

GRACE (in) FOCUS

ULTRA- DISPEN- SATION- ALISM?

IS FREE GRACE A NON-PROFIT RELIGION? | SALVATION DEPENDS ON ME?
GRACE IN ZAMBIA | DO WORKS PROVE OR IMPROVE? | MOTIVATION AND ASSURANCE
DO WE STRIVE TO ENTER? | WEAKNESS | COUSINS COMPARED

In This Issue...

Letter from the Editor Bob Wilkin	3	Weakness Nancy Rempel	24
Believe in Jesus for the Forgiveness of Sins! (Is That a Saving Message?) Ken Yates	4	Bookstore	28
Distant Cousins Compared Marcia Hornok	8	What Can Motivate Us if Eternal Life Is Assured? Philippe R. Sterling	34
What's Been Happening at GES?	11	Free Grace and Ultra-Dispensationalism Laurence M. Vance	38
Are You Guilty of Having a Non-Profit Religion? (James 2:14) Bob Wilkin	12	More of <i>What's Been Happening at GES?</i>	41
Does It Really Depend on Me? Mike Lii	14	If It's Free, Why Would Anyone Need to Strive to Enter? (Luke 13:24) Bob Wilkin	42
Prove or Improve: Using James 2 in Evangelism Kathryn Wright	18	God's Role in Conversion Zane Hodges	45
The Message of Grace in Zambia Ken Yates	22		

Editor: Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D. Typesetting and Design: Matthew Simmons.
Executive Assistant: Bethany Taylor. Order Fulfillment: Mark Gray. Director of
GES Missions: Ken Yates. GES Missions Coordinator: Kathryn Wright.

Volume 38, Number 5
© 2023 by Grace Evangelical Society

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.

Grace in Focus is a bimonthly magazine about the gospel, assurance, and related issues. For your free U.S. subscription sign up on our website or send your name and address to P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to offset the costs of printing and postage, it would be greatly appreciated.



Letter from the Editor

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, a famous British preacher, famously said,

“If your preaching of the gospel of God’s free grace in Jesus Christ does not provoke the charge from some of antinomianism, you’re not preaching the gospel of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ.”¹

I’m unsure if Lloyd Jones, who passed in 1981, would be identified as a Free Grace proponent. However, his statement is right on the money. In fact, he even twice refers to God’s *free grace*!

Grace in Focus magazine fits the description Lloyd Jones gave. We promote the free grace of God in our articles, and some people charge us with antinomianism.

We are not against God’s laws and commandments. Quite the opposite. We promote obedience to the royal law. However, the condition of everlasting life is faith in Christ, not obedience to God’s commands.

Even sanctification is not focused on the commandments. It is focused on Christ as seen in God’s Word (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). The good works we produce as a result of the Spirit of God applying the Word of God to our lives will result in eternal rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:5-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28).

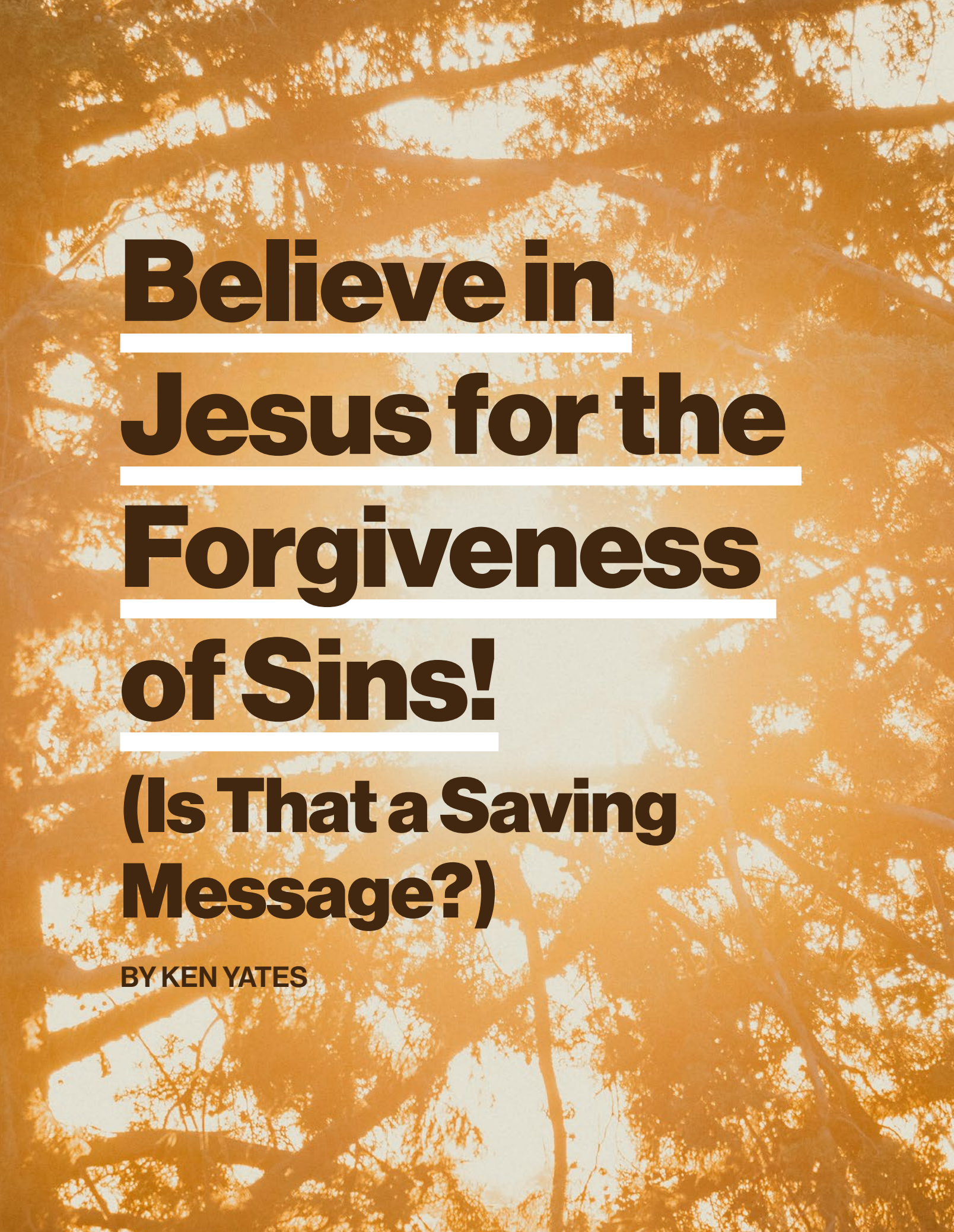


If you are blessed by our magazine, you can give family and friends a free subscription. And if you like our magazine, we encourage you to check out our daily blogs and podcasts at faithalone.org.

¹ Quoted at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/99297-if-your-preaching-of-the-gospel-of-god-s-free-grace>. There are similar quotes in his Romans commentary in his discussion of Romans 6.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wilkin".


Robert N. Wilkin



Believe in Jesus for the Forgiveness of Sins!

**(Is That a Saving
Message?)**

BY KEN YATES



I conducted a very unscientific survey. What I found is that the most popular way of presenting the gospel today is for the speaker to tell unbelievers that Jesus will forgive them of their sins if they believe in Him. We find this gospel presentation in numerous tracts, in sermons, and even on billboards along the highway.

Such a presentation is given in various ways. Often, the preacher will use 1 Cor 15:3, which says that Jesus died for our sins. If we believe He died for our sins, then we also realize that when we believe, He forgives us of those sins. The evangelist might say that when we believe, our sins are washed away and we become as white as snow.

Jesus certainly died on the cross for the sins of the world. When we believe in Him for eternal life, we also receive the forgiveness of sins. But here at GES, we are clear in proclaiming that one must specifically believe that Jesus gives eternal life. Believing in the forgiveness of sins is not the same thing.

Is that being too picky? Why wouldn't simply telling the unbeliever to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins be an acceptable way to preach the gospel? There are a number of reasons why it is not.

Eternal Life and the Forgiveness of Sins Are Not the Same Thing

Eternal life means that the believer will live with Jesus in His kingdom forever. The very word *eternal* means that it cannot be lost. Once you receive it, it is yours forever. The believer never needs to receive it again. That is what we believe in Jesus for when we come to faith.

Forgiveness of sins results in communion with the Lord. But this communion can be lost. As a result, when the believer sins, he needs to be forgiven. This is an ongoing need in the life of the Christian (1 John 1:9).

A person can have eternal life, but not have the forgiveness of sins. Paul, for example, received eternal life on the road to Damascus when he believed that Jesus is the Christ who gives that gift. However, he did not receive the forgiveness of sins and communion with the Lord until three days later (Acts 22:16).

Since they are not the same thing, a person can believe that his sins are forgiven, but not believe he has eternal life. In fact, many people believe just that.

The Gospel of John Doesn't Mention It

The Gospel of John is the only NT book written to unbelievers. It tells them how to receive eternal life. In John, whenever Jesus speaks to unbelievers, He tells them that He has eternal life to give. He *never* tells them they need to believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins. We need only think of the book's most famous verse—a verse loved by countless millions. Jesus says to Nicodemus: “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” (John 3:16). You don't have to be a Greek scholar to recognize that Jesus never mentions the forgiveness of sins to Nicodemus. He does, however, tell him to believe in Him for everlasting life.

The only time the forgiveness of sins is mentioned in the book is John 20:23. There, Jesus is speaking about the forgiveness of sins between believers.

This should raise an important question: If Jesus did not ask unbelievers to believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins in order to receive eternal salvation, why should we?

A Practical Question

If believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins brings eternal salvation, it raises a troubling question: Who, in all of Christendom, is *not* saved? I was a chaplain in the military for around twenty-five years and met chaplains from many different denominations and even cults. I *never* met one who didn't believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

I worked with Mormon chaplains who assured me that they were not a cult because they believed that Jesus died for their sins and that He had forgiven them. They quoted 1 Cor 15:3 to make their case. I had a Christian Science chaplain who was my boss. He also told me that Jesus had forgiven him of his sins.

There are many different groups proclaiming that salvation is by works. They insist that if one is going to be in the kingdom, they must be baptized,

or speak in tongues, or tithe, or do a number of different things. But they all believe that Jesus has given them the forgiveness of sins. It is a fact that many people believe they have been forgiven, but do not believe they have eternal life. They do not believe eternal life is given as a free gift by God's grace. They believe they must earn it, even though Jesus has forgiven them.

A Biblical example of such a group is found in Acts 15:1. There, we are told that in the early church, some were preaching that in order to be saved, one must be “circumcised according to the custom of Moses.” It is probable that this was not the only requirement the unbeliever had to perform. Circumcision was the first step in keeping the whole Law of Moses. These preachers were clearly teaching that one had to work in order to make it into the kingdom.

But there is no doubt that they believed that Jesus was the Christ. If they hadn't, they wouldn't have been at the church council that was taking place. If asked, they would have said that Jesus had forgiven them of their sins. However, the apostles strongly condemned the message these men preached.

Are all these groups preaching an acceptable gospel—one that saves a person from the lake of fire? They all preach the forgiveness of sins and that this forgiveness is only found in Christ. At the same time, they also deny that they have eternal life. That can only be obtained by doing good works for the rest of their lives. Once again, we see that there is a difference between the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

I would say that the message they preach is *not* a saving one, even though they all claim the forgiveness of sins.

It's Awfully Confusing

The unbeliever who is told to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins will usually be left in a confused state. What does that mean? Does it mean that He forgives us of our sins now, and that if we continue in good works, we might make it into heaven? Does it mean that He wipes the

slate clean, but then we'd better not mess it up? It is my experience that most people sitting in the pews on Sunday morning believe some version of these ideas.

But the confusion is even worse. How badly can we mess up and still make it? Since we all continue to sin, when do we sin to the degree that we are no longer forgiven and will be cast into hell? This confusion is the reason that we hear people who say they are forgiven also say things like, "I hope I make it into heaven. I try to keep the Ten Commandments and think I am better than most. If I hold on, maybe I have a good chance."

That is a far cry from the assuring words of our Lord: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

Conclusion

The Lord's payment for our sins on the cross is a wonderful doctrine. It is the reason Jesus can give eternal life to anybody who believes in Him for it. It is possible that an unbeliever can hear about the forgiveness of sins and deduce that Jesus gives him eternal life as well. Most unbelievers, however, do

not come to that conclusion. That explains the lack of assurance on the part of many who believe Jesus forgives their sins.

To simply say to the unbeliever that Jesus offers the forgiveness of sins will most often leave him confused. Why should we help to create that confusion? The Gospel of John repeatedly proclaims the offer of eternal life and never mentions the need to believe in the forgiveness of sins. It is tragic that in Evangelicalism this is often reversed. In gospel presentations we constantly hear about the forgiveness of sins, but very rarely about everlasting life.

Let's make it clear. Let's tell unbelievers that they need to believe in Jesus for eternal life. That is what the Lord Himself did. ■■



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

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

JOHN 6:47



Distant Cousins Compared

BY MARCIA HORNOK

What could Ishmael—Abraham’s son by Sarah’s servant Hagar—and Abraham’s great-grandson, Joseph, possibly have in common? Since the Holy Spirit’s verbal inspiration is intentional, even small details are purposeful and, in this case, can show similarities between Ishmael and Joseph.

AGE SEVENTEEN

God wants us to know Joseph’s age when he was exiled from his family, and most notably from his beloved father Jacob. Genesis 37:2 says he was seventeen.¹ Why would that be important? It may be to show God’s benevolence in giving Jacob and Joseph two sev-

enteen-year periods together—one before Joseph’s disappearance and another at the end of Jacob’s life (Gen 47:28).

However, the age of seventeen is reminiscent of another youth who was exiled from his family and his beloved father, Abraham. Ishmael was fourteen when Isaac was born (Gen 16:16 with 21:5). If Sarah weaned Isaac when he was around three, then Ishmael was seventeen when he was sent away from Canaan. He ended up under a bush in the wilderness, where there was no water (Gen 21:8-15).

Joseph, likewise, found himself in the wilderness in a pit “with no water in it” (Gen 37:22-24). The details of being in the wilderness and the absence of water tie together the two teens and their plights.

IN THE WILDERNESS

Despite religious art depicting Hagar as the one crying out to God while Ishmael languished under a bush, Gen 21:17 twice states that God “heard the voice of the lad,” whose name means “God hears.” God provided him with a well, a career, and a wife in his new home in the Wilderness of Paran (Gen 21:20-21).

Like Ishmael, Joseph cried out in anguish from the pit into which his half-brothers had thrown him (Gen 42:21), but unlike Ishmael, Joseph’s pleas were not immediately answered and resolved. The next thing he knew, he was on his way to Egypt with a caravan of Ishmaelites, also called *Midianites* (descendants of Abraham through Keturah). According to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “those two nationalities were often connected together...they were allies.”² Genesis 39:1 affirms that Potiphar bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites, “who had taken him down there.”

GOD’S PRESENCE

Fourteen times in Genesis, we see the phrase “God was with” His people. Significantly, Ishmael was the first to receive this assertion: “So God was with the lad” (Gen 21:20). Two verses later, we read that Abimelech and Phichol spoke it to Abraham: “God is with you in all that you do” (Gen 21:22).

God said it to Isaac in 26:3 and 24, and Abimelech and his associates said it to Isaac in 26:28. Jacob heard or affirmed it in 28:15, 20 and 31:5, 42.

Therefore, when Genesis 39 states four times that “the Lord was with” Joseph, it should not surprise us that he grasped this reality. The heritage of his fathers, which was also the heritage of his distant cousin Ishmael, became his touchpoint. We surmise that he handled his adversities by recalling God’s presence and providence. This has always been the practice of those who are walking by faith in the Lord.

RETURN TO CANAAN

Both Ishmael and Joseph were forced to establish new lives for themselves after exile from Canaan, and both returned to their homeland on at least one occasion. Ishmael met his half-brother Isaac at Hebron in order to bury Abraham (Gen 25:9).

Joseph, likewise, returned to Hebron to bury Jacob in the cave where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were laid to rest (Gen 49:29-31; 50:13). Both Ishmael and Joseph returned to Canaan when their fathers died.

IN THE CARAVAN

Scripture gives no details about Joseph’s trip with the Ishmaelites. Did they become friendly during the few weeks of travel? They probably spoke the same language and, at some point, realized that Abraham was their common ancestor. Perhaps they talked about Ishmael, whom Joseph’s dad may have met at least once.

This speculation comes from ages given in Genesis. Isaac was sixty when Jacob was born (Gen 25:26) and seventy-five when he and Ishmael buried their dad. It would be likely that Jacob, aged fifteen, was also present, and that he met Ishmael, his half-cousin-once-removed. If Jacob had related this meeting to Joseph, it would have established his kinship with Ishmael.

That is conjecture, I admit. Nevertheless, the narrative mentions the Ishmaelites at least three

times in chapter 37 and again in 39:1. Similarities between Joseph and Ishmael cannot be missed.

PARALLELS

(1) Paternal favoritism generated family conflict. Ishmael mistreated his favored half-brother Isaac and suffered by being sent away, while Joseph, the favored son, bore the mistreatment of his half-brothers, who sent him away.

(2) Both were estranged from their birth families at around the age of seventeen and gained close association with Egypt from then on.

(3) Both had a keen awareness of God's favor. Ishmael's mother received promises³ about him directly from the Angel of the Lord (Gen 16:11-12). He would be free, not enslaved like his mother. He would hold his own against enemies. He would live "before the face⁴ of his brethren," rather than being exiled from his homeland as Hagar was. God had blessed Ishmael before he was born (Gen 16:10), and although his life had taken an about-face, he had thrived and had fathered twelve tribes, just as God had said.

Joseph's life also met an abrupt detour, but God had provided a signpost to anchor him. Two dreams designated him the ruler of his family. As such, he would save the family from death by starvation.

(4) Both had a specific inheritance, though not the Covenant promise. Ishmael inherited his share of Abraham's wealth (Gen 25:6). Joseph received the land Jacob had purchased in Shechem (Gen 33:9; Josh 24:32).

IMPLICATIONS

All descendants of Abraham have significance. You may still prefer to think of Ishmael as a scoundrel and his mother as Abraham's greatest lapse of faith, but God's plan obviously included concubines. Four of the twelve tribes of Israel originated that way.

I wonder about Joseph's time in the caravan. No doubt he felt used and abused, as well as rejected by his family members and sold⁵ for a slave's price. He experienced the seeming death of his dreams, the likelihood that he would never again see his

beloved father or brother Benjamin, and the loss of his prized possession—his cloak and whatever privileges it bestowed.

In the face of such abrupt losses and undeserved suffering, it may have comforted Joseph to remember that Ishmael had endured a similar fate, but that "God was with the lad." When Ishmael cried out to God, God heard. Joseph also experienced God's response. When standing before Pharaoh, Joseph repeatedly acknowledged God's hand (Gen 41:16, 25, 28, 32). Twenty-two years after his brothers betrayed and exiled him, Joseph told them that God had sent him to Egypt. He even had to say it three times (Gen 45:5, 7, 8)! God was with him in Potiphar's house, in prison, and in the palace.

We believers—spiritual descendants of Abraham—can live with the same confidence that Ishmael and Joseph had. God hears us when we cry out to Him, and He is with us all the time. No matter our circumstances, the second-best promise in Scripture (after having eternal life that can never be lost) is that God will never leave us, nor forsake us. ■



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

- 1 Although not well-defined as the age when Joseph was sold, all scholars assume this.
- 2 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2009), 536.
- 3 Some see these promises as warnings, but they gave Hagar the motivation to return to the source of her conflict and submit to it. The Angel's words are not the proof nor even a prediction of the present-day Middle East conflict. See GIF magazine, Sept/Oct 2017: "Hagar Does Not Deserve Her Bad Rap."
- 4 Translations vary, but compare this wording in 16:8, 16:12, and 25:18. Tony Maalouf said it designated a geographical location. See *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003), pp. 73-74.
- 5 As an aside, he could identify with his late mother Rachel, who had felt sold and used by her dad, Laban (Genesis 31:14-15).



Sharon, Jean & JB Bond, Bob, Walt & Rosy Millet enjoyed some great fellowship during the conference



Big smiles from Bob's Sunday School class (Zoom peeps are on the tablet in the lower right)



Bob and Pastor "Neon" Leon Adkins of Berean Memorial Church

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



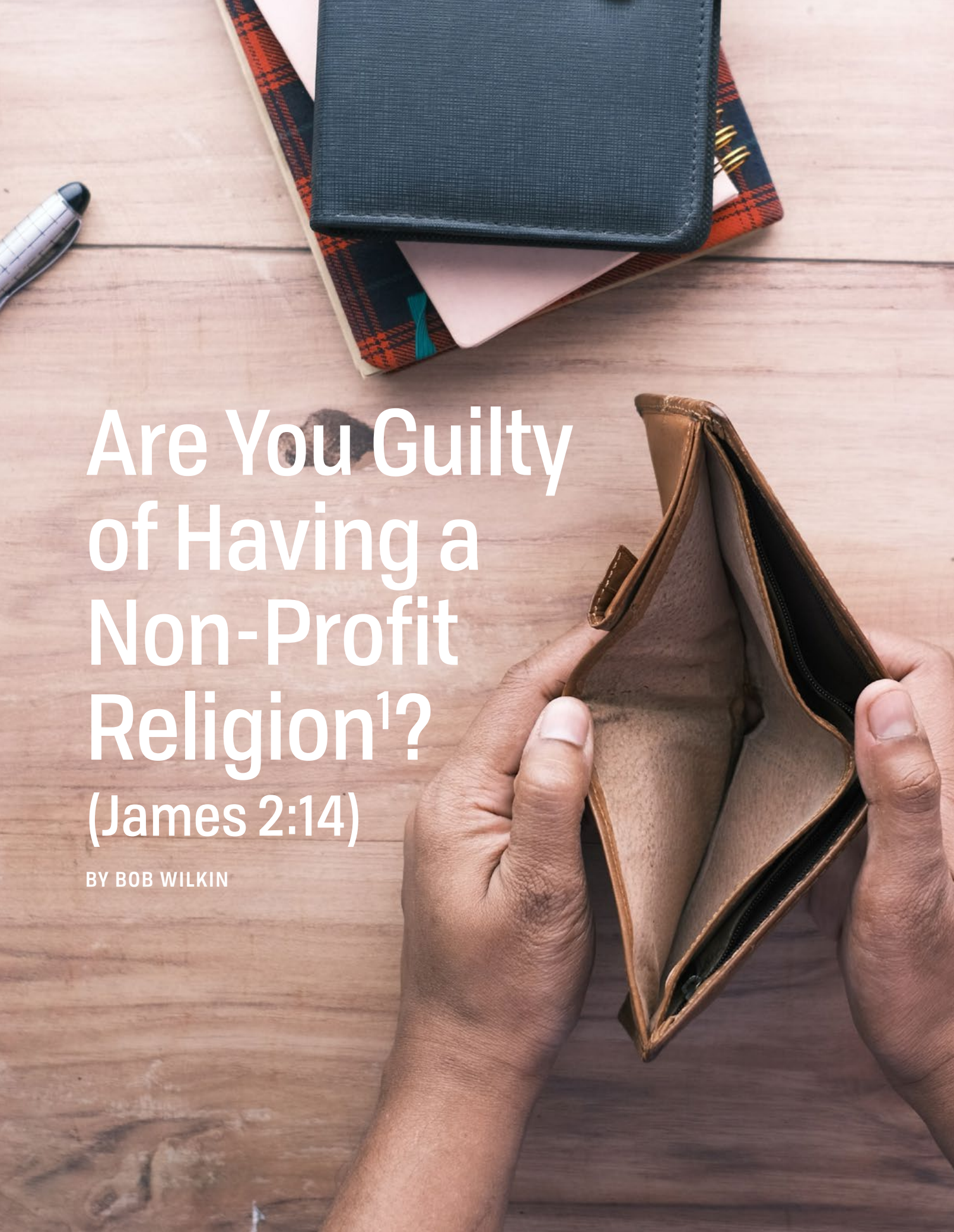
Ken and Kathryn at Bayside with Steve and Sharon Hiller



Jean Bond, Sherry Bryant, Rosy Millet, Cindy Fitzgerald, and other friends had a great time together at the women's fellowship



Brenda Sterling, Sharon Jung, Mary Lou Taylor, Barbara Johnson, and others decorated coffee mugs and shared some laughs



Are You Guilty of Having a Non-Profit Religion¹? (James 2:14)

BY BOB WILKIN

James 2:14 begins with three words in Greek: *ti to ophelos*.

Those three Greek words are found only one other time in the NT. Guess where?

Two verses later James repeats those three words.

Those words are translated in four different, but related, ways in the leading English translation:

What does it profit...? (NKJV, MEV, KJV, RSV, ASV).

What good is it...? (NIV, NET, CEV, HCSB, ESV, WEB).

What use is it...? (NASB).

What is the benefit...? (LEB).

Those four translations are all asking the same question. The only difference is in the word chosen to translate *ophelos*: profit, good, use, benefit.

James is asking us to consider what it profits us if we fail to put our faith to work. He is addressing believers, “My brethren.”

Clearly the “someone” who says he has faith yet does not have works, is potentially any believer. If we are honest, we have all been guilty sometimes of having faith without works.

Have you ever seen a fellow believer in need and yet failed to help? I have. Many times.

The need might be financial. Or it could be an illness that makes it hard for the brother or sister to cook, shop for food, or mow the yard. It could be divorce that leaves the children without their dad.

Have you given them money? Taken them a meal? Mowed their yard? Fixed their car? Spent time with their kids? Listened to them? Encouraged them?

In other articles in our journal and blog, we explain that the salvation in Jas 2:14 concerns the

deliverance of a believer from judgment in this life. The issue is not salvation from eternal condemnation. But in this article, I wanted to focus on the main point of Jas 2:14-17, profit or loss.

The reason *ti to ophelos* is repeated is because James is looking at profit or loss of two different people: the believer able to help and the believer needing help. If the believer able to help says nice words, but does not actually help, then he does not profit. That is, God does not bless and reward him. And the person in need does not profit either.

The principle here is this: *whenever any believer fails to apply whatever he believes, he does not benefit from his belief*. And if he should have been helping a fellow believer in need, but does not, then that other believer does not benefit either. That is the ultimate in a non-profit religion.

This principle applies to whatever we believe, about the call to love our spouse, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to give as the Lord prospers us, to pray without ceasing, to work to provide for our families, to share in Christ’s sufferings, to not get drunk with wine, to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, to encourage one another, etc.

God’s Word is meant to be applied. When we apply it, we benefit and those around us benefit as well. While your church is a non-profit organization, that is only true in the sense that it is not in business to make money. But it is in business to produce great profit in the lives of all its members. God desires our profit in this life and in the life to come. He blesses us when we apply His Word. ■

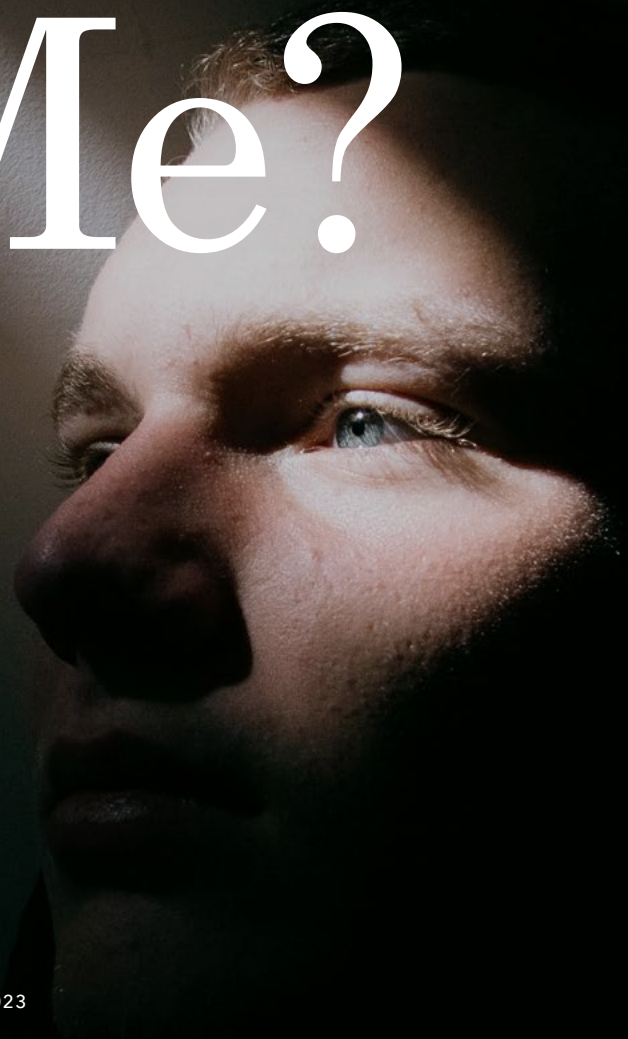


Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked ten marathons.

1 This article originally appeared as a blog on November 9, 2022.

Does It Really Depend on Me?

BY MIKE LII



Back when I was in high school, my church produced a video designed to encourage evangelism. The concluding scene of that video is burned into my memory. A young man was shown in tears and in relative darkness in order to represent his being in hell. He was looking at his friend—a believer who was in the light. The condemned man’s question to his friend was crushing: “Why didn’t you tell me, man?”

The implication of the condemned man’s words was clear: “I wouldn’t be in hell today if you had just told me the gospel. It is your fault for not sharing your faith, and because of that, I ended up here.”

Wow! What a tremendous burden and responsibility! My takeaway from that video was that there are people who will end up in hell unless I share the gospel with them. On the flipside, the only reason some people will be in heaven is that I shared the gospel with them. People’s eternal destinies depend on whether or not I evangelize them, so I’d better get out there and share my faith.

Is this an accurate and appropriate motivation for evangelism? Will people end up in either the lake of fire or in the eternal kingdom just because I evangelized or failed to do so? If this is an incorrect motivation, then what should motivate believers to evangelize?

We actually have from Scripture an answer to the question of whether a lost person would have believed if only someone had brought them the gospel. Recall the rich

man’s desperate plea to Abraham, found in Luke 16:27-31:

Then he [the rich man] said, “I beg you [Abraham] therefore, father, that you would send him [Lazarus] to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.”

Abraham said to him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”

And he [the rich man] said, “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will **repent** (emphasis added).”

But he [Abraham] said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be **persuaded** (emphasis added) though one rise from the dead.”

Notice that the rich man has the gospel wrong. He thinks he is in the place of torment because he failed to turn from his sins. However, he believes that if someone comes

back from the dead to tell them to repent, then his brothers will do so.

Abraham corrects him. He tells the rich man that his brothers will not be persuaded—will not believe—even if someone comes back from the dead to tell them. The rich man’s brothers’ problem is not that they have not repented; their problem is that they have not believed.

However, we have an answer to the question of whether these brothers would have believed if someone had come back from the dead to tell them the gospel. Abraham tells the rich man that even if someone came back from the dead to tell them, the rich man’s brothers would still not be persuaded of (believe) the truth.

Will there be people in hell who would have believed the gospel under different circumstances? The answer is an emphatic, “No!” Those in hell would not have been persuaded of the truth of the gospel, even if evangelized by someone who had come back from the dead.

Given the frequent calls to believe in Jesus for everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27; Acts 16:30-31), the Bible presupposes that man has the capacity to believe in Jesus. Otherwise, these calls to faith are meaningless. Why ask men to exercise faith when they have no capacity to do so? “Faith in Jesus” is not given by God, but comes in response to God’s illumination. God does not force anyone to believe. Believing the gospel is man’s response and responsibility.¹

The God of the universe knows of all the possibilities and under what circumstances one may come to faith in Jesus. When we think someone’s salvation depends on us, our view of God’s power and love is too limited. Would an all-knowing God, who loves everyone in the world and who has infinite resources at His disposal, be limited by any believer’s unwillingness to share the gospel with anyone who would believe it?

Obviously, the answer is, “No!” God’s desire for all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4) is not going to be thwarted by anyone’s unwillingness to share the gospel. If

one is unwilling to be part of His plan, God can use others to accomplish His purposes. If God knows that someone will believe if they hear the saving message, then God’s love for that person will find a way for them to hear the gospel. This is true today, has always been true, and will continue to be true.

One may ask, “Well, in that case, does it matter if I evangelize, since no one will end up in hell because of my lack of effort?” There will be a loss, but not the loss of anyone’s eternal life. The loss is on the part of the person who does not share his faith; this person loses the opportunity of gaining eternal reward. This principle is true not only in evangelism, but regarding any opportunity a believer may have to perform good works.

Recall, in Judges 4:6-9, what Deborah the prophetess said when she admonished the Israeli commander, Barak, to fight:

“Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, ‘Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?’”

And Barak said to her [Deborah], “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!”

So she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.”

The Lord had already commanded and promised that Jabin’s army would be delivered to Israel. However, Barak refused to go unless Deborah went with him. Even without Barak and Deborah, would Jabin’s army have been delivered into Israel’s hand? Of course it would have been, because the Lord had promised that. The question was not whether Jabin’s army would be defeated, but whether Barak would be part of God’s plan. Barak

No one will go to hell because of our failure [to share the gospel]. However, we will have lost the opportunity of being a part of God's plan and of gaining the eternal reward...

became a part of God's plan, but only after Deborah agreed to go with him. This unwillingness to obey God's command without reservation resulted in a lessening of reward for Barak. The glory of the triumph over Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, went to another. The reward went to "the hand of a woman."

Likewise, when we fail to share our faith, God will still accomplish His plan of bringing the gospel to anyone who will believe. No one will go to hell because of our failure. However, we will have lost the opportunity of being a part of God's plan and of gaining the eternal reward we could thus have earned.

This understanding has relieved me of the tremendous responsibility and pressure of thinking that people's eternal destinies rest in my hands. I just need to share the good news that Jesus promises eternal life to all who believe in Him for it. No one is going to go to hell because I was not eloquent enough or because I failed to speak up. Each op-

portunity to share my faith is an opportunity to earn eternal reward, but God will make sure that anyone who will believe will eventually hear the gospel, whether by me or someone else. The Lord Jesus has already promised that those who will believe are out there. "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matt 9:37).

God always accomplishes His plans. The question for us is whether we will be a part of this plan and earn the rewards that go with it. ■



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).

1 See "God's Role in Conversion" by Zane Hodges, *Grace in Focus*, July 1993, and "Man's Role in Conversion" by Zane Hodges, *Grace in Focus*, September 1993.



Prove or Improve:

Using James 2 in Evangelism



BY KATHRYN WRIGHT

Of all the passages in the NT, James 2:14-26 is the one we most frequently encounter in an adversarial way when we proclaim the message of grace. Sadly, many have fallen prey to works-based salvation due to popular misapplications of these verses. Because of these misunderstandings, if you teach that eternal life is a free gift and not by works (Eph 2:8-9), you will likely get asked about James 2.

This causes a conundrum for the evangelist. There's a lot to cover when explaining James 2:14-26. For example, the words *dead* and *justified* need to be defined. The context of the book needs attention, as well as the use of the Greek diatribe—and those are just a few issues. Explaining James 2 can be daunting if we are seeking to evangelize someone who is struggling to understand the free gift of eternal life by faith alone in Jesus. Because it is a passage that deals with a mature Christian faith, when used in evangelism it has caused many unbelievers to stumble in coming to understand the simple teaching of eternal life by faith alone.

Last month, I was faced with this situation when two Jehovah's Witnesses came to my door. I attempted to share the message of eternal life by faith rather than by works (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40, 47). Their response was to refute the grace message by quoting James 2. I explained the passage to the best of my ability. However, my response was confusing to the ladies on my front porch. I explained too much, and their eyes got glossy. They ended the conversation quickly and left.

As I considered this exchange, I was reminded of the importance of simplifying things. When it comes to James 2, how can Free Grace evangelists streamline the conversation in a meaningful way that clarifies the message and does not confuse the unbeliever?

As the old saying goes, "There's more than one way to skin a cat!" I would therefore like to offer three options, each based on how much time you might have with a person.

OPTION 1: THE TWENTY-MINUTE CONVERSATION

In a situation, such as a Bible study, where the evangelist has the opportunity for a long discussion, a simplified approach would be to define the word *save*. Begin with a question:

"What does the word *save* mean in the book of James?"

This is an important question for any passage, but especially for James. The word *save* can mean different things in different books. Since the word occurs five times in the Book of James (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15, 20), the evangelist can walk the person through these examples. This does two things: First, it's a simple concept and brings the conversation down to a single word. Second, walking them through each passage allows the evangelist to use a repetitive message, then just connect the dots. When trying to explain a difficult passage, repetition is a valuable tool. In the Book of James, all five uses of *save* refer to temporal deliverance from physical death, not to eternal salvation.

For example, 5:19-20 says:

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will **save** a life from death and cover a multitude of sins. (emphasis added)

Here, James gives a scenario in which one believer *saves* another believer by turning him back from a lifestyle of sin. James, it should be noted, understands that true Christians can wander from the truth. This alone refutes popular misapplications of James 2. In addition, it's clear that James doesn't have eternal salvation in mind. The salvation described in v 20 is by means of another Christian. Since only Jesus can save a person from the lake of fire, James is obviously writing about a dif-

ferent kind of salvation. James tells us what kind of salvation it is when he says that it will save a person from death. In other words, in the Book of James *save* is dealing with temporal deliverance from physical death, not with eternal salvation from the lake of fire. When we live a righteous life, we can be saved from premature death.

OPTION 2: THE TEN-MINUTE CONVERSATION

While defining the word *save* in James is simple, it does take time. What if you only have 5-10 minutes? In this scenario, I suggest going to verse 26, the conclusion of the passage. This narrows down the conversation to one verse and naturally summarizes James's point, thus avoiding the evangelist's having to exegete the entire passage.

In verse 26, James writes:

For as the body without the spirit is dead,
so faith without works is dead also.

James gives the reader an illustration of the role of works in the believer's life. Unfortunately, many Bible teachers mix up the illustration. For example, proponents of Calvinism argue that James is saying that saving faith will automatically produce works. However, that is not what James teaches in this verse. Notice that James equates the body to faith and the spirit to works. In this illustration, the spirit (works) animates the body (faith). The spirit is what makes the body move. Therefore, works make faith move. Again, it's important to notice that in this illustration James says that faith is the body. So, he is not saying that our faith produces works. He's saying that our works animate our faith. The Calvinist has flipped the illustration. Verse 26 is the conclusion to the section on the role of works in the Christian life and is therefore essential to understanding the entire section. The point James is trying to make has nothing to do with saving faith. It's about maturing in your faith as you exercise it with good works.

OPTION 3: THE ONE-MINUTE SUMMARY

There's a lot you can cover in twenty minutes or even in ten. However, what if you only have one minute on your front porch, as I did with the Jehovah's Witnesses? What if you don't have time to explain any of the specific details of James 2, but you want to give the person you are talking to something to ponder and something easy to remember? After my experience with the Jehovah's Witnesses, I came across a summary statement that I think would be helpful in this situation.

James isn't teaching that works PROVE our faith.

He's teaching that works IMPROVE our faith.

The evangelist can say that in less than 10 seconds and still get the point across. It's short, it draws a contrast to what is typically taught, it's a play on words, and it is also easy to remember.

Sadly, many think that works are necessary for salvation, or that works prove that you are saved. James 2 is often used to support this claim. However, that's not the point James is trying to make.

In James 2, we are given the example of Abraham's offering Isaac as a sacrifice. This event is known by most people who ask about James 2 and is therefore a great example to draw upon. Furthermore, it took place decades after the Lord declared the patriarch righteous by faith (Gen 15:6). Abraham's obedience to the Lord is not given as proof of his salvation, but to show his maturity. Before this event, Abraham made a lot of immature decisions. He lied about the identity of his wife (twice!) to save his own skin. He was fearful and attempted to circumvent God's plan by sleeping with Hagar. However, after decades of walking with the Lord, he faithfully obeyed when asked to sacrifice his beloved child. His faith had IMPROVED. In this passage, we see a man whose faith had grown. This was a unique moment in the life of Abraham. His



James isn't teaching that works PROVE our faith. He's teaching that works IMPROVE our faith.

works had matured to the point that he was willing to sacrifice the thing he loved most. This kind of maturity is not true of all believers. *This is an example of spiritual growth, not proof of spiritual birth.* His works didn't PROVE his faith; his works IMPROVED his faith. Even the example of Abraham can be explained in less than 60 seconds.

CONCLUSION


Lordship proponents have a famous expression. They often attempt to explain James 2 by saying, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." In other words, if you are saved, you will have works. This expression has become so popularized and so ingrained in church culture that it is now commonly accepted by many as fact. This shows the power of a catchy phrase.

However, this runs counter to the teachings of the NT, including the Book of James. Works are not automatic, and maturity is a process and is not

guaranteed. Abraham is the perfect example of this fact.

Lordship teachers have done a good job of simplifying their unbiblical position with this catch phrase. It's short and gets to the point of their message without overwhelming the hearer. In the same way, Free Grace teachers might consider having a simplified summary that expresses, in a Biblical way, what James 2 is saying:

Works don't PROVE faith; they IMPROVE faith.

GES has written several articles and blogs addressing James 2. For further study on this topic, check out our website at faithalone.org. 



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 Message of Grace in Zambia

BY KEN YATES

One of the ministries of GES is proclaiming the free gift of eternal life by faith alone in Christ in countries other than the United States. One way we do that is through our website. We also have Zoom classes through which citizens of other countries can participate in sound theological discussions. We also send people to teach in other countries in person.

One such country is Zambia. For the last seven years, my daughter Kathryn and I have gone to a Bible school in Zambia to teach Bible courses. Each trip lasts about two weeks. We average about 40 students each time we go. Our last trip took place in April of this year. Kathryn teaches a course on salvation, and I teach the Book of Romans.

The one characteristic that stands out with these Zambian students is their eagerness to ask questions. Even though they are young, with an average age of around 20, they are not shy about asking questions. The Free Grace message is rare in Zambia. Kathryn teaches the freshmen class and, for almost all of them, it is the first time they have heard that eternal life is given as a free gift by faith alone. It is the first time they have heard that they cannot lose that gift. As a result, they challenge this teaching and bring up various Bible passages that they think refute such a gracious offer. The great news is that by the end of the course almost all the students understand that they have eternal life that can never be lost.

In my course on Romans, I teach students who had Kathryn's class two years prior. We basically show how the book is interpreted from a grace (and Biblical!) perspective. This is the first time in their lives that they exegete a book in this manner. Once again, they have lots of questions. By the end of this course almost all of them say that they have a completely new understanding of the book.

It is always exciting to take part in these classes. The message of grace is going out in that country. These men are future pastors there. On this

last trip, we saw how that message was taking hold in various other ways.

Meeting with Students at Night

The students at the Bible college are busy. They not only take classes, but also have to work on campus to pay for their living expenses. There are various kinds of workshops; one example is a shop where they build furniture. Some of them work in the fields to raise crops for food, or they help with raising chickens.

Even though they have busy schedules, some of them asked Kathryn and me if we could meet at night to answer some questions about the Bible. We were able to do that every weekday night we were there. This gave the students an opportunity to deal with issues that are not discussed in our regular classes. Many of their questions deal with grace issues throughout the Bible, such as how people in the Old Testament received eternal life.

The most exciting part of these sessions is that it shows the dedication of these students. It takes a commitment on their part to attend these meetings at the end of a busy day of classes and work. They want to hear more.

The Message in Local Churches

Depending on our travel days, we always have the opportunity of attending a local Zambian church on one or two Sundays. On this most recent trip, we went to a local Baptist church about two hours from Lusaka, the capital city. I had spoken there the year before and was asked to come back and speak on eternal rewards and the doctrine of the end times. Kathryn led the Sunday school, covering the doctrine of rewards. During the main service, I spoke on the Rapture of the Church.

Kathryn explained the difference between being eternally saved and receiving rewards. The first is

absolutely free and cannot be lost. The second involves works. A believer may be in the kingdom of God, yet lose the reward of reigning with Christ. I showed, from 1 Thessalonians 5, that all believers, whether faithful or not, will go to be with the Lord when He calls His Church to Himself.

The pastor of this church is the father of one of our Bible college students. For the last three years we have given him Free Grace books to read. Each year he asks for more. We are able to give them to him because of donations to GES. It is clear that he understands the issues and wants to know more. One of the things that stands out about his church is the absence of charismatic excesses during the service. In other churches we have attended in Africa, it is common to see people scream, run around the building, and jump up and down in supposed expressions of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

At this church, however, these exhibitions do not take place. Things are done in an orderly fashion. I am confident that the teaching of grace and the influence of GES's website on this pastor play a role in what is happening there. We were also able to give Free Grace material to the deacons at this church. We are excited to see what the Lord will do in the lives of believers there.

A Free Grace Library

Each year, we give our students Free Grace books corresponding to the classes they take from us. They constantly ask for more. The Bible college has a well-stocked library where the students are able to find many additional GES books that we have donated through the years. In fact, the library has about 80% of our books.

In addition, we give the students all the information they need to access the GES website, where they discover a wealth of free articles and blogs. Throughout the year, we receive emails from students telling us they are using the site.

A friend of GES has also volunteered his time and resources to train the students in how to use LOGOS in their studies. He purposefully shows the students how to access Free Grace material using the program.

In a country where Free Grace teaching is rare, these students have an abundance of riches available to them.

Other Free Grace Missionaries

On our last trip to Zambia, we had the pleasant experience of meeting two other Free Grace missionaries, William and Jeff. William and his family are new to the country. They were mentored by Loren Faul, a longtime friend of GES. William works with Zambians by teaching them trades in construction so they can earn a living. He looks for opportunities to share the message of grace with his students.

William has found that the message is opposed by the other missionaries with whom he works. He is making contacts with some of our students and local churches in an effort to form Free Grace circles. It is our hope that, if the Lord tarries, we can work with and encourage one another in this work.

Jeff is a missionary who, like us, travels to Zambia to teach local pastors the message of grace. He learned about our trips there from the GES website and came to the school to meet us. He invited us to come and teach the group of pastors involved in his ministry. Perhaps, if the Lord wills, we will be able to do so during future trips to the country.

Conclusion

I am often asked how our trips to other countries are going. How are the folks responding? Do we see any fruit? Many people are interested in, and support, what we do.

Zambia is an example of what we are doing. As in the US, Free Grace theology is not the most popular teaching in that country. But also, as in the US, the message is going out. All those who support us, in whatever way, can be encouraged by the fact that the truth is reaching people. As with all of us, it makes a tremendous difference in the lives of those who have heard and believed. ■



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

Ward

Part I

By Nancy Rempel

Just before midnight on September 30, 1994, a baby, one month premature, slipped out of an unwed Muslim girl in Peshawar, Pakistan. Wide-eyed with fear, 15-year-old Jan Bibi delivered her tiny boy in silence. The victim of a revenge rape, Jan Bibi was running, hiding, and dodging death.

Six months earlier, our phone had rung in Layyah, 400 miles south. “Unmarried girl... pregnant... baby due the end of October. Do you want the baby?” a friend asked. We counted what little of the cost we could imagine and plunged into God’s grand adventure.

A Pakistani nurse who was concealing Jan Bibi in her home whispered an Islamic prayer into the baby’s ear. Jan Bibi cleaned herself up, tied back her long dark hair, and swept a wool shawl around her and the baby. Her older brother, posing as her husband, loaded them into a waiting car, and they blazed out of town.

Jan Bibi tugged her shawl open at the neck just enough to gaze down at the baby nuzzling her breast. She relished the smell of him, memorizing his face. Within hours, like two mail packages, they were sorted, separated, and sent in opposite directions.

Throughout the night, strangers passed Jan Bibi’s son from one to another in a secretive chain. The baby, nestled in a little pink sleeping bag, was more than usually controversial because he was the grandchild of a well-known Muslim cleric.

In the pre-dawn hours, the baby’s last guardians delivered their package to Bach Christian Hospital, 133 miles from where he had been born.

Later that day and four hours south, we idled our van through the gates of a Christian retreat center in the city of Jhelum. Clouds of dust settled behind us as our eyes drank in green lawns and purple morning glories climbing the brick buildings.



WESS

My mother, who was traveling with us and our toddler, had recently arrived from Canada for the expected baby's birth. The aroma of curried chicken wafted from the dining hall as Mom got out of the van and stretched her long legs.

As we searched for our rooms, arms full of luggage, we halted at the sound of running and a breathless voice behind us: "Your son has been born!" A friend had been tracking us all day with the news.

The next morning at Bach Hospital I posed for a photo with our new son, Curtis Donald. In the photo I look gaunt and tired, wearing a deer-in-the-headlights expression. Like a minor movie character suddenly elevated to the leading role.

While I waited for Don to return from the market with milk formula, I bathed off the last of the umbilical cord stuck in Curtis' navel. A perfect little person entrusted to such weakness and brokenness.

Jan Bibi and her elder brother reached their village. Her arranged marriage would be conducted in six weeks. As long as she could conceal the awful truth, she would live.

Meanwhile, I was a mother again, grateful but so overwhelmed. I had thought I would have another month to prepare, to rest, to let another baby into my heart where our toddler lived.

Back at the retreat center that day, while Curtis gorged on milk formula, I studied my mother. Her eyes were dull, and her clothes looked saggy on her shoulders.

Something had happened to Mom.

And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9a NKJV).

Part II

Edged between her two grandsons in the van's middle seat, Mom was quiet on the trip back to Bach Hospital, her face sad, vacant. In a real-life game of Whac-a-mole, I lurched back and forth between a sick mother and a premature baby.

Fuchsia-colored bougainvillea climbed the wall of the brick bungalow set on green lawns at the hospital. Huddled in Dr. Luke's living room with its low ceiling fans and ethnic carpets, medical staff had gathered to meet our family.

People leaned in to meet my mother. "When did you arrive in Pakistan, Mrs. Arcand?" A string of unrelated words tumbled off Mom's tongue, and an icy coldness spread through my body. I covered for her, providing the right information to the question.

Dr. Luke was gentle as he examined Mom in a private room. "I don't think it's a stroke. Her diarrhea is pretty bad, so let's give her oral rehydration solution and see how she does."

I took a deep breath and exhaled through pursed lips.

Mom's eyes were closed as I slipped into the double bed beside her that night. Plastic bags layered between her sheet and the mattress rustled as she shifted. Rehydrating Mom had produced predictable results.

"You Ok, Mom?"

She mumbled something unintelligible and gazed blankly in my direction. I felt like I was living someone else's life.

In the dark, it was quiet except for Mom's steady breathing. My brand-new baby and the rest of the family were somewhere else in the house. I had no words and no prayers. I was tumbling disoriented into a fearful valley.

Like a shaft of light, the words of a psalm streamed into my mind. I can't remember now which psalm, but I latched onto it like it was the last bus out of hell.

And I slept.

Around midnight, Mom awakened, struggling with soiled bedsheets. "Mom?" I was a small child looking for her mother.

She responded normally, like her old self again.

Dr. Luke admitted Mom to a hospital ward for tests and round-the-clock pampering by nurses.

I dragged our double mattress outside and doused the soiled areas with soapy water, scrubbing the stains, wrestling within my heart. So much for the carefully-planned arrival of our baby.

While the mattress dried in the hot Pakistani sun, baby Curtis and I followed Don around the hospital grounds as we dealt with details: Now a circumcision. Now polio drops. Now a birth certificate—"Father unknown, Mother unknown."

Somewhere in the kerfuffle, a wise friend said, "Nancy, you are on a train and the train is going through a dark tunnel. Stay on the train." But I resented God's train with its unplanned schedule and uncertain destination. I hated being out of control, unable to protect my image, our topsy-turvy family on full display.

The word *weakness* was scrawled across the whole black canvas—Jan Bibi's rape, Curtis' premature birth, and our awkward, imperfect family. But as I flip the canvas over now, I discover four more words etched—*the power of Christ*.

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor 12:9b, NKJV). ■



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.

\$5 OFF

FOR ANY REVIEW OF OUR BOOKS

GES is the publisher of over 20 books. You will get \$5 off each book you review on your next order.

FIVE SMALL STRINGS ATTACHED.

1. Only review books you have read. Duh.
2. These must be books published by GES. (Some of the books we sell [e.g., by Badger, Elkins, Kitchen, Lee, and Vance] are not published by GES and would not count.)
3. You can only get one discount per book you review. You can't review the same book twice and get another discount.
4. Only one discount per order. (You must spread out the discounts if you review multiple books.)
5. Your order must indicate the book you reviewed and the date the review was posted (put in order notes at checkout).

If you review one of our books before each time you order, you will get \$5 off each order for a long time.

This discount applies whether you give us a good or bad review.

You will see the discount line on the order form in the magazine and online.

CODE: **REVIEW** (for online orders)



THE BOOKSTORE

40% off
retail on bulk
orders of
10+ copies

GO TO WWW.FAITHALONE.ORG TO SIGN UP FOR FLASH SALES!

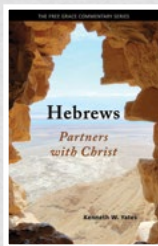


Faith Alone in One Hundred Verses

Robert N. Wilkin

Written in a devotional style, this book guides the reader through the overwhelming evidence for salvation by faith alone.

USD ~~\$15.00~~ **\$10.00**
Softcover • 296 pages
Code: fav



Hebrews: Partners with Christ

Kenneth W. Yates

This verse-by-verse commentary explains how Hebrews encourages believers to persevere so they will rule with Christ in His kingdom.

USD **\$22.00**
Softcover • 244 pages
Code: hpwc

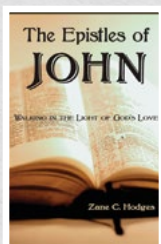


Is Calvinism Biblical? Let the Scriptures Decide

Robert N. Wilkin

Wilkin compares the five points of Calvinism against twelve key verses.

USD **\$10.00**
Softcover • 166 pages
Code: icb

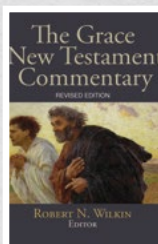


The Epistles of John

Zane C. Hodges

First John is all about fellowship with God, not tests of eternal life. Second and Third John are also explained in this valuable commentary.

USD **\$15.00**
Softcover • 312 pages
Code: 1-3john



The Grace New Testament Commentary (Revised Edition)

Ed. Robert N. Wilkin

This one-volume edition has hundreds of corrections and includes Zane Hodges's *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*.

USD **\$35.00**
Softcover • 658 pages
Code: gntc

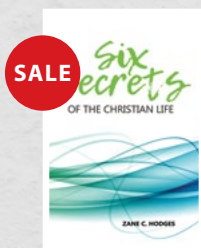


Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance

Robert N. Wilkin

What is the nature and purpose of repentance?

USD **\$15.00**
Softcover • 158 pages
Code: tal



Six Secrets of the Christian Life

Zane C. Hodges

Hodges sets forth some basic principles for growing in Christ. Second Edition, with study questions.

USD ~~\$6.00~~ **\$4.00**
Softcover • 100 pages
Code: ssl2



The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension

Zane C. Hodges

What is the relationship between faith and works?

USD ~~\$15.00~~ **\$10.00**
Softcover • 266 pages
Code: gus2

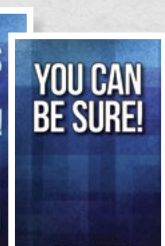
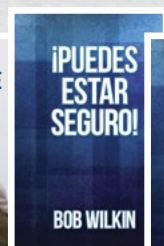
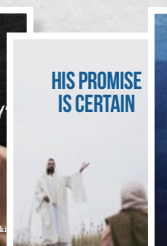
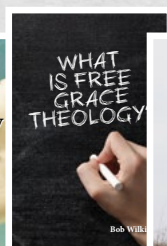
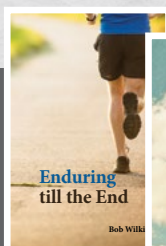


First Peter: The Salvation of the Soul

Zane C. Hodges

As you read through First Peter, you will better understand God's desire to save your soul.

USD **\$10.00**
Softcover • 106 pages
Code: 1pet



Booklets

Enduring till the End / Code: ete

His Promise Is Certain / Code: hpc

The Simplicity of Saving Faith / Code: ssf

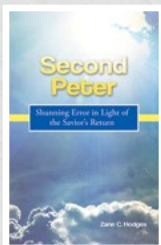
What Is Free Grace Theology? / Code: fgt

You Can Be Eternally Secure / Code: ycbes

You Can Be Sure! / Code: ychs

Puedes Estar Seguro / Code: ycbs-sp

Individually \$0.25/EACH -OR- Pack of 25 \$5.00 (\$0.20/EACH)

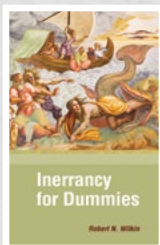


Second Peter: Shunning Error in Light of the Savior's Return

Zane C. Hodges

Second Peter is about growing in holiness in light of the Second Coming.

USD \$10.00
Softcover • 142 pages
Code: 2pet



Inerrancy for Dummies

Robert N. Wilkin

Wilkin explains "true inerrancy," and how to resolve alleged discrepancies in the Bible.

USD \$7.95
Softcover • 70 pages
Code: ifd



The Journey of Faith: Sermons on Hebrews

Zane C. Hodges

The Epistle to the Hebrews is about the incredible journey of faith.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 212 pages
Code: jof



Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?

Hodges & Wilkin

Zane and Bob discuss clear up Scriptures that seem to teach salvation by works.

USD \$15.00
~~USD \$15.00~~ **\$10.00**
Softcover • 174 pages
Code: tt



The Gospel Is Still Under Siege

Robert N. Wilkin

Know how to defend the gospel against all assaults.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 145 pages
Code: gsu

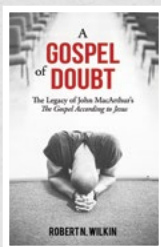


What Is the Outer Darkness?

Zane C. Hodges with Robert N. Wilkin

Zane and Bob discuss all three occurrences of the phrase "the outer darkness" in Matthew.

USD \$14.00
Softcover • 112 pages
Code: wod

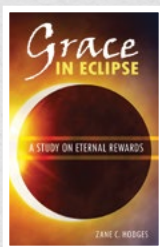


A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus

Robert N. Wilkin

Wilkin shows how to move from doubt to a gospel of assurance.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 305 pages
Code: agd



Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards

Zane C. Hodges

How does the doctrine of rewards relate to the saving message?

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 168 pages
Code: gie2

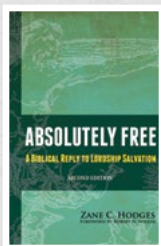


The Hungry Inherit

Zane C. Hodges

The burden of this work is to clearly distinguish between salvation and discipleship.

USD \$10.00
Softcover • 160 pages
Code: thi

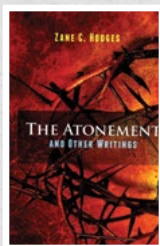


Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation

Zane C. Hodges

This book explains how popular theologies confuse faith and works, salvation and discipleship, eternal life and rewards.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 272 pages
Code: af2

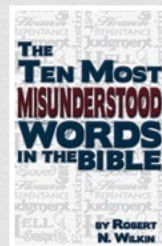


The Atonement and Other Writings

Zane C. Hodges

This book collects three hard-to-find shorter works by Hodges: *The Atonement*; *Jesus, God's Prophet*; and *Did Paul Preach Eternal Life?*

USD \$10.00
Softcover • 116 pages
Code: atm

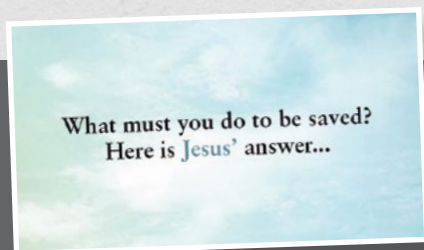


The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible

Robert N. Wilkin

An exploration of Biblical terms everyone knows, and yet few understand.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 221 pages
Code: ten



Available in Spanish too!

Evangelism Business Cards

USD \$15.00
Box of 200 cards
Code: ebc



Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

100+ pages. Two issues each year. Scholarly yet practical articles and reviews.

USD \$18.50 / \$9.95
for new or gift subscriptions.
Code: jotges



Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election Is to Service, Not to Eternal Life

Shawn Lazar

Is Biblical election about eternal life or service to God?

USD \$18.00
Softcover • 284 pages
Code: cts

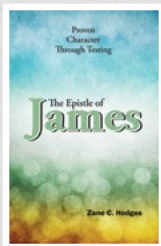


Elisabeth: Christ's Medal of Honor Recipient

Ken Yates

Ken writes of the impact Elisabeth's life and death had upon him.

USD \$11.95 \$10.00
Softcover • 151 pages
Code: elis

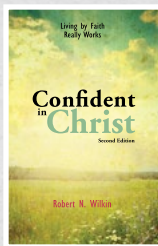


The Epistle of James

Zane C. Hodges

This is the best commentary available on James. The section on James 2:14-26 has helped thousands understand this pivotal passage.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 128 pages
Code: jas



Confident in Christ (Second Edition)

Robert N. Wilkin

This book examines sixteen "tough texts" from the NT that are often used to teach salvation by works.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 278 pages
Code: cic2



Salvation and Discipleship

Lucas Kitchen

This book clears up the confusion on the often-overlooked distinction between salvation and discipleship.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 208 pages
Code: sd



A Free Grace Primer

Zane C. Hodges

Collects three of Hodges's books, The Hungry Inherit, The Gospel Under Siege, and Grace in Eclipse.

USD \$22.00
Softcover • 571 pages
Code: fgp2

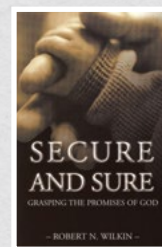


Romans: Deliverance from Wrath

Zane C. Hodges

Romans teaches us about deliverance from temporal wrath and slavery to sin.

USD \$25.00
Softcover • 488 pages
Code: rom

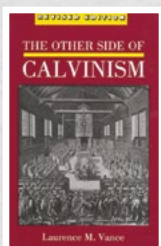


Secure and Sure

Robert N. Wilkin

Assurance of eternal life is one of the most important, and for many, elusive truths. You can be secure and sure.

USD \$10.00
Softcover • 252 pages
Code: sas

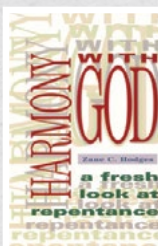


The Other Side of Calvinism

Laurence M. Vance

Historical and critical Biblical analysis of the philosophical speculations and theological implications of Calvinism

USD \$29.95
Hardcover • 800 pages
Code: osc

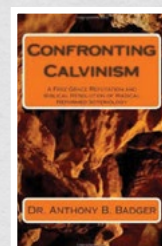


Harmony with God

Zane C. Hodges

Repentance is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the church today. If you have questions about repentance, read this book.

USD \$10.00
Softcover • 133 pages
Code: hwg

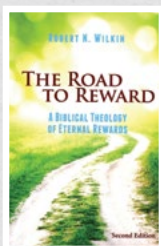


Confronting Calvinism

Anthony B. Badger

A detailed refutation of the Five Points of Calvinism from a Free Grace perspective.

USD \$24.95
Softcover • 397 pages
Code: cc

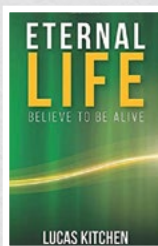


The Road to Reward (Second Edition)

Robert N. Wilkin

Robert N. Wilkin takes us through the Biblical doctrine of eternal rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

USD \$10.00
Softcover • 200 pages
Code: rr2



Eternal Life: Believe to Be Alive

Lucas Kitchen

This easy-to-read book gives an entertaining and illustrative view of the concept of eternal life and what you must do to receive it.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 300 pages
Code: el



Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of Free Grace Theology

Robert N. Wilkin

Wilkin responds to Grudem's critique of Free Grace.

USD \$15.00
Softcover • 144 pages
Code: gag

Booklist

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

- \$18.50 (renewal) / \$9.95 (new or gift subscription)
Other options available on website.

The Grace New Testament Commentary

- Revised Edition, \$35.00

Anthony B. Badger

- *Confronting Calvinism*, \$24.95
- *Free Grace Theology on Trial*, \$24.95

Steve Elkins

- *The Roman Road Revisited: New Vistas on the Road to Resurrection Living* (2nd ed.), \$14.95
- *Keys to Kingdom Greatness: An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, \$19.95

Zane Hodges

- *Absolutely Free* (2nd ed.), \$15.00
- *The Atonement and Other Writings*, \$10.00
- *The Epistle of James*, \$15.00
- *The Epistles of John*, \$15.00
- *Faith in His Name: John*, \$10.00
- *First Peter: The Salvation of the Soul*, \$10.00
- *A Free Grace Primer*, \$22.00
- *Grace in Eclipse*, \$15.00
- *The Gospel Under Siege*, ~~\$15.00~~ \$10.00
- *Harmony with God*, \$10.00
- *Here Walks My Enemy: The Story of Luis*, \$5.00 (hardcover), \$3.00 (paperback)
- *How to Be the Spouse God Wants You To Be*, \$6.00
- *The Hungry Inherit*, \$10.00
- *Jesus, God's Prophet*, \$5.95
- *The Journey of Faith: Sermons on Hebrews*, \$15.00
- *Luke* (Vol 1), \$8.95
- *Luke* (Vol 2), \$8.95
- *Power to Make War*, \$8.95
- *Power to Stand: An Exposition of Jude*, \$9.00
- *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, \$25.00
- *Second Peter: Shunning Error in Light of the Savior's Soon Return*, \$10.00
- *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*, ~~\$6.00~~ \$4.00
- *Spiritual Lessons from the Life of David*, \$10.00
- *Tough Texts: Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works?*, ~~\$15.00~~ \$10.00
- *What Is the Outer Darkness?*, \$14.00

Lucas Kitchen

- *Eternal Rewards: It Will Pay to Obey*, \$15.00
- *Eternal Life: Believe to Be Alive*, \$15.00
- *Salvation and Discipleship*, \$15.00

Shawn C. Lazar

- *Beyond Doubt: How to Be Sure*, \$15.00
- *Chosen to Serve: Election Is to Service*, \$18.00

Bill Lee

- *Grace Recovered*, \$10.00

Lawrence Vance

- *The Other Side of Calvinism*, \$29.95

Bob Wilkin

- *Confident in Christ* (2nd ed.), \$15.00
- *The Gospel Is Still Under Siege*, \$15.00 **NEW!**
- *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus*, \$15.00
- *Faith Alone in One Hundred Verses*, ~~\$15.00~~ \$10.00
- *Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of FGT*, \$15.00
- *Inerrancy for Dummies*, \$7.95
- *Is Calvinism Biblical?*, \$10.00
- *The Road to Reward* (2nd ed.), \$10.00
- *Secure and Sure*, \$10.00
- *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*, \$15.00
- *Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance*, \$15.00

Kenneth W. Yates

- *Elisabeth: Christ's Medal of Honor Recipient*, ~~\$11.95~~ \$10.00
- *Hebrews: Partners with Christ*, \$22.00

For more titles and
exclusive online sales
go to www.faithalone.org

3 Ways to Order

1. By phone (940-270-8827)

2. Online at faithalone.org/bookstore.html

3. Or complete the order form below



ORDER FORM

Prices effective until October 31, 2023

Refunds / Exchanges only within 60 days of purchase date.



SHIPPING ADDRESS

(No PO Boxes if order is over \$30)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

Acct.# (if you know it) _____

BILLING ADDRESS

(If different from Shipping Address)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

Acct.# (if you know it) _____

METHOD OF PAYMENT (circle one): Cash Check Money Order Credit Card

Send Check or Money Order to:

Grace Evangelical Society
P.O. Box 1308
Denton, TX 76202

Credit Card Information: Visa MasterCard

CREDIT CARD # _____

EXP. DATE _____ CSC# (3 digit code) _____

NAME ON CARD _____

CODE	TITLE	QTY	PRICE	AMOUNT

EXTRAS Extra copies of this magazine are available for \$1/ea, while supplies last. Call for cost of shipping and handling. Foreign subscription prices are \$28 per year to Canada, and \$48 per year for all other countries.	SHIPPING USPS (U.S. Addresses) FREE on all orders of \$10 or more. UNDER \$10: \$4.00 first item. \$2.50 for second item. SHIPPING UPS:	\$0-\$20 \$12.75 \$21-\$50 \$16.75 \$51+ 30%	SUBTOTAL	
				SHIPPING
				DISCOUNT for REVIEW*
				DONATION
				TOTAL

*\$5 off. Max of one discount per order. Book I reviewed and when it appeared on Amazon: _____

GRACE (in) FOCUS

Sign up people for free subscriptions.

[illegible]



What Can Motivate Us if Eternal Life Is Assured?

By Philippe R. Sterling

A motive is “that which moves or induces a person to act in a certain way” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In the context of the Christian life, what motive(s) could move a believer to live in obedience to Christ if eternal life is already assured?

Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it (John 5:24; 6:47). When people hear that eternal life is a free gift—and that getting it, keeping it, or proving that one has it is not dependent on good works—they sometimes wonder what would motivate a person to live a life pleasing to Christ once they are assured of eternal life. Before addressing that question, let’s consider what might be a primary motivation for obedience if eternal life were **not** assured.

What Might Motivate Us If Eternal Life Were Not Assured?

Fear of hell might be a primary motivation for obedience if eternal life were not assured. In an Arminian system of theology there can be the fear of losing justification. In a Reformed system of theology there can be the fear of being among the non-elect.

John Wesley believed that eternal life could be lost. He said, “It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous for good works. And these are so necessary, that if a man willingly neglects them... he cannot retain the grace he has received” (*The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion*).

Reformed writer R. C. Sproul cited a fear of not being saved:



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.

I tried to grab hold of myself. I thought, “Well, it’s a good sign that I’m worried about this. Only true Christians really care about salvation.” But then I began to take stock of my life, and I looked at my performance. My sins came pouring into my mind, and the more I looked at myself, the worse I felt. I thought, “Maybe it’s really true. Maybe I’m not saved after all (*Tabletalk Magazine*, Nov 7, 1989).

Jesus promised, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). We don’t look at our performance for our assurance of eternal life, but at Christ’s promise. What, then, can motivate our perseverance and faithfulness if eternal life is assured?

What Can Motivate Us If Eternal Life Is Assured?

Believers can have a multifaceted motivation for dedication and faithfulness to Christ. We can organize these facets of our motivation by focusing on the past, present, and future aspects of our salvation.

PAST-FOCUSED MOTIVATION

We can be motivated to obey and serve Christ when we reflect on the past aspects of our salvation. Our past-focused reflection on what Christ has done for us can stir up love and gratitude.

Gratitude can induce dedication and service. The Apostle Paul’s appeal for a believer’s dedication on the mercies of God: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God *which is your reasonable service*” (Rom 12:1). A believer can show appreciation for what has been freely provided him by dedicating himself to a life of service to Christ. We can serve out of thankfulness for what has been done for us.

Love for Christ can move a believer to live for Him. Jesus said “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word” (John 14:23).

PRESENT-FOCUSED MOTIVATION

We can be motivated to obey and serve Christ when we reflect on the present aspects of our salvation. There are positive and negative aspects to a believer’s present-focused motivation.

Positive Consequences in the Present Life

God rewards faithfulness with present blessings. Faithful believers experience joy, peace, and confidence in God’s provision for their needs. Jesus exhorted His disciples to cease being anxious about what they would eat, drink or wear, since

their heavenly Father knows that they need them all; instead, they were to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things would be added” to them (Matt 6:31-33). This was not a guarantee of health and wealth, but a general promise of God’s daily provision for believers who put God’s priorities first in life.

The Apostle Peter linked righteous living with present blessings by quoting from Psalm 32, “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet 3:10-11).

Believers who keep Jesus’ commandments experience an increased level of spiritual intimacy with Him and an increased level of joy. Jesus put it this way, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full” (John 15:10-11).

Believers can be positively motivated by a familial fear of the Lord’s discipline (Heb 12:7-9). God’s family discipline can take various forms.

The first form of discipline can be simple reproof. The Word of God reproves and corrects us as we are exposed to it (2 Tim 3:16-17). God may use a fellow believer to restore us in a spirit of gentleness when we are caught up in a transgression (Gal 6:1).

God may discipline us by making us sick. James gave this advice to believers who may be sick due to the Lord’s discipline: “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jas 5:15-16a).

God’s family discipline may be preventative, corrective, or instructive. All of God’s discipline is for our good so that we may be conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ (Heb 12:10). For the moment such discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but it later yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those trained by it (Heb 12:11). This is the grace of discipline.

Negative Consequences in the Present Life

Unfortunately, believers can fail to obtain the grace of God needed to benefit positively from the discipline of God (Heb 12:15). When we obtain God’s grace in the midst of our difficulties and trials, the results are positive. When, in our difficulties and trials, we fail to obtain God’s grace, the results are negative.

How do we obtain God’s grace? Hebrews 4:14-16 encourages us to come “to the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.”

When we fail to obtain God’s grace in our time of need, we may become bitter and immoral (Heb 12:15b-16a). We, like Esau, might even become godless and develop ways of living life and fulfilling needs apart from God (12:16b). Esau lost the birthright (inheritance of the firstborn) and blessing, and he could not change this fact no matter how much he later regretted it (12:17). Believers can lose their inheritance. This is not the loss of eternal life, but loss of the inheritance of reigning with Christ in the life to come.

God may even take the physical life of a sinning believer prematurely. This happened in the cases of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and of some of the believers in Corinth (1 Cor 11:30).

FUTURE-FOCUSED MOTIVATION

We can be motivated to obey and serve Christ when we reflect on the future aspects of our salvation. There are positive and negative aspects of a believer’s future-focused motivation.

Believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (*Bema*) to be recompensed for the deeds done in this present life, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10). The judgment at the *Bema* is not for the purpose of determining who has eternal life, but of testing the quality of each believer’s work (1 Cor 3:13-15). A believer is secure in his possession of eternal life. The evaluation of how he spent his life will have positive or negative consequences in the life to come.

Positive Consequences in the Life to Come

There is the positive promise of rewards. Among the last recorded words of Jesus in the New Testament is the promise, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev 22:12). Jesus will reward faithful believers with praise, the special joy of having pleased him, and the privilege of ruling with Him (Luke 19:11-19; Matt 25:14-23).

Is it selfish to be motivated by the promise of rewards? The fact that Jesus promises rewards for faithfulness makes it a good motivation. It is good to want what the Lord wants us to have. Jesus Himself endured the cross “for the joy that was set before Him” (Heb 12:2). Every believer should desire to hear the Lord’s words, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt 25:23).

Negative Consequences in the Life to Come

There is the possibility of shame when Christ comes. The Apostle John challenged believers to abide in Christ so as not to shrink back in shame at His coming (1 John 2:28).

There is the possible loss of rewards. Eternal life is free; rewards are earned. Every believer should dread losing what could have been his reward (Rev 3:11). The Apostle Paul was motivated by his hope of gaining an imperishable crown and by his fear of disqualification (1 Cor 9:24-27).

Conclusion

Our motive is our reason for doing something. There are powerful motives related to the past, present, and future aspects of our salvation that can move us to faithful endurance in the Christian life. We do not need to fear the loss of eternal life in order to be motivated to live a life pleasing to Christ, nor do we need to prove by our works that we have eternal life. We can be motivated by orienting our focus to the past and responding with gratitude and love for what He has freely provided

for us. We can be motivated by orienting our focus to the present, knowing that God both blesses obedience and disciplines disobedience in this life. We can be motivated by orienting our focus to the future and the rewards promised in the life to come based on our faithfulness in this life. Run with endurance the race that is set before you (Heb 12:1).

One of the most demanding of all races is the annual *Tour de France* bicycle race. The race covers about 2,000 miles, including some of France’s most difficult mountain terrain. Cyclists eat and drink as they ride. A cyclist may ride his bicycle 22,000 miles in a year to train for the event. What prize makes the contestants endure so much hardship? A small number are motivated by the possibility of the special winner’s jersey. (Most really have no chance to win since each team selects one member to be the possible winner; the rest of the team supports him.) What else motivates the contestants? One summed it up: “Why, to sweep through the Arc de Triomphe on the last day. To be able to say you finished the *Tour de France*.” Finishing the Tour is a matter of great joy. But these prizes fall far short of the prizes Christians strive to obtain (1 Cor 9:24-27).

Believers have much greater rewards to motivate them. In addition to their past and present motivators, believers who fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith, will, in the future, receive an imperishable crown from the Lord (2 Tim 4:7-8). ■



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.

FREE GRACE AND **ULTRA-** DISPENSATIONALISM

By Laurence M. Vance

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

One characteristic of conservative Evangelicals and Baptists who are not adherents of Reformed theology is that they are Dispensationalists. This is especially true of Free Grace believers.

Dispensationalism

The essence of Dispensationalism, as stated by one of its greatest proponents, Charles Ryrie (1925–2016), “is the distinction between Israel and the church.”¹ Based on the writings of Ryrie, Grant Hawley has posited five points of *normative dispensationalism*:

1. Literal, historical, grammatical interpretation should be applied to *all* portions of Scripture.
2. The church and Israel are distinct peoples in God’s program for the ages.
3. The Lord Jesus Christ will return bodily to earth and reign on David’s throne in Jerusalem for one thousand years.
4. The underlying purpose of God’s dealings with the world is His glory, not merely the

salvation of man, thus the Scripture goes far beyond evangelism.

5. The Christian is free from the Law in its entirety for both justification (Gal 2:16) and sanctification (Gal 5:18).²

Dispensationalists recognize distinctions between Israel and the Church, between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ, and between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment. The failure to observe basic dispensational distinctives leads even the most orthodox scholars astray. For example, Thomas Schreiner, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, maintains that works are “necessary for justification” and “necessary for final salvation.”³ This is why Schreiner and others, such as Wayne Grudem and Ben Witherington, can talk about “initial justification and final justification,” as if there were two stages to justification.

Ultra-Dispensationalism

Ultra-Dispensationalism and Hyper-Dispensationalism are terms used to describe Dispensationalists who take Dispensationalism to extremes under the guise of proclaiming “God’s Word, rightly divided” (2 Tim 2:15). They, of course, never refer

to themselves by these designations. They generally call themselves Grace Believers and their movement the Grace Movement. This should be offensive to all Free Grace believers because it implies that Grace Believers have a monopoly on the true teaching of salvation by grace through faith. It is like a Calvinist's calling the Five Points of Calvinism *the Doctrines of Grace*.⁴

The founders of Ultra-Dispensationalism in the United States were J. C. O'Hair (1876–1958) and Cornelius Stam (1908–2003), who were both active in the Chicago area. Their teachings are alive and well through such organizations as the Grace Gospel Fellowship and the Berean Bible Society, which Stam founded in 1940. Their distinctive teachings are:

- » Water baptism is not for this age.
- » Baptism will be required for salvation during the Tribulation period.
- » A period of time called the "Dispensation of the Grace of God" began with the apostle Paul.
- » The Church did not begin until Acts 9 or Acts 13.
- » Israel, not the Church, is the bride of Christ.
- » The books of Hebrews through Jude are doctrinally for Tribulation saints.
- » The apostles Peter and Paul preached different gospels.
- » The Gospels are entirely Jewish and have no message for the Church.
- » The Body of Christ began with the apostle Paul.
- » The early church in Acts is the kingdom church, still under the Law, and is distinct from the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

These are the views of mainstream ultra-dispensationalists, such as those associated with the Berean Bible Society, now headquartered in Germantown, Wisconsin, which publishes a monthly journal called *The Berean Searchlight*. The Bereans, as they like to point out, "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the

scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The original Ultra-Dispensationalist was the Anglican clergyman and scholar Ethelbert W. Bullinger (1837–1913), editor of *The Companion Bible* and author of many other works. His teachings were originally called Bullingerism. He believed that only the apostle Paul's Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) could be considered doctrine for the Church. He also taught that the soul sleeps between death and the resurrection and denied that baptism and the Lord's Supper were for this age.

But because modern Ultra-Dispensationalists are generally sound on not only the fundamentals of the faith and basic dispensational distinctives, but also on salvation by grace through faith, the gospel of the grace of God, premillennialism, and rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ, they can ensnare Free Grace believers and other Dispensationalists.

The Apostles Peter and John

The apostles John and Peter, and not the apostle Paul, are the only ones who mentioned being "born again" (John 3:3; 1 Pet 1:23). Are we to believe that the new birth is only for "kingdom saints" and "Tribulation saints"?

The Gospel of John was written that people might "believe" and "have life through his name" (John 20:31). In the Gospel of John, "everlasting life" and no "condemnation" are promised to believers (John 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24), just as in the Pauline Epistles (Rom 5:18; 1 Tim 1:16).

If Peter preached a different gospel at the same time that Paul preached his gospel, then he was "accursed" (Gal 1:8). It was Peter, not Paul, who said "that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7), referring to the incident with Cornelius in which God "had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). God told Cornelius to "hear words" (Acts 10:22) from Peter about being saved (Acts 11:14). After God showed Peter the full implications of the gospel concerning Jews and Gentiles, Peter concluded, "that through the grace of

the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11).

The Apostle Paul

The apostle Paul was baptized (Acts 9:18) and baptized some of his converts (1 Cor 1:14-16). The Corinthian believers who were "baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13) were also baptized in water after they believed (Acts 18:8), including Crispus, whom Paul himself baptized (1 Cor 1:14).

Paul persecuted the "church of God" (Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9) that was in existence before his conversion. Are we to believe that this is a different group from the "church of God" that he wrote to (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:10) and mentioned to Timothy (1 Tim 3:5)? Paul divided all mankind into three groups: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Cor 10:32). How can we say that there was, at this same time, also a kingdom church under the Law of Moses?

Believers in Christ

The apostle Paul often speaks about believers being "in Christ" (Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 16:24; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Thess 4:16; Phil 6). At the end of Romans, Paul named some individuals "who also were in Christ before me" (Rom 16:7). He told the Thessalonians that they "became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess 2:14). He told the Galatians that he "was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ" (Gal 1:22). The apostle Peter likewise said that his readers were "in Christ Jesus" (1 Pet 5:14). Are we to believe that there was a time when the churches of Judaea were not "in Christ"? Are we to believe that the Christians in the Judean churches and the Christians to whom Peter wrote were in a different body of Christ than that which Paul referenced? Jesus promised His disciples that they would be in Him (John 14:20) and would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17).

One Body


The distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Christ was abolished at the Cross. Both groups were reconciled "unto God in one body by the cross"

(Eph 2:16). The mystery "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:6), was revealed to God's "holy apostles and prophets" (Eph 3:5), not just to the apostle Paul, and was revealed "by the Spirit" (Eph 3:5), not just by Paul.

New believers added to the number of believers (Acts 1:15; 2:41) and to the first church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:47) were said to be added to the Lord both before (Acts 5:14) and after (Acts 11:24) the conversion of the apostle Paul.

Paul almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 26:28). Peter said that "if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet 4:16). Are we to believe that there were Pauline Christians and Petrine Christians, each in their own assemblies and with their own beliefs?

Conclusion

Beware of Ultra-Dispensationalism. It will take from you the OT, the four Gospels, the books of Acts and Hebrews, and the General Epistles. Ultra-Dispensationalism is not Dispensationalism taken to its logical conclusion. It is an aberration of Dispensationalism that wrongly divides the word of truth. 



Laurence M. Vance is the author of *The Other Side of Calvinism*, as well as many other books.

- 1 Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 41.
- 2 Grant Hawley, "Dispensationalism and Free Grace: Intimately Linked," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 24 (Spring 2011), 66-67.
- 3 Thomas R. Schreiner, "Justification apart from and by Works: At the Final Judgment Works Will Confirm Justification," in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, ed. Alan P. Stanley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 81, 98.
- 4 See Laurence Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, Revised Edition (Pensacola, FL: 1991, 1999).



*Kathryn teaches a workshop at the
GES National Conference*



*All the ladies had a blast at the
women's fellowship held during
the National Conference*



*The faithful believers at
Berean Memorial*

MORE OF WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



*We joined the good folks at Bayside
Community Church*

*Ken records a
podcast during
the National
Conference*



A VOICE FROM THE PAST

IF IT'S FREE, WHY WOULD ANYONE NEED TO STRIVE TO ENTER?

(LUKE 13:24)*

By **Bob Wilkin** | *This article was first published in the November 1991 issue of *Grace in Focus*.

"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

Who who believe in the freeness of the gospel may be uncomfortable with this verse. At least, we should be unless we've carefully considered what it is saying.

After all, if salvation is a free gift that we receive by simply believing in Jesus Christ, why would anyone need to *strive* to obtain it?

As might be expected, Lordship Salvation teachers love this verse. In it they find proof of their doctrine. One leading Lordship proponent writes concerning this verse:

The Greek word for "strive" is *agonizomai*, implying an agonizing, intense, purposeful struggle. It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 of an athlete battling to win a victory. It is also used in Colossians 4:12 of Epaphras laboring fervently, and in 1 Timothy 6:12, of the Christian who "fights the good fight of faith." It is a struggle, a battle, an extreme effort. There

is almost a violence implied. And appropriately so, because entering the kingdom is like going into warfare. ...

How does this fit the modern notion that salvation is easy? ...

Salvation is not easy. "For the gate is small ... and few are those who find it" (Matthew 7:14). That implies that unless a person is looking diligently for the gate, he is not likely to know that it is there. ...

The message of Jesus cannot be made to accommodate any kind of cheap grace or easy-believism. The kingdom is not for people who want Jesus without any change in their living. It is only for those who seek it with all their hearts, those who agonize to enter. Many who approach the gate turn away upon finding out the cost.

(John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 182-83).

It may surprise many of our readers to find that I actually agree with some of the above explanation!

The Lordship writer cited is correct that the Greek word *agonizomai* has the basic meaning of “to fight, struggle” (BAGD, p. 15).

He is also correct, at least in many cases, that “unless a person is looking diligently for the gate, he is not likely to know that it is there.”

He is wrong, however, in suggesting that this has something to do with turning from sins, changing one’s lifestyle, paying some price, or the like.

Clearly, the struggle involved here concerns finding the right gate to enter. The Lord’s point is that those who don’t know the way to eternal life should exert every effort to find out. It’s as simple as that.

This concept is taught in a number of other passages of Scripture.

Hebrews 11:6 says that God is a rewarder of those *who diligently seek Him*.

In John 6:27 the Lord told unbelieving Jews who were seeking more miraculous signs like the feeding of the 5,000, which had just occurred, “Do not *labor* for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” They then asked, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (v 28). Jesus’ response had nothing to do with change of lifestyle. It was a simple call to faith. He said, “This is the work of God, *that you believe in Him whom He sent*” (v29)!

In Acts 17:27 Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God has set up mankind “*so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him*, though He is not far from each one of us.”

Those who do not know the way to heaven are to strive to find out. They are to seek the truth.

Many today can give testimonies of having been raised in a cult or in another world religion and then coming to feel that this was not right, seeking God, and finding the way to eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone. I am one such person.

I was raised in a works-salvation holiness group. I thought that in order to get into heaven I had to live a good life and try my best to be worthy enough for Christ to save me. One day a friend challenged me to reconsider my view of the gospel. He also invited me to a gospel meeting. I went and was interested. Doubts I had about what I had been taught now resurfaced and grew. I then contacted a Christian worker at my college and asked him to meet with me. Over several weeks he convinced me that salvation was a free gift that could never be lost.

Romans 3:10 seems to contradict this understanding. It says that none seek God, no not one. The actual point of the verse is that none seek God *on their own initiative*. Clearly, other texts say that unbelievers can and do seek God (e.g., Cornelius in Acts 10; see also Acts 17:27). Since God is seeking all (John 16:7-11; Rom 1:19-20), all are free to respond to His drawing and to seek Him in return. Those who diligently seek Him will find Him (Heb 11:6; Acts 17:27).

Strive to enter by the narrow gate? You bet! (Of course, once you’ve entered, you no longer need to seek the gate! You’ve found it!) That doesn’t contradict the freeness of the gospel at all. Indeed, that is what GES is all about. We aim to make the way to eternal life clear as a bell to all our readers, believers and unbelievers. We hope to lead many unbelievers to faith in Christ and many believers to share the gospel clearly and boldly.

When sharing your faith, don’t be afraid to challenge unbelievers who doubt the truth of the gospel to strive to enter by the narrow gate. Challenge them to seek God. Invite them to read and study the Bible, particularly the Gospel of John. Encourage them to go to church and Bible studies with you. For God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. ■



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



God's Role in Conversion

By Zane C. Hodges

**This article was first published in the July-August 1993 issue of *Grace in Focus*.*

*In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them
which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ,
who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

—2 Corinthians 4:4 (KJV)

Lordship salvation teachers often maintain that an unsaved man is like a corpse. According to them, he is spiritually incapable of even the slightest response to the gospel. And most certainly, he is incapable of faith. This means that God must *give* him faith by regenerating him. Thus, for many such teachers, regeneration does not result from *faith*, but faith results from *regeneration*.

This turns a lot of Biblical texts on their head. The NT consistently makes regeneration (= eternal salvation) depend on faith. Paul and Silas did not tell the Philippian jailor: “Be saved, and you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”! But they *did* tell him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Of course, no doubt faith and regeneration are simultaneous from our finite point of view. But their *logical* sequence is clearly set forth in the NT. So Paul can speak of himself as “a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him *for* everlasting life” (1 Tim 1:16, italics added). The word “for” translates the Greek

word *eis*, which can also be rendered “unto” (KJV), and which here carries its normal overtones of purpose (“with a view to”) or result (“resulting in”). Either sense would fit here. But the NT never states that regeneration is “for the purpose of” or “results in” faith!

The text quoted at the beginning of this article is taken from the old King James Version. (The NKJV handles the Greek somewhat awkwardly.) The statement Paul makes here is revealing. Evidently, Satan does not subscribe to the notion that man is inherently incapable of believing. He would be wasting his time blinding people if they were hopelessly blind! But, in recording this activity of the evil one, the apostle Paul reveals that he himself regards it as the reason why his gospel is “veiled to those who are perishing” (2 Cor 4:3).

With this perspective, Luke 8:12 agrees as well. There our Lord explains the activity of the “birds of the air” in His famous parable of the soils (see Luke 8:5ff.). He says: “Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of

their hearts, *lest they should believe and be saved*" (italics added). Here, too, it is clear that apart from what the devil does, these people might be expected to believe the gospel.

It is not Biblically correct to call faith itself the gift of God. *Salvation* is the gift of God (Eph 2:8-9), but the Bible never says that *faith* is.

What then is God's role in the conversion of sinners blinded by Satan? The obvious answer is that God's role is revelatory—which is to say, He allows His truth to break through to man's heart in the same way that light penetrates the darkness. This divine action is beautifully stated by the apostle in 2 Cor 4:6, where he writes:

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness [see Gen 1:3], who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (NKJV).

God is in the business of penetrating satanically-induced darkness. Whenever that happens, faith is awakened in man's heart, and he is instantly born again. But this by no means excludes the fact that unsaved people, under

the Spirit's influence, often seek the truth (or may be frequently exposed to it) prior to the moment of faith. I will comment more on man's role in conversion in the next issue of the GES newsletter.¹

There is an obvious application for us. To the extent that human beings present the gospel falsely or in garbled form, they serve well the aims of Satan, who is *actively* blinding the minds of the unsaved. But to the extent that we give men the gospel in all its clarity and simplicity, we can become instruments whom God uses to focus His light on darkened human hearts.

And after all, isn't that exactly what GES is all about? ■

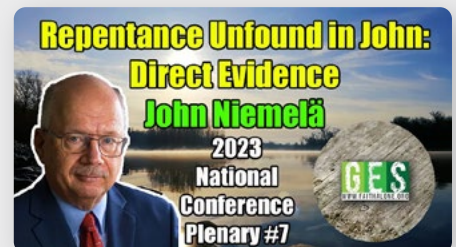


Zane Hodges taught New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years, authored over a dozen books, and was passionate about the grace of God.

1 We reprinted that article in the Sept-Oct 2022 issue of *Grace in Focus* magazine.

But to the extent that we give men
the gospel in all its clarity and
simplicity, we can become instruments
whom God uses to focus His light on
darkened human hearts.

Did You Know GES Has a YouTube Channel?



YOUTUBE.COM/@GESVIDS

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
ABERDEEN, SD
PERMIT #200

Grace Evangelical Society
P.O. Box 1308
Denton, TX 76202

Believe in Him for Life

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



GRACE *on the Go!*