It looks like disengagement from church—either not attending at all, or only attending instead of serving. It looks like addictions, from alcohol to drugs to TikTok.

In light of this, there are five things young men need to know.

1. Young men who follow Jesus are in short supply, meaning demand is super high. Many have called our current culture “post-Christian.” And that’s a fair assessment for many parts of the country. But **men who love Jesus will always be in high demand.** Regardless of what you might read online, a man whose identity is secure (a son of the Most High God), and whose mission is clear (to live in a way that brings great glory to his Creator), will be sought after. Your church needs you to love Jesus; your community needs you to love Jesus; the economy needs you to love Jesus. And, yes, likely, a young woman needs you to love Jesus. To be a man who loves and follows Jesus today puts you in high demand for most women, especially Christian women. Culture has created a form for men, but the form is unfit—and nobody has a use for the men it produces. So love Jesus and let Him inform your masculinity.
2. **Attempt masculinity even if you don’t do it right.** You are not perfect, and you will fail and offend, and that’s okay. Masculinity is imparted to men through a community of other men over time. Fathers, uncles, grandfathers, mentors, teachers, coaches—men
- who fill these roles have historically been the ones who guided boys through the initiation into manhood. All of these categories have been broken down. From single-parent homes to the dissolution of family connections to the infiltration of the anti-masculine agenda in the school systems, there has been a blitzkrieg against everything that makes a man. As you embrace masculinity, you will not do it perfectly. That’s okay. It is far better to try and fail than to continue the checked-out life. Move out of Mom’s house, pay your bills, engage in a ministry, exercise and take your health seriously, and start establishing a career path—start setting up a life that can care for others rather than one that requires being cared for by others. A great career doesn’t necessitate a degree. Trade schools often offer the best ROI. You will fail at times, but that’s okay. Keep trying, God fathers us through the successes and the failures. The path of maturity and purpose is worth it. It is also what draws and holds a woman’s affection.
3. **Find a community.** Isolation is probably the most damning effect of culture’s definition of masculinity. You especially need men around you, and I don’t mean those guys in Australia that you do online gaming with. I mean, go to your pastor, and ask him to mentor you. And if he can’t, go to your deacons or your elders and ask them. Pick up those relationships you let slide—a college roommate who loved Jesus, or a high school buddy—say, “hey, let’s go to church tomorrow, and then get wings, coffee, or something more Deuteronomy 14:26-ish.” Ask your pastor if you can start a young men’s Bible study, camping club, or fishing trip—whatever. You need community, and you need masculine community. If you are not in a church, commit to one. Most churches lay out the red carpet for a young man who shows up and says he wants to love Jesus—we need you, and we know it.
4. **Respecting women is part of the masculine soul.** A dangerous message pervades

the left and right sides of media, social media, politics, and podcasts. “Because men and women are the same, men and women should compete, not correspond.” We see this when 13-year-old boys and girls are pitted against one another on wrestling mats—how do you teach a boy not to lay a hand on a girl after cheering him on when he throws one around on a mat (or what’s maybe more challenging, gets thrown around on the mat)? And we see it in some of the violent tendencies of the “incel” movement. On the right, the message is, “Compete and *crush*.” Social media pushes this narrative with videos like the girl on the football team who gets knocked unconscious on her first play. On the left, the message to girls is “Fight to assert your empowerment over patriarchy.” Social media is again filled with arguments about the pay gap between male and female athletes. God’s message for men is simple: we respect women. Don’t get caught up in the competition narrative. Respect your mom, your sisters, and any young women in your life. This also means you don’t sleep around. God calls it *sin*, and He calls them His daughters. Delete the hookup apps.


5. **Pick a mate whose love for Jesus breaks the mold culture gives women.** Culture’s mold for women is tragic: beauty-conscious and empowered, but embittered and ill-equipped for a happy marriage, as the Bible describes it. As a result, marriage today is a hazardous business for men. Today, 70 percent of all divorces are initiated by women.<sup>6</sup> Men rarely get primary custody of their children. With that comes child support payments, and in many cases, alimony. 80% of custodial parents are women.<sup>7</sup> Marrying a woman shaped primarily by culture is an unwise choice that often carries devastating consequences. If we were to remove

God from the mix, not getting married and not having kids would be the wiser option for men today. But God is in the mix, and there are plenty of great young women who are more defined by their love for Jesus than culture (see point 1). Marriage and family are not only God’s plan,<sup>8</sup> but they are also one of the most significant sources of joy and fulfillment on this side of heaven. So, find a woman whose love for Jesus breaks the mold culture has set for her. That shows when she demonstrates submission to Jesus and the Bible. It shows up in her work in her church and her respect for her dad and other godly men. ■



Nathanael Stevens is the Lead Pastor of Nags Head (NC) Church, where he loves Jesus, his wife, five kids, and the church family God has gifted to him. He has worked in men’s ministry for over ten years and has a Doctor of Ministry in Biblical spirituality focusing on men’s ministry.

- 1 <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-testosterone-levels-dc/mens-testosterone-levels-declined-in-last-20-years-idUK-KIM16976320061031>.
- 2 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/09/young-men-college-decline-gender-gap-higher-education/620066/>.
- 3 <https://research.com/universities-colleges/college-drop-out-rates>.
- 4 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/09/26/women-now-outnumber-men-in-the-u-s-college-educated-labor-force/>.
- 5 <https://www.eviemagazine.com/post/nearly-a-third-of-men-under-30-arent-having-sex>.
- 6 <https://www.irwinirwin.com/why-do-women-initiate-divorce-more-than-men/>.
- 7 <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-269.pdf>.
- 8 Editor’s note: Paul did say that it is good to remain unmarried (1 Cor 7:8). But then he added, “If they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:9). Some can remain celibate. Most cannot.



# *The Sobering Reality Facing Single Christian Women and the Top Five Ways to Be Prepared*

SUMMER STEVENS



**M**eet Emma. She's a kind, young Christian woman. She always thought she'd grow up, get married, and have a family, but she wasn't in a hurry. There was plenty of time for that!

Let's say Emma graduates high school in a class with 1,000 people. Half are men, of course, so that leaves 500 possibilities for marriage.

Her first priority is finding a Christian. She's serious about her faith and wants a man who is, too. About 40 percent of Gen Z-ers attend church, but church attendance continues to be about 60-40 women to men. So let's estimate that out of Emma's 500 options, 160 men will attend church.

However, they're not real options. Barna Research says that about 40 percent of Gen Z-ers identify as LGBTQ, and even 30 percent of Gen-Z Christians identify as LGBTQ. So Emma's real option of heterosexual Christian bachelors is actually 112.

She goes on to graduate from college and wants to marry a man who did, too. That's not too much to ask, is it? About 70 percent of people attend college after high school, but only 61 percent of men. Her 112 men dwindle down to 68. And only 59 percent of enrolled men actually graduate, leaving Emma about 40 options from the original 500.

And this assumes that all 40 eligible men will be attractive to her and that she will be

attractive to all of them! We still haven't even talked about interests, personality, values, chemistry, and compatibility.

In reality, she is "competing" (to use that terrible word) with 168 heterosexual Christian women for the same 40 men.

Wait, what? Why that many? How come all the women who didn't go to college made it into the list? Don't the men have the same standards?

Here's where it gets tricky. Emma has a college education. You'd think that the 40 men she's considering would also be considering only highly educated women.

Research has indicated they're not.

Highly successful men have, throughout the decades (prior to the 1980s when men and women attended college at the same levels), married women beneath their educational status. And they were fine with it.

Women, however, are not fine with it.

Women do not want to marry men beneath their educational status.

Now I'm not saying men don't value intelligent women. Of course, many do. I'm merely saying that most men don't discount as a potential partner a woman with less

education than he has, the way women discount as a potential partner a man with less education than she has.

So where does this leave us?

First, people are simply getting married at a lower rate than ever before. The marriage rate is 5.1 per 1,000 people per year. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, that rate is the lowest since the US government began keeping records in 1867.

Many Americans are content with this and work around these bleak statistics by engaging in casual sex or cohabitating.

But women like Emma are waiting and wondering when God will bring the man they've been praying for.

How do we as Christian families and communities prepare women specifically for this reality? Do we continue to repeat the

old adage, "There's someone for everyone," and promise young women that their prince will indeed come for them?

I feel we've done young women a disservice.

Here are five ways to prepare young women for the reality facing them.

1. **It's all about Jesus.** This life is not eternity. It's an opportunity to love and enjoy and share God. We must lift the eyes of our little girls and young women to Jesus—and encourage them to find the satisfaction of their souls in Him rather than in the husband that may be. Jesus is always enough.
2. **Create a community of love and support.** Regardless of what your future holds, invest in deep friendships, serve your community, take good care of yourself, and keep a sense of adventure. Marriage alone won't make you happy. Happy single people are generally happy married people, and miserable singles make for miserable couples.
3. **Rethink the respectable man.** There are an increasing number of well-paying labor and trade jobs. These jobs are a vital part of every community and are in high demand today. You may want to rethink your beliefs on education, money, and employment for a potential partner. You may want to focus more on character and work ethic rather than education and prestige.

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satisfaction of their  
souls in Him rather  
than in the husband  
that may be. Jesus is  
always enough.*



*...focus more on character and work ethic  
rather than education and prestige.*

4. If you are committed to marrying a man with equal or greater education than you, **recognize that higher education may actually reduce your chances of getting married.** Please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying you should avoid that advanced degree. I have a master's degree and I'm thankful for it. But the percentage of Christian men with the same level of education puts you in a statistical disadvantage because generally those men have a wide pool of (less educated) potential mates whereas you've limited yourself to a small pool of highly educated potential mates. The reason your marriage chances are slimmer is not because of who you are; it's because you are choosing to be more selective. If you do choose to marry a man who makes less money or is less educated than you, it is critical that you not only show respect to him but that you actually believe him to be worthy of your respect. You must marry a man you can respect; if you can't respect him, you have no business marrying him.

5. There is indeed something going on with men. Young men are retreating from society because our culture has told them that their strength, their masculinity, and their way of thinking aren't just unwanted, but damaging, toxic, and dangerous. Women, we must **stand for Biblical truth and support men.** God created men to uniquely reflect His image—His justice, strength, protection, insight, and sacrifice. Men need our encouragement, and they need our appreciation. We must fight the tendency to be dismissive of or condescending to the men in our lives, but rather “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). ■



Summer Stevens is married to Nathanael and they have five children. She has a Master's in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and enjoys running (but mostly talking) with friends and reading good books to her kids.

ZANE C. HODGES

# THE GOSPEL UNDER SIEGE

FAITH AND WORKS IN TENSION

# The Siege Continues\*

ZANE HODGES

\*This article first appeared in the July 1991 issue of what was then a newsletter called *The GES News*. This thirty-two-year-old article is especially relevant in light of Bob Wilkin's new book, *The Gospel Is Still Under Siege*.

In 1980, my long-time friend and fellow GES board member, Mr. Luis Rodriguez and I became co-founders of the small publishing company known as Redención Viva (Spanish for “Living Redemption”). Our pilot book, *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works*, was first published in 1981.

At the time, Luis and I wondered if we could sell out our initial print run—a mere 3,000 books. But we did so, and the book went into a second printing in 1982, a third in 1984, a fourth in 1986, and a fifth in 1988. We were both thrilled and grateful to God for the use He was obviously making of our very first book.

The fifth printing has also been exhausted as of the end of May. Work has already begun on a sixth printing. This one will be unique, however, in that it will be a new edition. The second edition will contain the Scripture index that so many have wished for the book to have, plus it will include a set of endnotes in the back with pertinent references to other literature. Beyond that, there will be subheadings in all the chapters to make them more readable, and the style will be polished.

Luis and I feel that *The Gospel Under Siege* must continue precisely because the siege of the gospel continues. The growth of GES (with over 7,000 now on its mailing list) shows that the Free Grace movement is alive and well. But the fact remains that the Biblical truths for which GES stands are under attack in many quarters of the Christian community, probably more so now than in 1981 when our book first appeared. That, of course, is the price that comes with the higher visibility that the doctrines of grace now have in the Church.

“There remains very much land yet to be possessed.”

JOSHUA 13:1

But as the Lord once said to Joshua, “There remains very much land yet to be possessed” (Josh 13:1). At present, I feel there is something of a lull in the debate over the gospel. Of course, this is a generalization, and some areas of the country are probably exceptions (for example, Southern California). But by and large, what is needed is a fresh forward thrust for the message of grace.

Another way to say this would be that many people still need this message desperately. Not only are we thinking of the unsaved who are unchurched, but also of those who are in churches where they never hear the message of salvation clearly. Beyond these are uncounted believers who are trapped by teachings like “Lordship Salvation” and are thus unable to enjoy an assured and stable relationship with God. All of these people need the truths for which GES stands.

What, then, should we do? Two things, it seems to me: 1) We should be on our knees more than ever to ask for a fresh movement

of God’s Spirit in the Church on behalf of His gracious offer of salvation—a movement that will win many souls and establish many Christians in the truth. 2) We should be on our feet spreading these truths wherever we can!

I could add a third: If we are on our knees and on our feet on behalf of the truth of the Gospel, we should also have *our hands in our pockets* to support those who support the message of Grace.

And, oh yes! Pray for the new edition of *The Gospel Under Siege* as it is being prepared, and ask God to enlarge the book’s ministry for Him. It may be a new *edition*, but it will still tell “the old, old story of Jesus and His love”! ■



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.

We should be on our knees...and we should be on our feet spreading these truths wherever we can!



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In *The Gospel Is Still Under Siege*, Bob Wilkin provides a compelling follow-up to Zane Hodges's 1981 classic, *The Gospel Under Siege*. Chapter titles include "Assaults on Assurance," "Faith Under Fire," "Do Good Christians Need Everlasting Life?" "Jousting with John," and "Finally Final Judgment." Each chapter includes ten study questions.