

# Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

**AUTUMN 2022**

**Volume 35 / Number 69**

**Cain: Testing the Limits of God's Love**

Bob Bryant

---

**To Be (or Not to Be) Summoned to the Final  
Judgment: John 5:28-29 in Light of 5:24**

John H. Niemelä

---

**The Role of Christ in Our Salvation**

Bob Wilkin

---

**The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)**

Kathryn Wright

---

**Darkness at the Cross (Mark 15:33)**

Kenneth W. Yates

---

**Book Reviews**

Journal of the  
**GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY**

*“Faith Alone in Christ Alone”*

---

VOLUME 35	Autumn 2022	NUMBER 69
<hr/>		
<b>Cain: Testing the Limits of God’s Love</b>		<b>3</b>
Bob Bryant		
<b>To Be (or Not to Be) Summoned to the Final Judgment: John 5:28-29 in Light of 5:24</b>		<b>15</b>
John H. Niemelä		
<b>The Role of Christ in Our Salvation</b>		<b>31</b>
Bob Wilkin		
<b>The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)</b>		<b>45</b>
Kathryn Wright		
<b>Darkness at the Cross (Mark 15:33)</b>		<b>63</b>
Kenneth W. Yates		
<b>Indexes of the <i>Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society</i> (1988-2022)</b>		<b>79</b>
<b>Book Reviews</b>		<b>85</b>

# Journal of the GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

Published Semiannually by GES

Editor

**Kenneth W. Yates**

Associate Editor

**Robert N. Wilkin**

Layout

**Matthew Simmons**

**Manuscripts, book reviews, and other communications** should be addressed to GES, Director of Publications, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or [submissions@faithalone.org](mailto:submissions@faithalone.org).

**Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address** should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or email [ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org). Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.00 for U.S. shipping. Add \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping. New subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25; gift subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25.

**Purpose:** Grace Evangelical Society was formed “to promote the clear proclamation of God’s free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship.”

**We Affirm:** God, out of love for the human race, sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners. He paid the full penalty for human sin when He died on the cross. Any person who believes in Jesus Christ for everlasting life receives that gift which, as the words everlasting life suggest, can never be lost (John 1:29; 3:16-18; 19:30; 1 Tim 1:16).

---

Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202

---

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

©2022 Grace Evangelical Society

ISBN: 978-1-943399-49-9

# CAIN: TESTING THE LIMITS OF GOD’S LOVE<sup>1</sup>

**BOB BRYANT**

*Cypress Valley Bible Church  
Marshall, TX*

## I. INTRODUCTION

**W**e read about Cain in Genesis 4:  
Now the man had relations with his wife Eve. And she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said, “I’ve gotten a man child with the help of the Lord. And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel (Gen 4:1-2a).

In the NT, Jesus told us something significant about Abel as it related to Cain. Jesus told us in Luke 11 about the blood of all the prophets, from the blood of Abel until the blood of Zechariah (Luke 11:50-51). The point here is that Jesus told us that Abel was a prophet. And as a prophet, he had a message. That was the message of all the prophets. We know the message of all the prophets because Peter told us in Acts 10, also recorded by Luke, in which we read, “All the prophets witness that through His name whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).

Now, from that statement by Peter we learn that all the prophets witness that through His name—and from the context, he is talking about Jesus—whoever believes in Him will receive the forgiveness of sins. This means to believe in Him for everlasting life. And with that comes the forgiveness of sins. So, if we put Abel in that verse, Abel

---

<sup>1</sup> This was originally given as a spoken, plenary session at the 2021 Grace Evangelical National Conference held at Coppell Bible Fellowship, Coppell, TX. The title of the conference was *Genesis: The Beginning*. The audio version can be heard on the GES website, [www.faithalone.org](http://www.faithalone.org). Footnotes and section markers have been added by the editor. Used by permission.

witnessed that through the name of Jesus whoever believes in Him for everlasting life will receive forgiveness of sins.

## II. WAS CAIN A BELIEVER?

We can certainly assume that Cain heard the saving message through his brother Abel, who was a prophet proclaiming that message. Cain likely heard the saving message from his parents,<sup>2</sup> but certainly, through his brother, because his brother was a prophet.

Thus, the question is: did Cain believe that message? Did Cain believe in the coming Messiah for everlasting life? Was he born again? I believe the answer to that question is seen in the evidence found in the story of Cain. I think the evidence is very conclusive that Cain was a believer who had everlasting life. He was a born again, regenerate child of God who tested the limits of God's love.

## III. CAIN VERSUS ABEL

Genesis states:

Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So, it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground...The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard (NASB; Gen 4:2b-3, 4b-5a).

I think "regard" means that God was pleased with Abel's offering and not pleased with Cain's offering. Of course, the question is why would God be pleased with one offering and not the other? However, the text does not say just with the offering, but with the men themselves. It says Abel and his offering and Cain and his offering. What was the difference between the two offerings?

Some have suggested that the problem with Cain's offering was that it was not a blood offering, while Abel brought an animal,

---

<sup>2</sup>Ross indicates that when Eve gave birth to Cain she was "full of hope and faith" (Gen 4:1). Her name for him and the faith she expresses seem to point back to the promise of the Messiah in Gen 3:15. This supports Bryant's view that she would have spoken of this promise to her son Cain. See Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 156.

and there probably would have been shed blood.<sup>3</sup> Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground. Some have said that that was an insufficient offering which displeased God. However, we know that later in the Bible, God commanded grain offerings, so there certainly was not anything wrong with a grain offering. It was an acceptable offering before God.<sup>4</sup>

Some have suggested that Abel brought the firstlings of the flock and the fat of the flock. It does not say that Cain brought the first fruits of his harvest.<sup>5</sup> But we do not know that Cain did not bring the first fruits. It simply does not say.

All the speculation about why God regarded one and not the other is completely cleared up, for me, in the New Testament in 1 John 3:12 in which John tells us about Cain: his works were evil and his brother's righteous. That was the problem. It was not the offering. It was the life behind the offering. Cain was living an evil life when he brought his offering to God. Abel was living a righteous life when he brought his offering to God. And that is why Cain's offering was hypocritical in the eyes of God.

David's words in Psalm 51 are relevant here in what we read about Cain:

You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God  
are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. These, O  
God, You will not despise (Ps 51:16b-17 NKJV).

Certainly, Abel had a broken and contrite heart over his sin when he brought his offering to God. But Cain did not.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The view that God wanted a blood sacrifice has a long history. See, John Skinner, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), 105-106. With Bryant, Sailhamer rejects this common view. He points out that the reason for the rejection of Cain's offering is not that it was bloodless. Both Abel and Cain's offerings are, in themselves, acceptable. Moses writes that both are "offerings" and not sacrifices. See, John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Leviticus*, eds. Tremper Longman, III, and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 97.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Leviticus 2; 6:14-23.

<sup>5</sup> This, too, has a long history. See, H. D. M. Spence-Jones, "Genesis," *The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 78. Spence-Jones bases this upon Exod 13:12.

<sup>6</sup> Sailhamer seems to agree with Bryant's discussion about the problem with Cain's offering, in contrast to the reasons often given. The issue was one of the heart, not the sacrifice itself. In the account of Cain and Abel, the reader can see the "kind of heart that lies behind an unaccepted offering." Sailhamer says it is a matter of worship. See, Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 97.

Cain was living a life of evil works when he brought his offering to God. Cain did not have the sacrifice of a broken spirit or a broken and contrite heart over his sin.<sup>7</sup> And because of what we read in 1 John 3, we can now better understand what is meant in Genesis 4. The Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard.

#### IV. CAIN KNEW THE REASON

It is very likely, if not certain, that God communicated that to these two men: “Abel, I have regard for your offering, and, Cain, I do not have regard for your offering.”

The reason God had to have communicated this is because of what we read next, that Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell (Gen 4:5). Notice it does not say, “and Cain became angry.” It says that Cain became *very* angry, and his countenance fell. You could see it all over his face. He was extremely mad. Right there we see that Cain was truly testing the limits of God’s love. He was testing the limits of God’s love when he brought these hypocritical offerings, living an evil life and then coming and saying, “I want to worship You.” That was testing the limits of God’s love. Then, when God said, “I am not pleased with your offering,” he became very angry.

With whom was he angry? Certainly, he was angry with his brother because he was jealous of his brother. But it is very likely that he was also angry with God. God was playing favorites towards his brother and had disregard for him.

#### V. REACHING OUT TO CAIN

As you read in the verse, he was very angry in his heart, and you could see it all over his face; God went to Cain and asked, “Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen?” (Gen 4:6). Was God asking this because He did not know the answer to the question? Of course not. God knew the answer to the question. Why, then, would He ask Cain the question? I believe it is because God loved Cain and

---

<sup>7</sup> Ross also supports this notion when he points out that Abel went “out of his way” to make his offering to God, while Cain felt he had to discharge “a duty.” The kind of offering is not the issue, but the attitude in which it is offered is. See, Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 157.

was trying to illicit from Cain confession of sin. He was trying to get Cain to talk about what was going on in his life, hoping that maybe Cain would say,

Well, Lord, you know that I guess that I should not be angry. I know that I am living an evil life. I understand why my offering isn't acceptable to You. God, I am really convicted, even as You ask me the question. Please forgive me for the way I have been living and for what I have done and for being angry with You and for being angry with my brother.

But that was not how Cain responded, as we will see. But God went on to explain to him and tried to plead with him, "Cain, if you do well, will you not be accepted?" (Gen 4:7). And of course, the obvious answer to the question was, "Yes. Cain, if you do well, you will be accepted."

This is a statement that I find hard to believe God would say to an unregenerate person, someone who did not have eternal life, that had never believed for eternal life. God would not say to this unregenerate person, "You know, if you do well, you will be accepted."

It would not make sense, certainly in terms of salvation, for God to say to an unbeliever, "If you do well, I will accept you into My family," let alone, "I will accept you into fellowship." But He would say it to a believer. He says that to believers every day. He says it to you and me every day. "If you do well, you will have fellowship with Me.<sup>8</sup> If you confess known sin, I will forgive you, and you will have fellowship with me."

Of course, with Cain it was more than just confession. It was repentance. He needed to confess and repent in order to be accepted into fellowship with God his Father.<sup>9</sup> And then, God went on to say

---

<sup>8</sup> Editor's note: Here Bryant makes the Biblical distinction between having eternal life and having fellowship with Christ. All believers have eternal life, but not all believers have fellowship with Christ. Fellowship is the result of the believer's walking in obedience. See, Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 131-34.

<sup>9</sup> Editor's note: Bryant correctly points out that there is a difference between the confession of sin and repentance. A believer confesses sin when it comes to his attention through the Word of God. Repentance is turning from a lifestyle of sin after the believer has become entangled in it. See, Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 63.



it in an even stronger way: “If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you” (Gen 4:7). God was saying,

Cain, if you persist in the path you are going down with these evil works, these hypocritical offerings, and this anger you have in your heart towards your brother and towards Me, sin is crouching at the door like an animal, and sin will pounce on you, and it will get worse and worse. You will sink deeper and deeper into the depths of your sin.

And then God said in that last line, “But you should rule over it” (Gen 4:7). “Regarding sin, you should rule over this sin.” And I am certain in my own mind that God would never say that to an unbeliever, to an unregenerate person who did not have everlasting life. Unregenerate, unsaved, people cannot rule over sin.<sup>10</sup> That is their problem. They need eternal life, and *then* they need to call upon God to give them the strength and power to overcome sin in their daily lives.<sup>11</sup>

This evidence seems conclusive to me that God was speaking to His child who was in danger of sinking deeper and deeper into sin but encouraged him by saying, “you should rule over it. You have the power to rule over it. You are a child of God. You have My life, and you have Me to help you. You can rule over this sin.”

---

<sup>10</sup> Editor’s note: This is an important point Bryant makes. His entire presentation is centered around the fact that Cain was a believer. But many reject that view because they say Cain is pictured as such a terrible sinner. However, the inconsistencies in that view are on display. Brown, for example, agrees with Bryant that Cain’s problem was jealousy, and this sin was trying to control him. Cain was told by God to fight back. But Brown then says that Cain’s willful sin shows he is an unbeliever. See, Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 442. As Bryant points out, God would never tell an unbeliever he needs to fight against jealousy. The unbeliever does not have the spiritual resources to fight against sin.

<sup>11</sup> Speiser does not speak about whether Cain had eternal life, but he does say that the point here is clear. Cain could master the power of sin. He could have mastery over his sinful impulses. See, E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 33.

## VI. CAIN'S RESPONSE

I am sure Cain heard God because we read next that he went and told his brother Abel (Gen 4:8a). I would have liked to have been there for that conversation, to listen to what he said. But we should certainly assume that he told Abel what God had told him.

Cain went and told his brother Abel. What else could he tell him except what he had just heard from God? "Abel, you know, God told me that He is not happy with me. He is pleased with you, but He is not pleased with me. He does not like the way I am living, and He wants me to change." Something like that.

Since Abel was a prophet, I am guessing that Abel might have had some words for him, such as, "Cain, that is what I have been telling you all along. I have been trying to get you to turn from your sin and repent and to come back into fellowship with God." Whether Abel said that or not, we know what Cain said because he told Abel what God had told him.

Most of you know what happened next. It was horrible. "And it came about, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him" (Gen 4:8). You talk about testing the limits of God's love.

We already read that Cain had evil works. We read that he came to God with this hypocritical offering. We read that when God called him out for it, he had anger in his heart. And now, he had killed his brother. Talk about testing the limits of God's love.

## VII. STILL REACHING OUT TO CAIN

But the Lord did not run away from Cain. The Lord ran *to* Cain. The Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" (Gen 4:9). Did God ask him that question because he did not know where Abel was? No, He knew where Abel was. He asked the question for the same reason He asked him the question before (4:6). "Talk to me about this, Cain." God was hoping that Cain would be so convicted by what he had done that he would say,

Well, Lord, I killed him. He is dead in the field. God, what have I done? Forgive me for the evil that has risen in my heart. You said that sin was crouching at the door,

and it has consumed me. I have had enough. Please, Lord, please forgive me. Restore me to the fellowship I had with You.

That is why God asked him the question.

Did Cain respond in the way God had wanted him to? Hardly. He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). You talk about testing the limits of God’s love. He had evil works. He had a hypocritical offering. He had anger in his heart when God called him out for it. He murdered his brother, and when God tried to get him to talk about it, to admit it, He lied to God: “I do not know.” And in my opinion, he became sarcastic with God. “Am I my brother’s keeper? You are God. You know where He is. And if You do not, go find him Yourself.”

I know I am elaborating. But I see sarcasm in Cain’s statement, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Talk about testing the limits of God’s love. But God did not run away from Cain. He kept coming towards him, and God said,

What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. And when you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (Gen 4:10-12).

Was God saying, “You have pushed through the limits of My love for you, Cain. I have had it with you. And this is my pronouncement upon you”? Did God say, “I don’t love you anymore”? No, it is the exact opposite. What we read in those words is an expression, the very expression, of God’s love for Cain. The writer of Hebrews says, “Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines” (Heb 12:6). What God was saying is, “You are going to get a good dose of discipline, Cain, because I am trying to get your attention. I am trying to break you. And I want this to break you.” And further:

When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength. Your life is going to be miserable. And it needs to be, to get your attention. You are going to be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. You are not going to have rest. You are not going to have peace. You are not going to

be fruitful in what you want to do. It is going to be bad, Cain. But it is what you need.

And Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is too great to bear” (Gen 4:13). This is the translation found in the majority of English translations. To me, what that implies is one of two things. “This is not fair.” “This is too much. What you have put on me is too great. I cannot bear this because of the excessive punishment you have put on me.”

Another way to think about what this means would be to see Cain as feeling sorry for himself by saying this was more than he could bear. “I do not know if I can stand this. This is just too much for me.” It is as if he wanted God to feel sorry for him. That is what I gleaned from this translation.

## VIII. A DIFFERENT TRANSLATION

As I indicated earlier, that is the translation of the majority of English versions. There is a small minority translation that I think presents a better way to look at it. I will walk you through that translation by first looking at the Hebrew words. “Punishment” is the Hebrew word *āwōn*. And the word “bear” is the Hebrew word *nāsā*.

Those words for “punishment” and “bear” are translated in another passage. I want to go there because it stands out to me how these words are used in Psalm 32, David’s psalm of repentance: “I acknowledge my sin to You and my iniquity [*āwōn*]. I have not hidden, and You forgave [*nāsā*] the iniquity [*āwōn*] of my sin” (Ps 32:5).

I want to examine the last two lines so that we can focus on those words—“You forgave [*nāsā*] the iniquity [*āwōn*] of my sin.” You see that word *āwōn*? It is used 229 times in the Old Testament. One hundred and eighty-nine of those 229 times, it is translated “iniquity.” Eighty-three percent of the time it is found in the OT, it is translated “iniquity.”<sup>12</sup>

The word *nāsā* is translated “forgave” here in Ps 32:5; it is used many times in the Old Testament, and in the English translation it is

---

<sup>12</sup> This is discussed in any Biblical Hebrew lexicon. For one example of the various possible translations of these words, see R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 600, 650.

often rendered “forgave.” Thus, as we see David’s use of those terms when he was repenting of his sin, let’s take those words back and think about them in light of Gen 4:13.

If we take the words we saw in Psalm 32, we would read Gen 4:13 as, “My iniquity is too great to forgive.” I believe this is the translation which best reflects the intended meaning of what Cain was saying. “My iniquity is too great to forgive.” I want to repeat it the way I think Cain said it. “My iniquity is *just too great*.”<sup>13</sup> This rendering is found in three English translations: the Aramaic Bible in Plain English, the Brenton Septuagint translation, and the Douay–Rheims Bible. There are at least these three English versions which translate it in the way I am suggesting: “My iniquity is too great to forgive.”<sup>14</sup>

And with this translation, I believe we can say that Cain was saying, “I am so wrong. I am such a sinful man. What I have done is so bad. It is too great for You to forgive. I have pushed past the limits of Your love, and I know it.”

And I think that what he went on to say emphasizes that thought even more: “Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground. From Your face I will be hidden” (Gen 4:14).

Cain was saying, “I have pushed past the limits of Your love. I know that I can never have fellowship with You again. You can never forgive me for what I have done. Your face will be hidden from me.” And not only that, but he went on to say, “I will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me” (Gen 4:14). And I believe he had in mind, “And I deserve it.” “I deserve to be a fugitive. I deserve to be a wanderer. I deserve to die for what I have done, because I have pushed past the limits of Your love.”

Now, I want to suggest this morning that that was exactly what God was looking for. That was exactly what God was trying to bring out of Cain: a broken spirit and a contrite heart, a heart of confession and a heart of repentance before God.

---

<sup>13</sup> Editor’s note: Here Bryant inflected his voice to express a person who is contrite or sorry over his sin.

<sup>14</sup> Matthews points out the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the OT, translated these words in this way (Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures*, vol. 1a [Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 1996], 276). The early Jewish Rabbinic literature did also but put them in the form of a question (*b. Sanh.* 101b). Luther, the early Reformer, also translated the words in this way. It needs to be said, however, that while he thinks translating these words in this way is legitimate, he prefers the majority view.

And I think we are hearing it and seeing it from Cain in these words. I think that not only because of what we have read so far, but also because of what God said next. “And the Lord said to him, ‘Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the Lord set a mark on Cain so that no one finding him would kill him” (Gen 4:15). That mark—I do not know what it looked like—but it was a mark that when people saw it, they would not see a mark of guilt or shame. They would see a mark of God’s love and God’s protection and God’s fellowship on Cain.<sup>15</sup>

Cain had a story to tell. It was from that day forward. It was a story that I am sure he was eager to tell people, if they would listen. His story could be summarized in two statements. Cain would say,

I tested the limits of God’s love. But I want to tell you.  
God’s love has no limits. I am a testimony to the fact that  
God’s love has no limits. If you think you have pushed  
past the limits of God’s love, look at me. I am proof  
positive that God’s love has no limits.<sup>16</sup>

## IX. CONCLUSION

I am sure Cain carried that testimony and proclaimed that testimony as long as he lived. And his testimony is still with us today. Cain is still speaking to us today. We all need Cain’s testimony, for every one of us has tested the limits of God’s love.

And even as we acknowledge that, you can ask yourself whether you have done anything as bad as Cain. Probably not, but maybe. Maybe there is a murderer in the room. I know that many are murderers in their hearts. We all have tested the limits of God’s love. And we all know people—born again people—who think they have pushed past the limits of God’s love. They need to hear about Cain. They need to know about Cain.

---

<sup>15</sup> Arnold agrees. In Gen 4:15-16, after Cain murdered his brother, God dealt graciously with him. He provided for Cain’s future. See Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 80.

<sup>16</sup> One can compare this picture of God’s infinite love and grace with the view, often associated with Cain, that he was an unbeliever and expelled from God’s presence. Ross comments that when God expelled Cain, Cain had to “sever all relationship with the Lord.” See, Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 156.

Cain did not have the examples we have. He did not know anything about David and how he committed adultery and murder. He did not know anything about Moses and how he committed murder. He did not know anything about Peter denying Christ. The only thing he knew was that his mom and dad had eaten from a forbidden tree. Yet God still loved them. But Cain had no model to know if God would still love a man who would murder his brother. He had to learn it as the first one who would commit such a sin, a crime like that, and would learn how true it is that God's love has no limits. People need to know about Cain, and they need to know this truth: God's love has no limits.

# TO BE (OR NOT TO BE) SUMMONED TO THE FINAL JUDGMENT: JOHN 5:28-29 IN LIGHT OF 5:24<sup>1</sup>

JOHN H. NIEMELÄ

*Message of Life*  
*Knoxville, TN*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Amen, amen, I tell you, the *one* who listens to My word and believes the *One* who sent Me has everlasting life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).

Do not be shocked *at* this, because an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth—those who have done good *things*, unto *the* resurrection of life; but those who have done substandard *things*, unto *the* resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).<sup>2</sup>

Those who interpret John 5:24 in light of 5:28-29 expect Jesus to summon all people (believers and unbelievers) to the Great White Throne (GWT). They regard verses 28-29 as universal. If that were actually so, John 5:24 would not promise believers an exemption from the summons to the GWT. It would only exempt them from eternity in the lake of fire.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revision of “Wrong Way on John 5:28-29: Will There Be Any Who Did Good Things?” delivered May 25, 2022, at the Grace Evangelical Society National Conference in Denton, TX.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all NT citations are from the *Faithful Majority Translation* (FMT), copyrighted by John H. Niemelä. This is an in-process translation of the New Testament from the *Majority Text*.



By contrast, this article contends that John 5:24 promises that Jesus will not even summon believers to the GWT judgment. It goes without saying that they will never experience the lake of fire.

Most of Christendom understands John 5:24 as older editions of the King James Version<sup>3</sup> rendered it:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word,  
and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life,  
and **shall not come into condemnation** [i.e., the lake of  
fire]; but is passed from death unto life (emphasis added).

Unfortunately, such an understanding serves as a catalyst for most of Christendom imagining that a believer's destiny is not settled until the final judgment. That is the polar opposite of John 5:24's promise. This article categorically denies that believers will be at the GWT. Paraphrasing Shakespeare in *Hamlet*:

To be [at the GWT], or not to be [at the GWT]? That is the question.

Analysis will proceed under the following outline:

- I. Hermeneutics and the order of operations.
- II. John 5:24 as the great divide.
- III. John 5:24 takes priority over 5:28-29.
- IV. Three Grace views of 5:28-29.
  - a. Believing is the good that every believer has done.
  - b. The sinless regenerate-seed only does good.
  - c. Unbelievers doing good is hypothetical and impossible.
- V. Proof that unbelievers doing good is hypothetical and impossible.
  - a. The New Testament uses similar hypothetical arguments.
  - b. Unbelievers will be the last group to be resurrected.
  - c. "Hypothetical and impossible" is the simplest Grace view.

---

<sup>3</sup>The *New King James Version* corrects the older versions here.

## II. HERMENEUTICS AND THE ORDER OF OPERATIONS

Conflicting views of John 5:24 derive from opposed hermeneutical starting points. The following math problem illustrates:

$$4 + 1 \times 3 = x$$

Should one add first or begin by multiplying? The results differ:

One student adds first (as if parentheses were around  $4 + 1$ ); the other multiplies first:

	Addition First	Multiplication First
Problem:	$4 + 1 \times 3$	$4 + 1 \times 3$
Interpretation:	$(4 + 1) \times 3$	$4 + (1 \times 3)$
Step 1:	$5 \times 3$	$4 + 3$
Step 2:	15	7

Mathematicians follow this order of operations: P = parentheses, E = exponents, M/D = multiply (or divide), A/S = add (or subtract). The acronym is PEMDAS. The student on the left erred by ignoring PEMDAS. The one on the right followed PEMDAS, multiplying before adding. That led to the correct answer: 7, not 15. Even if 100% of a teacher's students answered 15, it is still wrong.

Virtually all interpreters start with 5:28-29. They assume that everyone (believers and unbelievers) will appear at the GWT. Taking 5:28-29 to affirm that believers will be at the GWT would preclude 5:24 from excluding believers from that judgment.<sup>4</sup>

Reversing the order of operations (starting with 5:24) yields an entirely different result. Jesus promised that no believer will appear at the GWT. This precludes including believers among "those in the graves" (5:28) who would appear at the Great White Throne.

Will Jesus judge believers at the GWT? Or will only unbelievers appear there?

---

<sup>4</sup>Of course, no believer will go to the lake of fire. The crux is whether 5:24 promises more—that believers will not appear at the Great White Throne.

### III. JOHN 5:24 AS THE GREAT DIVIDE

Why is 5:24 the great divide? Why not 5:28-29? Grace interpreters stand unified against the majority view of 5:24. Despite agreeing that 5:28-29 does not mean that believers appear at the GWT, they differ on the particulars of those verses. Thus, 5:24 is the dividing point. Sections III–IV of this article will focus on why 5:24 (not 5:28-29) is the starting point; sections V–VI will show that one Grace position on 5:28-29 is the most consistent with 5:24.

A 2013 book in Zondervan's Counterpoints Series (*Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*)<sup>5</sup> conveniently shows John 5:24 as the great divide. Each contributor to a *Views* book represents a segment of Christendom. Three writers (Calvinist Thomas Schreiner, Anglican James Dunn, and Catholic Michael Barber) prioritize 5:28-29, while Robert Wilkin emphasizes 5:24. The general editor, Alan Stanley, wrote the following summaries of each author's view. The great divide in regard to John 5:24 is crystal clear:

Thomas R. Schreiner: Works will provide **evidence** that one actually has been saved: At the final judgment works provide the necessary condition, though not the ground for final salvation...

James D. G. Dunn: Works will provide the **criterion** by which Christ will determine **eternal destiny** of his people...

Michael Barber: Works will merit eternal life: At the final judgment, good works will be **rewarded with eternal salvation**...

Robert N. Wilkin: Works will **determine rewards** but not salvation: At the Judgment Seat of Christ each believer will be judged by Christ to determine his eternal rewards, but they remain eternally secure **even if** the judgment reveals **they have failed to persevere** in good works or in faith.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Alan P. Stanley, general editor, *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, Counterpoints Series: Bible and Theology, series ed., Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Stanley, *The Role of Works*, back cover, wrote all four statements to summarize each author's view. Emphasis added.

Schreiner, Dunn, and Barber all surmise that believers will appear at the final (GWT) judgment. Wilkin does not. John 5:24 is a great divide within Christendom.

Each author wrote a main article, to which the others responded. Wilkin emphasizes the verse, mentioning it fourteen times, at least once in each essay. Schreiner and Dunn both mention it twice (but each only does so in a single essay); Barber avoids the verse entirely.<sup>7</sup>

John 5:24 Citations in Main Essays and Rebuttals					
	Stanley	Wilkin	Schreiner	Dunn	Barber
<b>Main Essays</b>					
Introduction	1				
Wilkin		6			
Schreiner			2		
Dunn				—	
Barber					—
Conclusion	1				
<b>Responses:</b>					
to Wilkin			—	2	—
to Schreiner		3		—	—
to Dunn		1	—		—
to Barber		4	—	—	
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

Akin to Schreiner, Dunn, and Barber, some translations render John 5:24 as if it only promises that believers will not end up in the lake of fire. They express it with some variation of “will not be condemned,” “will not come into condemnation,” or “will not be found guilty.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, the promise is that believers will not even

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Justification Apart from and by Works at the Final Judgment Will Confirm Justification” in *The Role of Works*, 92-93; James D. G. Dunn, “If Paul Could Believe Both in Justification by Faith and Judgment according to Works, Why Should That Be a Problem for Us?” in *The Role of Works*, 57-59.

<sup>8</sup> The KJV, NAB, NETB, NIRV, NLT, and Webster Bible are some that misinterpret the

appear at the final (GWT) judgment. A great divide exists over the interpretation of John 5:24.

## IV. PROOF THAT 5:24 TAKES PRIORITY OVER 5:28-29

John 5:22-30 has seven uses of the *kri-* family of words. *Krinō* (“to judge”) appears twice (5:22, 30), and *krisis* (“judgment”) has five uses (5:22, 24, 27, 29-30). *Krima* is not used here. Both John’s word choice and context are significant.<sup>9</sup> Each requires analysis.

### A. John’s Word Choice

Both English and Greek add suffixes to nouns. For example, the English suffix *-al* refers to an action. Examples include “arrival,” “denial,” and “removal.” Likewise, the Greek suffix *-sis* generally focuses on actions, not results of those actions. The renowned grammarian James Hope Moulton concluded his analysis of noun suffixes by saying:

In the classical [pre-300 BC], and still more in the Hellenistic period [300 BC–AD 300], a differentiation of meanings was observed in the use of the several formations: *-sis* then expressed the verbal abstract [the verbal action]..., and *-ma* the result of the action...<sup>10</sup>

---

verse in this manner.

<sup>9</sup> John’s Gospel uses *krima* only once (9:39), speaking of judgment’s result, not the act.

<sup>10</sup> James Hope Moulton, *Accidence and Word-Formation* in James Hope Moulton and Wilbert Francis Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 2, (Edinburgh, SCT: Clark, 1920), 355. Neither Moulton nor I claim that every occurrence of every *-sis* Greek noun refers to action, nor that every occurrence of every *-ma* noun refers to result. It is a general pattern. (Section IVB of this article contends that the general pattern holds true here.) Romans 5:16 is an important exception, in which *krima* is an action (the verdict), while *katakrima* is the result (the judicial sentence). The 160 NT *-sis* words follows [KRISIS is capitalized]: *agalliasis*, *aganaktēsis*, *ainesis*, *aisthēsis*, *anablepsis*, *anachusis*, *anadeixis*, *anagnōsis*, *anairesis*, *anakainōsis*, *anakrisis*, *analēpsis*, *analysis*, *anamnēsis*, *anapausis*, *anapsuxis*, *anastasis*, *anesis*, *anoixis*, *antapodosis*, *antilepsis*, *antithesis*, *apantēsis*, *apekdu-sis*, *aphesis*, *aphixis*, *apochrēsis*, *apodeixis*, *apokalupsis*, *apokatastasis*, *apokrisis*, *apolausis*, *apolutrōsis*, *apothesis*, *athetēsis*, *athlēsis*, *auxēsis*, *basis*, *bebaiōsis*, *biōsis*, *brōsis*, *chrēsis*, *deēsis*, *diagnōsis*, *diairesis*, *diakrisis*, *diēgēsis*, *dikaiōsis*, *diorthōsis*, *dosis*, *egersis*, *ekbasis*, *ekdikēsis*, *ekplērōsis*, *ekstasis*, *elexis*, *eleusis*, *endeixis*, *endōmēsis*, *endusis*, *enteuxis*, *enthumēsis*, *epanorthōsis*, *epignōsis*, *epilusis*, *epipothēsis*, *episustasis*, *epithesis*, *erēmōsis*, *exanastasis*, *genesis*, *gennēsis*, *gnōsis*, *hairesis*, *halōsis*, *halusis*, *hexis*, *homoiōsis*, *horasis*, *hupantēsis*, *huparxis*, *hupokrisis*, *hupomnēsis*, *hupostasis*, *hupotupōsis*, *husterēsis*, *iasis*, *kakōsis*, *katabasis*,

## B. The Context of John 5:22-30

Six uses of the *kri-* family of words in John 5:22-30 set the pattern for 5:24. Analysis will begin with the verses in which a verbal form appears.

### 1. “*Krinō*” and “*Krisis*” in John 5:22

For the Father **judges** [*krinō*] no one, but He has granted all [execution of] **judgment** [*krisis*] to the Son.

The Father will not judge at the GWT but will delegate that to the Son. Clearly, this speaks of people facing Jesus as Judge, i.e., the act of judging.

### 2. “*Krinō*” and “*Krisis*” in John 5:30

I can do nothing of Myself. As I hear, I **judge** [*krinō*], and My **judgment** [*krisis*] is righteous, because I do not seek My will, but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Again, this speaks of Jesus as Judge at the GWT.

### 3. “*Krisis*” in John 5:27

...and [the Father] has granted Him authority to **execute judgment** [*krisin poieō*], because He is *the* Son of Man.

Although *krinō* does not appear here, *krisin poieō* (“make judgment”) is equivalent. This follows the pattern.

### 4. “*Krisis*” in John 5:28-29

...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice and [those raised from the tombs] will come forth— those who have done good *things*, unto *the*

---

*katakrisis, katanuxis katapausis, katartisis, kataschesis, kataskēnōsis, kathairesis, katoikēsis, kauchēsis, kausis, kinēsis, klasis, klēsis, koimēsis, kolasis, KRISIS, ktisis, kubernēsis, lēmpsisis, lusis, lutrōsis, metalēmpsisis, metathesis, morphōsis, nekrōsis, opsisis, orexis osphrēsis, parabasis, paradosis, paraklēsis, paratērēsis, paresis, pepoithēsis, peripoiēsis, perithesis, phanerōsis, phasis, phronēsis, phusiōsis, phusis, poiēsis, pōrōsis, posis, praxis prognōsis, prophasis, pro-schusis, proskarterēsis, prosklisis, proslēmpsisis, prothesis, ptoēsis, ptōsis, purōsis, rhusis, stasis, sumphōnēsis, sunantēsis, sunchusis, suneidēsis, sunesis, sunkatathesis, suzētēsis, tapeinōsis, taxis teleiōsis, tērēsis, thelēsis, thlipsis, zētēsis.*

resurrection of life; but those who have done substandard *things*, unto *the* resurrection of **judgment** [*krisis*].

Consider the chronology for unbelievers here. They will rise, so Jesus can try them. Precisely, the phrase “resurrection of judgment” refers to being raised so they could appear at the GWT. Again, *krisis* refers to the act of judgment (the GWT), not to its result (the lake of fire).

#### 5. “*Krisis*” in John 5:24

Amen, amen, I tell you, the *one* who listens to My word and believes the *One* who sent Me has everlasting life, and does not come into **judgment** [*krisis*], but has passed from death to life.

The other six uses of the *kri*- family of words in John 5:22-30 refer to the GWT. Everything in context points to *krisis* in 5:24 as a court appearance, not the lake of fire. Jesus promised that believers will not appear before Him as Judge.

#### 6. Summary of Word Choice and John 5:22-30’s Context

Schreiner, Dunn, and Barber attempt the wrong order of operations in John 5:24 and 28-29. They ignore John’s choice of *krisis* (not *krima*), a word normally focused upon action, not result. Most of Christendom neglects the Biblical equivalent of PEMDAS (parentheses, exponents, multiply/divide, add/subtract). Bad hermeneutics lead to catastrophic results. A great divide ensues.

## V. THREE GRACE VIEWS OF 5:28-29

Free Grace advocates agree that John 5:24 promises to exclude believers from the GWT. Despite unity there, three consistent Grace views of 5:28-29 exist, as Wilkin clarifies:

[B] This could be an example of Johannine use of absolute language. *Positionally speaking*, all believers are holy and sinless. [C] It is also possible that Jesus is pointing out the futility of salvation by works...

[A] Another view is that the reference to doing good alludes to believing in Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

This article will treat the views in the following order:

- A. Believing is the good that every believer has done.
- B. The sinless regenerate-seed only does good.
- C. Doing good is hypothetical and impossible for unbelievers.

## **A. Believing Is the Good that Every Believer Has Done**

The pertinent part of the passage reads:

...all those in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth— those who have done good *things*,<sup>12</sup> to the resurrection of life...

John Hart is one of many holding this view.<sup>13</sup> He states it in a totally transparent way, even surfacing the key difficulty with the view:

In this passage, all Christians are considered to be those who did the good [*ta agatha*] deeds (v. 29), namely, they exercised faith in Jesus (see the contrast between believing and disobeying [the command to believe] in 3:36), and they will go to a resurrection of life.<sup>14</sup>

One difficulty here is that *good (things)* is plural. Another is that believing is not something that a believer does; it is something that happens. A person is persuaded that Jesus guarantees him or her eternal life. Believing is not something that one does, but that one experiences.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, "John," *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 192.

<sup>12</sup> "Good (*things*)" is plural in Greek, as is worthless (*things*) (5:29).

<sup>13</sup> I once held this view. It may be attractive but does not quite fit the passage.

<sup>14</sup> John F. Hart, "John" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, gen. eds. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1622.

<sup>15</sup> Someone will object, "Believing is an active voice. Therefore, believing is done by people." No, that is not the active voice's only use. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 411 defines *simple active*, "The subject *performs* or *experiences* the action. The verb may be transitive or intransitive. This [the subject performing or experiencing the action] is the normal or routine use, by far the most common [of the active]" (italics his; underlining mine).

Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, ENG: University Press, 1990; reprint, Oxford, ENG: Clarendon, 2002),



## B. The Sinless Regenerate Seed Only Does Good

Again, the following is the portion of the passage which this view seeks to explain:

...all those in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth— those who have done good *things*, to the resurrection of life...

Zane Hodges proposed the Sinless Regenerate Seed view in 1979.<sup>16</sup> He reiterated his argument in his commentary on John:

It is perfectly true that even after we are born of God, we continue to live in a sinful body that expresses itself all too often. But it is the unmistakable doctrine of the Apostle John that, in the final analysis, “whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him and he cannot sin because he has been born of God”<sup>17</sup> (1 John 3:9). This verse means exactly what it says, but of course it is the *new person* created by regeneration that “does not... and cannot sin.”<sup>18</sup>

---

135-36, names a category of verbs to which *pisteuō* belongs, “Verbs of passive *cognition*, mental attitude or emotional state. No focus on exertion to maintain knowledge. Attitude or to act in keeping with it” [emphasis in original]. He then appended some verbs in that category. I started with his list, but (1) removed verbs lacking active forms, (2) added *noeō*, (3) added basic definitions, and (4) made *pisteuō* bold. His list appears on *ibid.*, 136; the resulting list follows:

*agrupneō* (to be alert); *ginōskō* (to know) [in present tense]; *grēgoreō* (to be alert); *dokeō* (to think); *elpizō* (to hope); *exoutheneō* (to disdain); *epithumeō* (to desire); *euaresteō* (to take delight); *eudokeō* (to take delight); *thelō* (to desire); *kathēudō* (to sleep); *kataphroneō* (to despise); *merimnaō* (to be anxious); *mimnēskō* (to remember); *mnēmoneuō* (to remember); *noeō* (to perceive); *nomizō* (to think); *oida* (to know); ***pisteuō*** (to believe); *prosdokaō* (to expect); *phroneō* (to think).

Let me illustrate the upshot of the citations of Wallace and Fanning: “I know that I am writing this near Knoxville on a cool, breezy, and sunny summer morning with a few clouds.” My body detects the coolness. My knowledge of time (morning), place (near Knoxville), date (early summer), and weather (cool, sunny, with a few clouds) does not derive from action or decision, but from sensory perception and mental awareness. My knowledge (belief) concerning time, place, date, and weather is not an action.

Theodore Mueller, “Linguistic Nonsense about Faith,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 48 (January 1984): 61-66, has helpful analysis along the same lines.

<sup>16</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “Those Who Have Done Good—John 5:28-29; Part 6 of Problem Passages in the Gospel of John,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (April–June 1979): 163-64.

<sup>17</sup> See Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 140-44, for a presentation of the evidence for this view of 1 John 3:9.

<sup>18</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Faith in His Name: Listening to the Gospel of John* (Corinth, TX: Grace

In 1 John 3:9 Zane Hodges rightly notes that the sinless regenerate seed cannot sin. However, the problems with this view of John 5:29a seem insurmountable. John directs his gospel to unbelievers. Thus many<sup>19</sup> of his parenthetical asides assist unbelieving readers to understand difficult ideas.<sup>20</sup> In a book for unbelievers, would not John need to have added a parenthetical aside to clarify this result of regeneration? It seems far too advanced for unbelieving readers—without a parenthetical explanation.<sup>21</sup> Another solution is needed.

### **C. Doing Good is Hypothetical and Impossible for Unbelievers**

Before I make a case for the view, a brief explanation of the passage under this model is appropriate. Again, the passage provides context for the analysis:

...all those in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth— those who have done good *things*, to the resurrection of life...

A rewording of this passage may make the “hypothetical and impossible view” clearer.

*At the GWT, any unbeliever who has lived an absolutely perfect life, consistently doing only perfect and good things, would receive eternal life while standing before the judge.*

No unbelievers at the GWT will be found to have lived perfect lives meriting eternal life. Jesus did not predict that He will find any who did good. He will find none.

Chuck Swindoll offers some clarity on John 5:28-29:

---

Evangelical Society, 2015), 109.

<sup>19</sup> Clarifying difficulties is a common (but not the only) reason for parentheses. Often, they give emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Merrill C. Tenney in “Footnotes of John’s Gospel” (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 117 (October 1960): 364, lists 59 parenthetical asides in John. Gilbert Van Belle in *Les parenthèses dans L’Évangile de Jean: Aperçu historique et classification texte grec de Jean*, Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia, ed. Frans Neirynck, vol. 11 (Louvain, BEL: University Press, 1985), 243-329, typed in the Greek text of John from Nestle<sup>26</sup>, adding parentheses and endashes (–) to mark parentheses and parentheses within parentheses. Excluding parentheses within parentheses, I count 174 parentheses in Van Belle. John’s Gospel has at least 100 parentheses.

<sup>21</sup> John 7:39 illustrates clarifying parentheses, (“Now He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believe in Him were about to receive, for *the* Holy Spirit *was* not yet *given* because Jesus was not yet glorified.”).

Theoretically, a person can go to trial before the judge and, if he or she is found to be morally perfect, gain eternal life. However, in a practical sense, no one is morally perfect. Therefore, to face judgment without grace is to face condemnation. Consequently, Jesus uses the two ideas interchangeably; judgment is condemnation [e.g., reaching a verdict to condemn]. His point, then, is to avoid judgment altogether by grace that is received through belief.<sup>22</sup>

The analysis of the “hypothetical and impossible” offer will focus on three issues:

1. The New Testament uses similar hypothetical offers.
2. Only unbelievers will be in graves at the time of the GWT.
3. “Hypothetical and impossible” avoids a bait-and-switch.

### *1. The New Testament Uses Similar Hypothetical Offers*

Although Zane Hodges did not accept the “hypothetical and impossible view” of John 5:28-29, he did so elsewhere. In fact, in 2005 or 2006, I told him my view of this passage. His first words were, “I, of all people, should hold your view.” He said this, because he is well-known for taking this approach in Rom 2:6-7:

In line with the teaching of the Gospel of John as well as Jewish thought in general, this future destiny is identified in terms of eternal life. God will certainly give it to any who deserve it by persisting in good work.

Unfortunately, no one does this. As Paul later makes quite clear, “There is none righteous, not even one. There is no one doing good, there is not so much as one” (Rom 3:10, 12). Yet the principle remains true that, if there were someone who *did* do good persistently, and who *was* indeed righteous, God would give him eternal life because of that.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *John*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 119.

Unfortunately, Swindoll imagines (per his flowchart) that John 5:24 involves “all of humanity” facing “judgment before death κρίμα (*krima*).” This approach is from his mind, not from exegesis: (1) John 5:24 does not even use *krima*; (2) it speaks of believers avoiding *krisis*; (3) and 5:28-29 speaks of a judgment of those in graves, not a pre-death judgment. When Swindoll stays with the text, he is clear; when he strays, he gets lost.

<sup>23</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical

On the same page, Hodges sets forth Jesus proposing a hypothetical and impossible option to a lawyer:

When a specialist in the Jewish law (NKJV = “lawyer”) asked Him, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked the counter question, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” (Luke 10:25-26). The lawyer then proceeded to quote the two foremost commandments of the law, the commands to love God and neighbor. To this Jesus replied simply, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:27-28). The problem was, of course, that neither the lawyer himself, nor anyone else (other than the Lord Jesus) has ever, or will ever, fulfill these two supreme commandments.<sup>24</sup>

Once again Jesus set a hypothetical and impossible option before someone in the hope that the hearer would recognize: “That’s impossible.” People who realize the impossibility of earning eternal life often become open to a gift by grace. In John 5, Jesus was confronted by religious leaders who wanted to kill Him because He told a man to pick up his mat (John 5:16). They demanded perfect adherence to their rules. Jesus sought to put His sandal on their foot—for them to realize that He, the Judge at the GWT, would demand perfection. They would be infinitely better off to accept His offer of life (5:24) than to face Him as judge (5:28-29). This is not the NT’s only use of a hypothetical and impossible offer.

## *2. Only Unbelievers Will Be in Graves at the Time of the GWT*

As 1 Cor 15:22-23 notes, the resurrection of believers will occur in stages:

- A. Church age believers will rise in the pretribulation Rapture.
- B. Tribulation saints will rise for the beginning of the Millennium (Rev 20).
- C. OT saints will have a role in the kingdom; they rise before the Millennium begins.<sup>25</sup>

---

Society), 63.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>25</sup> Scripture does not say when they will rise, but it must be prior to the start of the Millennium.

- D. Millennial saints who die will be part of the first resurrection. Their resurrection will be prior to the GWT.<sup>26</sup>

Who will still be unresurrected at the time of the GWT? Only unbelievers will still be in tombs. Note that 5:28 speaks of “all those in the tombs,” not “all those who are in the tombs.” Jesus did not say, “everyone who ever was in a tomb” will participate in 5:28-29.<sup>27</sup> He spoke of those who would *still* be in tombs at the time of the GWT. Thus, it is vital to remember that the GWT is after the Millennium. Unbelievers will be the sole participants.

### 3. *Hypothetical Avoids a Bait-and-Switch*

Whether one holds that believing is the good that every believer does (Grace view 1) or the sinless regenerate-seed approach (Grace view 2), both assume that Jesus asserts that believers will do good. Of necessity, both views see Jesus introducing the *Bēma*, at which believers’ works will be judged. Therefore, both views logically envisage Jesus saying in John 5:24, “Only unbelievers will be judged.” So far, so good. But only a few verses later, they imagine Jesus saying, “Unbelievers will be judged at the GWT; believers will be judged at the *Bēma*.” That creates a bait-and-switch.

View 3 avoids this difficulty. Only a tiny part of John 5 speaks of the promise of everlasting life for believers (5:21, 24-26, 40). On the other hand, 5:22-23 and 27-39, 41-47, warn them that rejecting Him will result in facing Him as judge. In verse 27, Jesus turns from a focus upon Himself as the life-giver to His role as their future judge at the GWT.

The topic in 5:28-29 does not include believers. The focus shifts to unbelievers at the GWT. In John 5:24, Jesus promised categorically that believers will not appear at the GWT, but in 5:28-29 He asserted that unbelievers certainly will be there.

---

<sup>26</sup> This is suppositional, since Scripture does not address this. However, I argue that no saints (of any dispensation) will be part of the GWT judgment, because John 5:24 is a trans-dispensational promise. It was true for the age of Israel believers (prior to Pentecost); it is true for church age believers; it will be true for believers under the return to the age of Israel during the Tribulation. How could this trans-dispensational truth be revoked for Millennial saints?

<sup>27</sup> Lest anyone go on autopilot—traditionally, people think of part of the passage speaking of the first resurrection and part about the second resurrection. If so, every human being would participate. Instead, the passage speaks only of unbelievers, so the participants would be the only ones unresurrected after the first resurrection is totally completed.

Grace people need not struggle over an imaginary bait-and-switch. John 5 does not say, “Believers will not be judged [GWT], but believers will be judged [*Bēma*].” Rather, Jesus promised in 5:24 that believers will not be judged at the GWT, but 5:28-29 certifies that unbelievers will be judged there.

What is the appropriate response to an objector who asks whether the *Bēma* compromises the truth of 5:24? “Absolutely not.” The topic in this portion of John 5 is whether one will be judged at the Great White Throne. Jesus promised that believers will not be judged there, but unbelievers will. He said nothing about the *Bēma* here.

An illustration may help. My wife Diane and I purchased lifetime senior passes to U.S. national parks. They are not passes to any state, county, or municipal parks. We did not buy passes to every park everywhere. Similarly, Jesus did not offer exemption from all assizes, but to the one specific judgment that is a major focal point in John 5.

View 3 allows saying that the only judgment in view is the GWT. Jesus said nothing here about believers doing good. Why not? Eternal life is a gift to believers. He spoke of the requirement that unbelievers would need to be perfect to merit eternal life. Believers receive eternal life without merit, so why would Jesus stipulate something about their doing good? Why would He hint at their facing a judgment (albeit a different one) in a context exempting them from the GWT judgment?

## VI. CONCLUSION

We have seen that John 5:24 is the great divide in Christendom. Three scholars (Thomas Schreiner, James Dunn, and Michael Barber) represent the vast majority of those who call themselves Christian. They all regard John 5:24 as nothing more than a promise that believers will not be in the lake of fire.

Why? They and their compatriots ignore John 5’s order of operations (a Biblical counterpart to PEMDAS<sup>28</sup>). John 5:24 takes priority over 5:28-29, because verse 24 categorically promises that

---

<sup>28</sup> Parentheses, exponents, multiplication/division, addition/subtraction (see the introduction to this article). When one violates the proper order of operations, wrong answers result.

believers will not appear at the GWT. Therefore, 5:28-29 describes the judgment of unbelievers.

Grace people are clear on 5:24 but diverge in their approaches to 5:28-29. Some say that believing is the good thing that every believer does, but the verse speaks of having done good *things* (plural). Also, believing is not a thing done, but something experienced.

Other Grace people opt for the sinless regenerate seed, but that is a deep theological truth for a book designed for unbelievers. John typically adds parentheses to help unbelieving readers understand anything difficult. Though 1 John 3:9, indeed, speaks of this truth, John 5 certainly does not.

The final Grace position is that Jesus spoke hypothetically: Those who (theoretically) have done good would be raised unto life. That is, if any unbeliever were absolutely perfect, Jesus would not deny that person eternal life. No such unbelievers ever have or ever will exist. No one will receive eternal life through merit.

The arguments in favor of the “hypothetical and impossible offer view” are that Scripture uses such arguments elsewhere with unbelievers; the only ones still in the graves at the time of the GWT will be unbeliever; and this is the only Grace view that escapes the bait-and-switch.

How might one sum up the two passages?

Jesus promised that believers will not appear at the Great White Throne (5:24), but He guarantees that unbelievers will appear there to see if any reached perfection (5:28-29): the hypothetical and impossible requirement that an unbeliever would need to attain.

# THE ROLE OF CHRIST IN OUR SALVATION

BOB WILKIN

Executive Director  
*Grace Evangelical Society*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of salvation, also known as soteriology—from the Greek word for salvation, *sōtēria*—typically is divided into five to ten major categories, including the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, eternal security, the terms of salvation, election, sanctification, and perseverance.

All treatments of soteriology begin with a discussion of the role of Christ in salvation.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and first president of DTS, has five sections in his volume on soteriology, and the first section is entitled, “The Savior.”<sup>1</sup> That section takes up 154 of the 396 pages, or nearly 40%.

Bible.org suggests three sections: the nature of the atonement, the extent of the atonement, and the process of salvation (election, regeneration, conversion, union with Christ, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification).<sup>2</sup> The first two of those sections concern the role of Christ in salvation.

In Thiessen’s systematic theology, his first two sections (of ten) on soteriology, after an introductory discussion, are on the Person of Christ and the work of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3: Soteriology (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 11-164.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Herrick, “Soteriology: Salvation” at <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-soteriology-salvation>.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids:



The Bible certainly centers on Christ, the Messiah, especially in its discussion of soteriology. For example, in John's Gospel, the only evangelistic book in the Bible (see John 20:30-31), the Lord Jesus repeatedly said that whoever believes *in Him* will not perish but has everlasting life (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35, 37; 11:26). Jesus Himself is the One who guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it.

In Galatians, in Paul's defense of his gospel, he begins by talking about the grace of Christ and the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:6-9). Three times in Gal 2:16 Paul says that justification is by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law.

In Rom 3:21–4:25, Paul's exposition on justification by faith alone, he repeatedly says that it is through faith in Jesus Christ that one is justified before God.

As we consider this vital topic, let us begin with a brief word about the words *save* and *salvation*.

## II. A BRIEF WORD ON *SAVE* AND *SALVATION*

The Biblical doctrine of salvation concerns every way in which the Bible says that God saves people. This includes salvation from eternal condemnation, healing from illness, saving from deadly storms, delivering someone from his enemies, and delivering people from the deadly consequences of walking in the darkness. The doctrine of salvation is not exclusively the doctrine whereby God gives people everlasting life.

In the OT, 100% of the references to salvation and deliverance refer to deliverance of individuals and nations *in this life*.<sup>4</sup> In the NT, 70% of the references to salvation and deliverance refer to deliverance in this life.<sup>5</sup> Only in the NT do we find the words *save* and *salvation* used in reference to regeneration, and then only rarely.<sup>6</sup>

---

Eerdmans, 1949), 283-340.

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (N.p.: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 36-40.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 40-47.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, John 3:17; 5:34; 10:9; Acts 11:14; 13:26; 16:31; Eph 2:5, 8; 1 Tim 2:4; Titus 3:5.

However, for the purpose of this article, we will discuss specifically one type of salvation, salvation from eternal condemnation. What is Christ's role in people's being saved from eternal condemnation?

### **III. THE PERSON OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION**

Some like to speak of the three aspects of Christ that are central to our salvation: His Person, His provision, and His promise.<sup>7</sup>

We will begin by considering the importance of the Person of Christ in our salvation.

There could be no salvation for sinful humans unless God provided a perfect Savior. Nothing less than perfection would do.

The OT sacrificial system required *unblemished sacrifices*. The OT sacrifices pointed to the coming Messiah: "And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God..." (Heb 10:11-12).

The OT priests stood. They offered sacrifices repeatedly. Christ offered one sacrifice for sins. Never to be repeated. Then He sat down.

The reason why Jesus' one sacrifice was sufficient was because of His Person. He was the sinless sacrifice that all the OT sacrifices pointed to ("a shadow of the good things to come," Heb 10:1).

Paul said, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21).

There could be no perfect Savior unless God Himself became a man, which He did.

The Lord Jesus is God (John 1:1). He has all the attributes of God: He is eternal, holy, righteous, good, just, loving, omnipotent, omniscient, and impeccable.

---

<sup>7</sup> Charlie Bing, "The Content of the Gospel of Salvation," GraceNotes no. 40, available at <https://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=40&lang=eng>. Last accessed June 29, 2022.

Impeccability means that Jesus was incapable of sinning both in His deity and in His perfect humanity and in His united Person. He not only did not sin. He could not sin. Many insist that He had to be able to sin in order for Him to be tempted (Heb 4:15). Charles Hodge is representative of the view of many,

If He was a true man, He must have been capable of sinning. That He did not sin under the greatest provocations; that when He was reviled, He blessed; when He suffered He threatened not; that He was dumb as a sheep before its shearers, is held up to us as an example. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect and He cannot sympathize with his people.<sup>8</sup>

Hodges takes the opposite position, that Jesus could not sin:

Though unlike them He was without sin (cf. 7:26; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 3:5), never responding wrongly to any of His temptations (*nor could He, being God*), yet as a man He could feel their reality (much as an immovable boulder can bear the brunt of a raging sea) and thus He is able to sympathize (*sympathēsai*, lit., “to feel or suffer with”) with their and our weaknesses. It may indeed be argued, and has been, that only One who fully resists temptation can know the extent of its force. Thus, the sinless One has a greater capacity for compassion than any sinner could have for a fellow sinner.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, R. Carlton Wynne wrote at the Desiring God website: “Taking humanity to himself meant assuming a true human nature — with its creaturely mind, affections, body, and will — but one that, in perfect harmony with his deity, *could seek nothing but wholehearted delight in the Father’s purposes* (cf. John 6:38).”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (New York, NY: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1873), 457. The book can be read online at [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Systematic\\_Theology/V7wim5btRzMC?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Systematic_Theology/V7wim5btRzMC?hl=en&gbpv=1).

<sup>9</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Vol. 2, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Victor Books, 1985), 790, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> “Could Jesus Have Sinned?” available at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/could-jesus-have-sinned>. Last accessed August 24, 2022. Emphasis added. See also D. Blair Smith,

The following titles of Christ found in the NT show the importance of His Person in our salvation: the way, the truth, the life, the faithful High Priest, the Seed of the woman, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Holy One, the One who knew no sin, the Alpha and the Omega, and the Savior of the world.

People do not need to understand everything about the Person of Christ in order to have everlasting life.<sup>11</sup> What they need to understand is that He is fully capable of giving everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it.

#### IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION

Concerning that middle element, *the provision of Christ*, I prefer to refer to *the work of Christ* because His work was broader than His death on the cross for our sins.

His work includes His incarnation (John 3:16), His sinless life (2 Cor 5:21), the miracles He did (John 20:30), the teaching He gave (the Gospel of John), the suffering He underwent (Isaiah 53; 1 Pet 3:18), His death on the cross for our sins (John 3:14-15), His burial in a rich man's tomb (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:57-60), His three days in Hades (Matt 12:40; Luke 23:43), His bodily resurrection on the third day (1 Cor 15:18-19), His post-resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15:5-8), and His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). All of that was essential for our salvation.

Jesus' last words on the cross before He committed His spirit to the Father were "It is finished" (John 19:30). All throughout His ministry, He had spoken about the importance of His finishing the work the Father gave Him to do (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4; 19:30). His

---

"Was It Possible for Jesus to Sin?" at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/possible-jesus-sin/>. Last accessed August 24, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Some suggest that one must believe in the deity of Christ to be born again. See, for example, Thomas L. Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ* (Milwaukee, WI: Grace Gospel Press, 2009), 353-61, 540; J. B. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong* (N.p.: Xulon Press, 2008), 85-90. Precisely what must be believed about the deity of Christ to have everlasting life is not explained. It is hard to sustain this view in light of the fact that the apostles were born again before they believed in the deity of Christ. Belief in His deity should lead a person to believe in Him for the promise of everlasting life. Sadly, however, there are untold millions today who believe in the deity of Christ and yet who do not believe that everlasting life is a free gift received by faith alone, apart from works.

whole life and ministry were pointed toward Calvary. But all that led up to the cross were also essential works of Christ for our salvation.

Commenting on Heb 10:11-12, Bruce writes:

The Aaronic priests never sat down in the sanctuary; they remained standing throughout the whole performance of their sacred duties. In this our author sees a token of the fact that their sacred duties were never done, that their sacrifices had always to be repeated. In v. 1 the repetition of the ritual of the Day of Atonement “year by year” was mentioned; here, as in 7:27, the reference is to those sacrifices which were offered “day by day.” But whether the repetition was annual or daily, the main point is that repetition was necessary; not one of these sacrifices could remove sin or cleanse the conscience with permanent effect. The completion of one sacrifice meant only that a similar one would have to be offered in due course, and so on indefinitely; it was in keeping with this that the priests of the old order never sat down in the presence of God when a sacrifice had been presented to him.

But it was equally in keeping with the perfection of Christ’s sacrifice of himself that, when he had presented it to God, he sat down. No further sacrificial service can be required of the priest who appeared on earth in the fulness of time to put away sin and sanctify his people once for all. A seated priest is the guarantee of a finished work and an accepted sacrifice. The heavenly high priest has indeed a continual ministry to discharge on his people’s behalf at the Father’s right hand; but that is the ministry of intercession on the basis of the sacrifice presented and accepted once for all; it is not the constant or repeated offering of his sacrifice.<sup>12</sup>

Many point to Rom 5:10 to suggest that we are not saved by the death of Christ, but by His life. There Paul says, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” But Paul is speaking about sanctification, about being saved from God’s wrath in this life (cf. Rom 1:18-32).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 245.

<sup>13</sup> See “Salvation by the Life of Christ” at <https://activechristianity.org/what-does-it-mean-to-be-saved-by-the-life-of-christ-romans-510>. Last accessed August 5, 2022. While not

In Eph 2:8-9, Paul uses a perfect tense to express the idea that regeneration is a past event with an abiding result: “by grace *you have been saved* through faith...” By contrast, in Rom 5:10, Paul uses a future tense: *we shall be saved by His life*. Hodges has shown that all the uses of *sōzō* and *sōtēria* in Romans refer to deliverance from the wrath of God in this life. Never in Romans do those words refer to regeneration.

While Rom 5:10 does not prove the point, it is true that no one could be saved by faith in Christ if Christ had sinned. His had to be an unblemished sacrifice (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 10:1-14). That is, He not only had to have died on the cross for our sins and risen from the dead, but He also had to have lived a sinless life.

It would be accurate to say that we are saved both by the life of Christ and by the death of Christ. His death on the cross was only effective because of His sinless life.

## **V. THE PROMISE OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION**

Not only did Jesus need to be the right Person and do the right works, but He also had to make the right promise. Without the promise of everlasting life, no one could be saved.

He stated the promise in verses such as John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; Rev 22:17.

In the NT this promise is called “the promise of life” (2 Tim 1:1; see also Gal 3:21; Titus 1:2) or “the word of life” (Acts 5:20; Phil 2:16; see also 1 John 1:1).

The promise is found in the OT as well, starting in Gen 3:15 and continuing in Gen 15:6. The Lord Jesus said the OT proclaimed that those who believe in Him have everlasting life (John 5:39-40). Hebrews 11 gives many examples of OT people who believed in Jesus for their eternal destiny. For example, Abraham “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). He knew he would one day be raised and would see the New

---

crystal clear, the author sees a second type of salvation in Rom 5:10: “In the first salvation we receive forgiveness for committed sins. The second salvation comes by walking in obedience to the faith, because it is written: Walk in the light while you have the light, that you may become sons of light. In the light is life, and in the light was life, and life is the light of man. Being a child of the light is the same as being a child of life.”

Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day” (John 8:56).

Moses “esteem[ed] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure in Egypt, for he looked to the reward” (Heb 11:26). Only one who knew he would be in the coming kingdom could look forward to eternal rewards.

Some have suggested that one need not believe the promise of Christ in order to be born again. They suggest that faith in Christ’s Person and work is sufficient.

Morrison, for example, writes, “John 9:35-41 provides strong evidence that to believe in Christ is not to merely accept the proposition that Jesus gives eternal life but rather has as its object the Man Himself.”<sup>14</sup> His statement may seem to imply that one must believe in the promise of everlasting life as well as the Person of Christ (“not to merely accept the proposition that Jesus gives eternal life...”). However, he goes on to say, “One may infer, of course, from the rest of John’s Gospel (e.g., John 6:47) that this man therefore had eternal life, but the fact remains that it is not clear that this man is at any point asked to believe a promise. Instead, he is asked to believe in a person.”<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, commenting on Paul’s sermon in Antioch, as recorded in Acts 13, Stegall says,

This passage does not tell us that “*everlasting life*” was necessarily even part of “*the things spoken by Paul*” (v. 45)

---

<sup>14</sup> Chris Morrison, “Hodges’ ‘Promise Only’ Gospel in Light of John 9:35-41,” 1. It is available at <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcapjpcglclefindmkaj/https://cmmorrison.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/john-9-paper.pdf>. Last accessed August 16, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14. In my commentary on John, I point to this very fact to suggest that the man born blind was already an OT believer before he discovered that Jesus is the Messiah he had already believed in for his eternal destiny: “However, unlike John 4 or the other evangelistic encounters in John’s Gospel, here Jesus never mentions everlasting life. To say the least, that is odd and should cause us to wonder why. Since we have no other evangelistic encounters in John where everlasting life is not mentioned by Jesus, it seems probable that this man is an OT believer, that is, one who previously had believed in the coming Messiah for everlasting life but who did not yet know that Jesus is the Messiah in whom he had already believed. If this is correct, it would mean that the man was already born again before he met Jesus, and that here is a Johannine example, like John the Baptist earlier (1:33, “And I did not know Him”), of an OT saint coming to believe that Jesus is the Messiah in whom he had already believed (cf. Luke 2:25-38 re. Anna and Simeon). The way he handled himself before his inquisitors sounds like a man who was an OT saint who already knew that he had eternal life by faith alone in the Messiah alone” (in “John,” *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, revised edition [Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010, 2019], 205).

that constituted “*the Word of God*” (v. 44) in his evangelistic message “*on the next Sabbath*” (v. 44). Though the Galatians clearly heard about “*everlasting life*,” it was only at the *conclusion* of Paul’s evangelism on the second Sabbath and only *after* they had already rejected the gospel (“*the Word of God*”) in verse 44.<sup>16</sup>

Others, however, recognize that belief in Christ’s promise is essential in order to be born again. In his book, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, John Piper has a section which asks the question, “We Are Not Justified by Belief in Justification?”<sup>17</sup> He quotes Wright as saying, “We are not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith. We are justified by faith by believing the gospel itself—in other words, that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead.”<sup>18</sup> Piper continues,

This sounds right. Of course, we are not saved by doctrine. We are saved by Christ. But it is misleading because it leaves the meaning of “believing in the gospel” undefined. Believing in the gospel *for what*? Prosperity? Healing? A new job?...we will have to announce why this death and resurrection are good news *for them* (italics his).

Similarly, Hodges writes,

I now realize that no one is saved by praying a prayer. They are saved when they understand God’s offer of eternal life through Jesus and believe it. That’s when people are saved. And that’s the only time when people are saved. All of the excess baggage that we bring into our encounter with unsaved sinners is just that, excess baggage!<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ*, 369.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2,” *JOTGES* (Spring 2001): 17. The “excess baggage” of which Hodges spoke was things like asking a person to “pray a prayer, or make a decision for Christ, or do any of the many other things people often asked the unsaved to do” (p. 17).



## VI. FIVE MAJOR VIEWS ON THE ATONEMENT

There are many views concerning why Jesus died on the cross for our sins. I will briefly outline five major ones.

*Moral influence theory.* Jesus' death on the cross *and His entire life* are an example for us on how to live so that we might gain everlasting life. This is a form of works salvation.

Franklin Johnson summarizes the view in this way,

While the Christian world as a whole believes in a substitutionary atonement, the doctrine is rejected by a minority of devout and able men, who present instead of it what has often been called the "moral-influence theory." According to this, the sole mission of Christ was to reveal the love of God in a way so moving as to melt the heart and induce men to forsake sin.<sup>20</sup>

*Ransom to Satan.* In this view, God had to pay Satan with the death of His Son in order to set people free from bondage to Satan and sin. This is another form of works salvation since the aim is moral reformation for salvation.

Ligonier ministries describes this view as follows: "One other view that has circulated in church history is that Christ's death was a ransom paid to Satan. When Christ died, He paid a price to Satan in order to secure our release from bondage to Satan's kingdom."<sup>21</sup> They go on to critique the view in this way: "The Bible does view the Atonement as a ransom paid (see Mark 10:45). But it is a ransom paid to God the Father. There is no negotiation between the Devil and the Lord for the release of the captives. Rather, we are redeemed by having Christ crush the head of the serpent after He pays the ransom to God."<sup>22</sup>

*Christus Victor.* This means *Christ, the Victor*. In this view, Satan was not paid anything. However, similar to the previous view, Christ's death defeated evil and set people free to live righteously. This too is another form of works salvation.

---

<sup>20</sup> Franklin Johnson, "The Atonement," p. 1, available at [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcapjpcglclefindmkaj/https://goitrc.org/pdf/pdf\\_sermons/Sermon,ATONEMENT.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcapjpcglclefindmkaj/https://goitrc.org/pdf/pdf_sermons/Sermon,ATONEMENT.pdf). Last accessed August 5, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> "The Ransom Theory" (unnamed author) available at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/ransom-theory>. Last accessed August 5, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

I should mention that while the three views above are way off regarding justification, they are on the right track concerning sanctification. The death of Christ does make freedom from slavery to sin a positional reality for all who believe in Jesus. It makes freedom from sin's bondage a reality in the experience of every believer who is walking in the light and in fellowship with God.

But we are not born again by living a righteous life.

*Anselm's Satisfaction Theory.* According to this view, the sinfulness of man is an injustice that must be dealt with in order to satisfy God's justice. The death of Christ serves to satisfy God's justice.

There are aspects of works salvation here as well, since one is not born again by believing in Jesus and thereby having God's justice satisfied. The death of Christ makes it possible for people to live in such a way as to satisfy God's justice. In a sense, this view sees Christ's death as making us savable. But the condition for salvation and the nature of it were wrong.

Anselm believed that salvation began with baptism, and it was maintained by regularly partaking of the eucharist, as well as confessing one's sins and doing acts of penance.

*Penal Substitutionary Atonement.* The Reformers, Calvin and Luther, developed a new theory, one that was related to Anselm's view and was a modification of it. In this view, Jesus died in our place. The result is that humans are savable. But unlike Anselm's view on how people were saved, this view teaches that people are saved by faith alone (though how they define faith varies greatly). Some who hold to substitutionary atonement believe that salvation cannot be lost.

The idea of substitution is found in the words *for* or *in place of*, *hyper* and *peri* in Greek ("Christ died for our sins," 1 Cor 15:3; 1 John 3:16) and *ransom* ("He gave His life a ransom for many," Mark 10:45).

This last view is the view of most Evangelicals.

## **VII. UNLIMITED VS. LIMITED ATONEMENT ("L" IN TULIP)**

An important issue in the death of Christ is whether He died for everyone (the doctrine known as unlimited atonement) or whether He died only for a select group of people (the doctrine which is called limited atonement).

Calvinists believe that Christ died only for “the elect.” Most of humanity was not chosen to have everlasting life; Christ did not die for most people.

There is a modified Calvinist view—that Christ died only for those who would one day believe that on the cross, He died in their place. In this view, one must believe not only that Christ died on the cross for our sins, but that He did so as our substitute. One who believes other views of the atonement would not be eligible for salvation. This too is limited atonement, though I have heard people swear that it is unlimited since Christ potentially died for all, even if His death actually counts only for those who believe in substitutionary atonement.

But that is exactly what limited atonement teaches: Christ potentially died for all, but He actually died only for the elect, and the elect are the only people who will be given what Calvinists call *the gift of faith*.

Many people wrongly think that if Christ died for all, then all would be given everlasting life. They wrongly think that the purpose of the shed blood of Christ was to save everyone for whom He died. God actually had many purposes for the shed blood of Christ.<sup>23</sup> But none of those purposes were to save those for whom Christ died. God purposed that Christ’s blood makes everyone *saveable* (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). But whether anyone will be saved depends on whether he believes in Jesus for everlasting life.

The Scriptures clearly teach unlimited atonement. See John 3:16; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 2:2.

## VIII. JESUS IS GOD’S GREATEST EVANGELIST

Alex MacDonald says, “Our Lord Jesus gave us the greatest example of preaching, but he also gave us the greatest example of evangelism.”<sup>24</sup> Adrian Warnock agrees: “Jesus is the model evangelist, and we can learn from his example how to get caught up on his mission to seek and save the lost.”<sup>25</sup> Both of those men use Jesus’

---

<sup>23</sup> Bob Wilkin, “Benefits of Christ’s Blood: Restricted and Unrestricted” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2009): 3-10. Available online at <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/benefits-of-christs-blood-restricted-and-unrestricted/>.

<sup>24</sup> “Jesus the Evangelist” at <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/jesus-evangelist>. Last accessed August 5, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> “Jesus the Great Evangelist: a sermon on John 4” at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/adri->

interaction with the woman at the well in John 4 to prove their point. Zane Hodges's first book, *The Hungry Inherit*, was devoted to that interaction as well.

Though not specifically using the expression *God's greatest evangelist*, Hodges says that the message we should be proclaiming today is the message the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the woman at the well:

He wanted them [His disciples] to say "Come!" to everyone He sent them to and to broadcast far and wide the availability of His living water. That was the message of God's Holy Spirit. *That would be the message of the whole Christian church, Christ's bride* (Eph 5:25-32).<sup>26</sup>

Most evangelistic tracts and presentations are based upon a collage of verses drawn mainly from the NT epistles. Rarely do evangelistic presentations concentrate on the evangelistic ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. His evangelistic ministry has not received the attention that it deserves.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." He is the one who reveals God and God's truth to us. Of special importance was His revealing God's truth about everlasting life (John 6:68).

Zane Hodges wrote a booklet entitled, *Jesus: God's Prophet*.<sup>27</sup> He showed that all NT doctrine found in the epistles flows directly from the teachings of the Lord Jesus. That was true of the doctrine of salvation as well.

John 3:16 is still in effect today. So are the scores of verses in John's Gospel where the Lord Jesus said that whoever believes in Him has everlasting life, will never perish, will never hunger or thirst, will never die spiritually, will never be cast out, and so forth.

Whatever the epistles teach, they do not contradict the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

---

[anwarnock/2014/02/jesus-the-great-evangelist-a-sermon-on-john-4/](http://anwarnock/2014/02/jesus-the-great-evangelist-a-sermon-on-john-4/). Last accessed August 5, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit: Winning the Wealth of the World to Come* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2016), 151, italics added.

<sup>27</sup> It is available as a free e-book at <https://faithalone.org/ebooks/jesus-gods-prophet/> and a paperback version is available at [https://faithalone.org/store/page/2/?filter\\_book-author=hodges&query\\_type\\_book-author=or](https://faithalone.org/store/page/2/?filter_book-author=hodges&query_type_book-author=or).

Paul tells us in Galatians that he received his gospel directly from the Lord Jesus. His was not some new message. His was the same message that Jesus preached.

Jesus is much more than the Savior. He is our Lord. He is our King. He is our soon-returning Judge. He is also our Teacher. He is the Light of the world. He is everlasting life.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The Lord Jesus Christ is central to anyone's gaining everlasting life. There could be no salvation apart from His incarnation, sinless life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection. And there could be no regeneration apart from His promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it. For any human being to be saved requires the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the promise of Christ.

He is the object of saving faith. We are not saved by our works or by our faith plus our works. We are saved by believing in Jesus, the Giver, for the gift of God, that is, everlasting life (John 4:10, 14).

# THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LUKE 10:25-37)

KATHRYN WRIGHT

*Columbia, SC*

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most well-known parables of the Lord is the Parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37.<sup>1</sup> In studying the literature, I have discovered at least two primary issues surrounding this teaching by Christ. The first is the danger of the interpreter to allegorize the parable. Many have suggested that Jesus is teaching things that may not at first be apparent. How much of this, if any, is legitimate? Can a reader look at the context and conclude that the Lord is pointing the lawyer in the account to certain conclusions which are separate from the original question he asked Him? Can the reader read between the lines and conclude that Christ has another purpose in mind? It is common to find in the commentary traditions warnings against this tendency.

A second major issue concerning the parable is more basic. What is its fundamental interpretation? At face value, the parable seems to be teaching that God's people should care for those in need. Often this is used to provide a test of "genuine" faith. It is maintained that a true child of God will love his neighbor. The problem is that this parable would then be teaching eternal salvation by works, which is contrary to the teachings of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Since the Scriptures can never contradict themselves, it is clear that this cannot be the meaning of

---

<sup>1</sup> The word "good" does not occur in the parable. In fact, the man who asks the question that leads to the parable would never have called a Samaritan good. This article will use the adjective simply because of the popular name of the parable.

<sup>2</sup> No doubt, it would be maintained that this is not the same thing as teaching salvation by works. One might say that salvation is indeed free, by faith alone, but that the good work of caring for those in need will automatically flow from such a faith. Such work does not save. But if this good work is necessary to prove one is saved, it has become essentially, nonetheless, a requirement for that salvation.

the parable. Such a view can only be arrived at by not considering the context.

In this article, I would like to address these two issues. To do so, we will first consider the context.

## II. THE CONTEXT

There is heavy Jewish emphasis in Luke 10. The chapter begins with Jesus sending out seventy of His disciples to preach in the cities of Israel. Their message would have been that He is the Christ and that He was offering the kingdom to that generation of Jews. He would be the One who judged them if they rejected that message (vv 11-15). In order to confirm that their message was from God, the seventy were given the power to perform miracles.

The seventy returned and were excited about the miracles they were able to perform in the name of Christ (v 17). The Lord, however, reminded them that they should rejoice rather that their names had been written in heaven (v 20). This is a clear statement that they had eternal life. Christ was the One who gave it to them. In fact, He is the One who gives it to all who believe in Him for it. Those who believed the message when the seventy went out and preached it, had the same gift of everlasting life (v 16).

It must be remembered that the Gospel of Luke was written to believers, specifically a believer named Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4). Believers would already know that eternal life is a gift given by God's grace through faith in Christ. They would already know that it is not obtained by good works.

Hodges makes the point that the Lord's statement about names written in heaven means that these "babes" had assurance of eternal life. These wonderful truths had been revealed to them as babes (v 21). The Lord was calling them to do His work, in the case of the Twelve and the seventy, but that work had nothing to do with the gift He had already given them. They could never lose the gift of everlasting life because works were not involved in any way in the gift they had received.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018), 95, 541.

The Lord prayed and thanked His Father that babes understood “these things.” The babes refer to the seventy and the rest of Jesus’ disciples (v 23). The things Christ spoke of would include, first of all, how to have one’s name written in heaven, that is, how to obtain eternal life. But it would also include His authority to judge the nation of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of judgment is perhaps behind the Lord’s statement that “all things have been delivered to” Him “by the Father.”<sup>5</sup> The Father had given Him that authority. The fact that Jesus is the Christ and can give eternal life through faith alone in Him alone is based upon knowing who the Son is (v 22).

These are the things revealed to babes. These babes were blessed because they were able to see them (v 23). At the same time, the “wise and prudent” were those from whom such things have been hidden (v 21). They were and are even today blind to such realities.

Babes, then, know that Jesus is the Christ. In Him, they have eternal life. He is the One who will judge. The wise, however, do not see “these things.” After laying out these fundamental principles, Luke gave an example of a “wise and prudent” person and an example of a “babe.” The babe, the discerning person, is Mary (v 39). The “wise” man was not really wise; he was an unbelieving scribe. But he was one the Jewish community called *wise*. He was the one who asked the Lord the question which led to the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

### III. THE PARABLE

The parable can be divided into three parts: the question by the lawyer and answer by the Lord, the parable itself, and the application.

#### A. The Question and Answer (10:25-29)

Luke recorded how a man who would have been considered wise and prudent came up to the Lord. He is identified as a “lawyer.” The word is always used in the Gospels for one who was considered

---

<sup>4</sup>Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 312. Stein says Christ has the authority to judge the whole world. That is true, but the statement ignores the Jewish context here.

<sup>5</sup>See John 5:22.



an expert in the Law of Moses and would have been respected as such.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that in the Gospel of Luke, lawyers are always presented in a negative light (e.g., 5:17-19; 9:22).

It is clear that this man did not recognize who Jesus is. He did not see Him as the Christ. He addressed the Lord as “teacher.” In addition, he stood up in order to test Him.

This word for “test” is used only four times in the NT, and it is always in a negative sense (Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12; 1 Cor 10:9). Here, the man was putting Jesus to the test to see if Jesus agreed with his own assessment.<sup>7</sup> It implied that he was not convinced the Lord was as knowledgeable as he was concerning the Law of Moses.

It is also clear that this lawyer did not see eternal life as a free gift through faith alone. The idea that such a faith would result in his name being written in heaven (v 20) was a foreign concept to him. This is seen in his question. He wanted to know what he must “do” to inherit eternal life. As an expert in the OT, he was well aware of a coming kingdom, in which the dead would be raised, and some would have everlasting life and be a part of that kingdom (Dan 12:2).

The question set the context of the parable that follows. Somehow, the parable is connected with this man’s desire to earn eternal salvation. What must he do?<sup>8</sup>

In this entire episode, the word “do” is important; in the Greek text, the word in v 25 is a participle. In His initial answer as well as in His final application, the Lord used the imperative verb form of the same word (vv 28, 37). This section, then, begins and ends with the concept of “doing” good works. The lawyer’s question fits a Jewish context. As a proud Jewish lawyer, he mistakenly thought he could earn his eternal salvation by such works. He looked to the Law of Moses to determine what those works would involve. This question not only led to the parable, it also is the key to understanding it.

Since the man was an expert in the Law, the Lord directed him to it. He asked him what the Law says about this topic (v 26).

The lawyer gave an outstanding summary of the Law. It was common among the leading rabbis of the day to state in a few words

<sup>6</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 676.

<sup>7</sup> Philip G. Ryken, *Luke*, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 537.

<sup>8</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1996), 1035.

or verses the essence of the Law. The foundation of the Law, he said, can succinctly be summarized in two verses. Deuteronomy 6:5 says that the Jew was to love God with his whole being. Leviticus 19:18 says that the Jew should love his neighbor as himself.

To anyone familiar with the gospel of grace, the Lord's response was unexpected. He told the lawyer that if he would "do" those two things, he would live. In the context, it means that he would inherit eternal life. The Lord appeared to be teaching salvation by works, agreeing with this proud lawyer.

### *1. Salvation by works?*

The idea that the Lord was indeed teaching salvation by works is a view shared by various commentators. Stein is an example of this thinking. He says that to love God means you accept what He has done in His grace. Faith is not just mental assent to certain doctrines, or an emotional feeling. Faith and love entail obedience. Eternal salvation is by grace through faith, but this faith works through love. Sometimes we need to emphasize faith and other times love.<sup>9</sup> If we do not love, we do not have eternal life. Stein also says the rest of the NT teaches this necessity of works for eternal salvation. He feels that a faith that does not produce love of one's neighbor is dead (Jas 2:17). Without these works, faith never existed.<sup>10</sup>

Not only does this common view of the passage teach the necessity of works for eternal salvation, it also paints an extremely positive picture of the lawyer. In essence, Jesus agreed with him. The lawyer thought he could earn eternal salvation by doing good works, and the Lord told him how to do it. He said to him that he needed to do the things the Law commands.

This, however, cannot be the key to understanding the parable which follows. Luke was the traveling companion of Paul, and Paul wrote that no one can do the works of the Law (Rom 3:10, 20). The standard the lawyer set for himself is impossible to obtain. No one can love God with his whole being, and no one can love his neighbor as he loves himself. The Lord was saying that if you could do the impossible, you would have eternal life.<sup>11</sup> The answer to the lawyer's

---

<sup>9</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 319.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>11</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical

question is that he could not “do” anything to earn eternal life. Only a “wise” and arrogant person would think he could.

Wiersbe seems to agree with the general thrust of this line of reasoning. He says that the Lord’s purpose in pointing the man to the Law was to convict him.<sup>12</sup> This seems to imply that the man did not love God or his neighbor. Martin clearly sees the Lord’s statement this way. The man should have said that he was unable to do what the Lord told him he had to do.<sup>13</sup>

## *2. Justifying himself.*

In his spiritual arrogance, the lawyer evidently had convinced himself that he was able to do the impossible and loved God with his whole being. However, he needed further information about the second commandment. In Lev 19:18, the neighbor is a fellow Jew. The lawyer lived in a land in which he encountered Gentiles. In fact, the Gentiles, through the Romans, ruled over the Jews. But there were also Samaritans. In addition, there were many Jews who did not keep the Law as strictly as he did. Surely, he was not required to love people like that. The Pharisees, with whom this man was at least sympathetic, felt this way (John 7:49). A particular group of Jews who lived around the Dead Sea said they were only required to love those who lived in their community.<sup>14</sup> The lawyer wanted to know whom he needed to love as much as he loved himself if he were going to earn eternal salvation. This was an attempt to “justify himself” (v 29).

This use of “justify” is taken by some to mean he was trying to make excuses. He knew he did not love everyone as much as he loved himself. He was looking for an excuse not to do so.<sup>15</sup> Some have suggested it was important for this man that others thought he was righteous. He wanted to assure himself that such an evaluation was merited, based upon whom he loved.<sup>16</sup> Stein takes it as a further

---

Society, 2013), 63-64. Hodges comments that this is exactly Paul’s point in Rom 2:6-7, and the account of the lawyer in Luke 10 teaches the same thing.

<sup>12</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 211.

<sup>13</sup> John A. Martin, “Luke,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 234.

<sup>14</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 316. Stein refers to *1QS*:1:9-10 from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

<sup>15</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 288.

<sup>16</sup> BDAG, 249.

indication that he did not hold Jesus in high regard and disparagingly asked the Lord how anyone could possibly determine who his neighbor was. His interaction with Christ was not completely sincere.<sup>17</sup>

It seems more likely, however, that Luke's use of the word "justified" here is also connected with the book of Romans. This man wanted to be righteous in the eyes of God by his works. If he had to love his neighbor to do that, he needed to know who among the people around him were considered his neighbor. He was genuinely curious about the opinions of Jesus on this matter.

He assumed that if he were righteous in the eyes of God, he would have eternal life. He thought that with enough knowledge and effort, this was a very real possibility. That led to the parable.

### **B. The Parable Itself (10:30-35)**

A leading figure in the parable is a "man," presumably a Jewish one, who traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho. This is a distance of approximately 17 miles through a dangerous, deserted region known for the frequent occurrence of robberies. That was the fate this man met.

After having been robbed, beaten, and stripped of his clothing, he was left for "half dead." Exposed to the elements and completely helpless, he could not save himself from his predicament and needed help. That help was his only hope.

Fortunately for him, a religious Jew saw him, ready to die and lying on the side of the road. This was the kind of person the lawyer would have considered a neighbor. He was a priest and knew about Lev 19:18 and the command by God to love one's neighbor. However, this priest did not do anything to help the man in need.

The same thing was true for another religious Jew who passed by the man. He was a Levite who also worked at the temple in Jerusalem. The lawyer would have considered this man a neighbor, too. But, like the priest, he did nothing to help the injured man.

The reasons these two religious Jews do not render assistance are not stated. Neither are they important.<sup>18</sup> It is enough that they did

---

<sup>17</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 317.

<sup>18</sup> Various reasons could be suggested. If the man was already dead and they touched him, they would be defiled for touching a corpse. This would have made them ceremonially unclean and unable to perform their religious duties until ritually cleansed. They were on

not love the man as a neighbor and thus did not save him from his dire situation. They did not “do” what they were commanded to do. These two Jews, like the lawyer, would have also taken pride in being men who followed the Law of Moses. But as Paul said, they were those who have the Law but do not keep it (Rom 2:23). If the lawyer saw himself in people like the priest and Levite, perhaps he might question also if he did what it says. If he did, perhaps he would begin to doubt if he could indeed “justify himself.”

The hero of the parable is in stark contrast to the religious Jews. In verse 33, the word “Samaritan” is placed first in the sentence in the original and is therefore emphasized. Samaritans were hated by the Jews; a Samaritan would have assuredly not been someone the lawyer would have considered a neighbor whom he was required to love. The Samaritans and Jews had a long history of animosity toward each other. The reader of the Gospel of John gets a glimpse of the ill feelings Jews had for Samaritans (John 4:9; 8:48).

The man in the parable did not have clothes on him, since they were taken in the robbery; thus, the point may be that neither the priest, Levite, nor Samaritan knew if the dying man was a Jew or not. In any event, that is not what is important. The critical point is that the Samaritan had compassion on him (v 33), while the religious Jews did not. This compelled him to save the man. It is no coincidence that the verb for compassion is used elsewhere in Luke to describe the heart of God and Christ (7:13; 15:20). If the lawyer accepted the idea that love for God (Deut 6:5) manifested itself in love for others, the Samaritan in the parable was the only one who demonstrated it. By the lawyer’s own description of what one must do to earn eternal life, it was the hated Samaritan who did it.

The Samaritan went to great lengths to meet this man’s needs, doing all that was necessary. He poured wine on his wounds as a disinfectant. He then put oil, with its medicinal properties, on them and bound him with bandages. After taking him to an inn, the Samaritan watched the man overnight, caring for him. When he left the next day, he left enough money to pay for all his needs, instructing

---

a dangerous road and feared that the robbers were still in the vicinity or even had set a trap with their previous victim as bait. These two Jews may have rationalized that they did not know if the man was a Jew since his clothes had been stripped off, and they were not obligated to assist those who were not Jews.

the innkeeper to care for the man with the funds he provided while he was gone. He promised to return and to pay for whatever more the innkeeper might spend.

This parable must have been hard for the lawyer to hear. We call it the Parable of the “Good” Samaritan, but the word “good” does not appear in the text. The lawyer would not have thought of the Samaritan as a good man. But he is the one who fulfilled the requirements of the Law in this instance, not the men with whom the lawyer would have found affinity.

### **C. The Application (10:36-37)**

The Lord applied the parable to the lawyer because of his original question. The lawyer wanted to know who his neighbor was (v 29). He did so in order to know whom he had to love because this was required of him, in his mind, to obtain eternal life. But Jesus turned the original question around and asked the lawyer a related question: who was a neighbor to the man who was left on the side of the road for dead?

The lawyer wanted to know who was considered *his* neighbor. He wanted to know to whom he was obligated to show compassion and to help. Jesus’ question focused on *being* a neighbor. The original question involved obligation. Christ’s question looked at character. The lawyer had asked the wrong question. Jesus told him he should not have asked who his neighbor was to make him righteous in the eyes of God. The lawyer wanted to avoid the responsibility the Law placed upon him by limiting those to whom he was commanded to love. Instead, he should *be* a neighbor. Those with various interpretations of the parable have reached this same conclusion.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus had answered the lawyer’s original question (v 29). Now the lawyer must answer Jesus’ question.<sup>20</sup> This caused him to reconsider what he thought about “doing” the Law.

The lawyer did. The answer was obvious, even if it was difficult for the lawyer to come to the right conclusion. Many have pointed out that he was not willing to say the word “Samaritan,” but only said that the neighbor was the one who showed mercy to the man left for

---

<sup>19</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 432; Ryken, *Luke*, 547; Bock, *Luke*, 1035; Wiersbe, *Bible*, 212.

<sup>20</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 318.

dead (v 37). The lawyer had disdain for a Samaritan but was forced to admit the truth. In showing mercy, the Samaritan was the one who did what the Law said. He was one who loved his neighbor.

This account began with a question concerning what the lawyer must “do” to earn eternal salvation (v 25). It ended with the same idea and thus forms an *inclusio*. The Lord told him to go “do” what the Samaritan did.

#### IV. INTERPRETATION

Many have interpreted this parable as a call for social action. We should stop and help people who are stranded with a flat tire, for example. The lawyer was only talking about what he should do, but Jesus told us to actually do the things which we discuss in the abstract. We should not simply talk about doing what is right; we should put such talk into action. We should feed a family who is hungry or help an unemployed person find a job. What Jesus said to the lawyer He says to His church. We are to get to “doing” what Jesus commanded, and this is to be an ongoing thing on our part.<sup>21</sup> The question is not *who is my neighbor?* That is a question that should never be asked. The question is *who acts like a neighbor?*<sup>22</sup>

This view of the parable is seen as specifically directed toward the lawyer. He had heard the Law and obviously knew what it said. The question now is *would he do it?* The hearing of the Law is authenticated by obeying it.<sup>23</sup>

Such an understanding is also used as a call for the end of racial prejudice. God can use anyone who is open to Him. The Samaritan was considered a despised minority but was used by God. A person like that makes a neighbor, regardless of his status in society or even in our churches.<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, related to this kind of interpretation of the parable is the view that “real” Christians will do such things. With that line of reasoning, a person who does not fight against social ills and needs should question his eternal salvation. Of

---

<sup>21</sup> Wiersbe, *Bible*, 213.

<sup>22</sup> Green, *Luke*, 432.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 426, 432.

<sup>24</sup> Osborne, *Luke*, 290.

course, how one measures this is left unsaid. On many occasions, all of us have passed by people stranded on the road. Very few believers today could claim that they went to the extent the Samaritan did to meet the needs of someone when they were given the opportunity. Have we spent the night with a total stranger who needed help, given two days wages for others to continue ministering to him, and committed ourselves to financial costs above and beyond that if needed? If that is the standard by which we can conclude we are the children of God and have eternal life, we will all live with doubt and after an honest evaluation determine that we are not spiritually saved.

It is also extremely difficult to make an analogy between the characters of the parable and today. If the priest and Levite passed the man without helping because they were concerned about ritual uncleanness, what is the present day parallel? Who are modern day Samaritans for the believer in the United States? Craddock warns us about applying the details of this parable to modern day society.<sup>25</sup>

While all Evangelical Christians are familiar with such interpretations of this account, a little reflection leads to the conclusion that this is a misuse of this parable. These social concerns have validity in many cases, but if the interpreter focuses on these things, he must do so at the expense of the context. In fact, approaching the parable in this way is to deny fundamental Biblical teaching.

The lawyer was concerned about earning eternal salvation. If Jesus was telling him not to be racially prejudiced and to help those in need in order to obtain that salvation, it is clear He was teaching a salvation by works. This man was one of the “wise people” who are blind to spiritual realities (v 21). The exegete must start there, realizing that this man’s desire to earn salvation was flawed from the beginning. Jesus was most certainly not encouraging him to continue to believe he could do enough works to justify himself before God and obtain eternal life.

### **A. An Alternative View**

The view that Jesus was telling the lawyer that if he loved as the Samaritan did, he would gain eternal life, must be categorically rejected. The correct view is obtained by realizing that the lawyer’s

---

<sup>25</sup> Craddock, *Luke*, 151.



quest was flawed from the start. He could not “do” anything to inherit eternal life. In the case of the lawyer, Jesus needed to show him that.

The lawyer would have limited whom he needed to love. The Lord expanded the number of people he must love. It would include anyone in need. The Samaritan did not care about the nationality of the man lying by the side of the road.

No one loves like the Samaritan in the parable did. Even if a person could point to one time in his life when he did, it would not be on a consistent basis and certainly not always. It is impossible, just as Paul taught in Romans. When the Lord told the lawyer to go and do that, He was telling him to do the impossible. And that is the point. The lawyer wanted to earn eternal life by his works. He could not. As one of the “wise and prudent” people of this world, he needed to become like a babe and realize that having his name written in heaven is given as a gift (vv 20-21).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus adopted the same approach when dealing with unbelievers. While the majority of the Sermon is directed towards believing disciples, there were those in the multitude who were not believers. These unbelievers listened and were impressed with His teaching (Matt 5:1; 7:28-29). The Lord said a few things in the Sermon specifically directed at these unbelievers. He mentioned that a man cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless his righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20). But whose righteousness is like that? Certainly, the common Jew listening to the Sermon would find such a quest impossible. The Biblical answer, of course, is that this righteousness can only be found through faith in Christ (Rom 3:21-26). If it was not obtained this way, it cannot be obtained at all. The Law was given to show men this reality since all fall short of fulfilling its demands (Gal 3:19-24).<sup>26</sup>

The same thing is true about the Lord’s statement in Matt 7:13, when, at the end of the Sermon, He said there is only one narrow gate that leads to life. The unbeliever would be left wondering what that gate is. The unbeliever who is open and seeks the answer would find that Jesus is the way that leads to eternal life. There is no other way (John 10:9).<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Hodges, *Primer*, 420, 424.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

If this is the way the Lord engaged in pre-evangelism in the Sermon on the Mount, why could He not do the same thing with the lawyer? The lawyer looked to the Law for eternal life. Jesus pointed him to the Law and showed him that he cannot do it. The lawyer himself had said that Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18 were the key, but now saw that that he could not do Lev 19:18. The lawyer wanted to be righteous before God by his works, and the Lord showed him it is impossible.

## **B. Objections**

The most obvious objection to this interpretation is that it appears to some that the Lord is using trickery or hiding the truth from the lawyer. Why would the Lord tell the man to do something that he was not able to do? Why did the Lord not simply tell the man the truth, that he was unable to earn eternal life and justify himself before God? For these reasons, the common way to understand the Lord's instruction to the lawyer must be accepted.

Whatever view of the parable one takes, the common understanding must be rejected. The analogy of faith tells us that the clear teachings of Scripture should be used to interpret the unclear. The clear teaching of Scripture is that obedience to the Law cannot save. The Lord was not denying that here. We cannot take this parable and interpret it in a way that had the Lord doing so. The exegete must start at this point.<sup>28</sup>

But why could the Lord not use this tactic? This man was blind to spiritual truth. The very context speaks of those to whom truth is "hidden." He was unwilling in his religious pride to acknowledge that he fell short. The Lord used an engaging story to start to open this man's eyes. The first step that needed to be taken if this man were to receive eternal life was for him to realize that he could not do anything to earn it. We do not know how the lawyer responded, but the application of the Parable of the Good Samaritan by the Lord is a masterful way for light to shine into this man's heart. The Lord, because of His love for him, wanted to hear the man say, "I cannot do

---

<sup>28</sup> Dillow, while taking a different view than this article, also notes this obvious point. His view is that the lawyer was already a regenerate child of God and wanted to know how to have a deeper experience of the life that he already had. In that case, works are necessary. See, Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument, CO: Panim Group, Inc., 2012), 342-43.

that!” He wanted this man to start the journey from being one of the seemingly wise and prudent, to becoming a babe.<sup>29</sup> If so, he would have gotten the point of the parable for him.

## V. IS IT APPROPRIATE TO ALLEGORIZE THE PARABLE?

This parable has a long history of interpreters who have allegorized various parts of it. This goes back at least to the time of Augustine. He said the man left for dead represents Adam. Jerusalem is the heavenly city. The thieves are pictures of Satan and his demons. The Samaritan’s animal is the body of Christ, while the inn is the church building. Paul is the innkeeper, and Christ is the good Samaritan. The two denarii are the two commandments mentioned by both the lawyer and the Lord. Others say the oil and wine represent the ordinances of the church—baptism and communion. The man is a picture of all unbelievers who are half dead in the sense that they are alive physically, but dead spiritually. The priest and Levite are illustrations of the Law and the sacrifices in that Law.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that such an approach can lead to an almost infinite number of interpretations, and the warning against such practices is warranted.

Some might accuse the views expressed in this article as promoting license to allegorize the parable. If Jesus’ command to go and do something is really an attempt to show the impossibility of obeying that command, it might be said that the plain meaning of the text is disregarded, and the interpretation of the parable is left to the whims of the individual reader.

However, seeking the purpose of the Lord’s question to the lawyer does not involve the use of allegory in any way. The people and elements of the story remain what they are. The lawyer was not asked to find a secondary meaning of any part of the parable.

But the lawyer was an unbeliever. It might be asked what the original audience of Luke’s Gospel, made up of believers, was expected to glean from the parable. As already seen in the Sermon

---

<sup>29</sup> Alberto S. Valdés, “The Gospel According to Luke,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 281.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1981), 42-71; Wiersbe, *Bible*, 212.

on the Mount, portions were for unbelievers, and portions were for believers. The message for the lawyer may have been one thing, while the message for a Christian hearing the parable might be something else. As a master storyteller, the Lord could have used the same story to meet the needs of both groups of people. A self-professed wise but spiritually blind unbeliever could be shown by the parable that he could not earn eternal salvation. A humble believer, who already knew that truth, could see things in the parable the unbeliever could not.

The believer is able to see things in this parable that the lawyer could not. Not surprisingly, numerous Christians have seen the Samaritan as an example of Christ. These Christians include even those who warn against allegorizing the parable.<sup>31</sup>

And why would believers not see such a thing? They know that the lawyer asked the wrong question. In many of the parables of the Lord, He is the hero. In the Parable of the Talents, He is the conquering King (Matt 25:14-30). The same is true in the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:12-27). In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, He is the hero. He does what no one else can do. He becomes the example of the impossible. He is full of compassion and mercy and saves a man who cannot save Himself. He pays the price necessary for that salvation. Every believer can see that at one time, before faith, he himself was the man lying, without hope, on the side of the road, but Christ came and saved him. That is not allegory. That is seeing what is obvious.

In the Parable of the Talents and in the Parable of the Minas there are also servants. They were told to continue the work of the Lord while He was gone. It is not allegory to see these servants as believers.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, there is also a servant. The innkeeper was told to continue what the Good Samaritan began. The innkeeper was to serve the wounded man, just as the Samaritan had done. He was told to do it until the Samaritan returned. It would be foolhardy for a believer *not* to see this as an illustration of what he is called to do. He is to serve others as the Lord did until the Lord returns.

But the believer, the babe whom Jesus mentioned, knows that such work does not earn eternal salvation. Neither does it prove

---

<sup>31</sup> Martin, "Luke," 234; Wiersbe, *Bible*, 213; Valdés, "Luke," 281; Ryken, *Luke*, "55.

one is saved. This service of love towards others results in rewards in the life to come.<sup>32</sup> In the parable, the Samaritan promised to pay the innkeeper for any service he performed on his behalf when he returned (v 35). Luke used the Greek verb translated here as “return” in only one other place. It is in Luke 19:15, when, in another parable, the Lord promised to reward His servants when He returns.

The reader will have to determine if it is legitimate to apply such parallels to the teachings of the Lord in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Would a mature believer rightfully see the example of the Lord in the hero of the parable and understand that he had the privilege of following that example? If he does, Christ will reward him. While some would charge this as allegory, the context and teachings of the Lord suggest otherwise.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Prior to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke recorded how different people in Israel received the message of Christ. Some were blind to who He was and His offer of life. They were called the “wise and prudent.” Others saw these things and were called “babes” (10:21). The babes were able to hear the things the Lord taught, and the implication is that the wise cannot (10:23-24).

The lawyer who asked the Lord how he could earn salvation is clearly an example of the blind “wise” who cannot hear. He asked a question which revealed that he was blind and deaf, spiritually speaking. The Lord understood these disabilities and used the parable to allow that man to hopefully begin to see and hear.

There were “babes,” i.e., discerning people, who also heard the parable. Immediately after Jesus’ encounter with the lawyer, Luke spoke of one particular discerning listener (10:38-39). Her name is Mary, and she sat at the feet of the Lord to hear His word. If she had heard the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and perhaps the Lord spoke it again on that occasion, she would have heard it in a way completely different from the way the lawyer heard it. She would have seen the Samaritan as a beautiful picture of her Lord. She would have been thrilled to know that, just like the innkeeper, she could be like Him.

---

<sup>32</sup> Valdés, “Luke,” 281.

She would understand that eternal rewards were at stake when He returned if she did so.

As the greatest teacher that ever lived, He gave us a parable which meets the needs of both types of listeners—the “wise” and the discerning.



# **DARKNESS AT THE CROSS (MARK 15:33)**

**KENNETH W. YATES**

Editor

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

**E**ach Synoptic Gospel writer mentioned that when Jesus was dying on the cross, darkness fell upon the land for three hours (Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). However, because of the general nature of narrative literature, we are not told the significance of this darkness.

In this article, I would like to look at Mark's Gospel and try to determine the importance of this event from his perspective and what it means. Other explanations will be explored and rejected.

It seems that this is a productive exercise. First of all, there is obvious benefit in knowing why this miraculous event took place and how it is related to the death of Christ. Secondly, Mark showed us that studying this phenomenon is beneficial. He indicated that at least one person considered the darkness, and it helped him in arriving at certain truths about the One on the cross.

## **II. THE CENTURION AT THE CROSS**

All the Synoptic Gospels record that there was a Roman centurion at the cross. In the Gospel of Mark, this man played a pivotal role. He was the one who made the final statement about Jesus when He died. He stated that Jesus was the Son of God (15:39).

This is significant for a number of reasons. First, in Mark's Gospel, he is the only human who declared this truth. God the Father and demons were the only other ones who recognized the identity of Christ in like manner (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7).

We can certainly conclude that this man did not understand that Jesus was the Second Person of the Trinity. Even the disciples did not comprehend these realities. The centurion was not even a believer and was a person who believed in many different gods. Wallace calls the



use of “Son” here qualitative. This means the centurion was stressing the character of Christ<sup>1</sup>: he saw that Jesus was the One who was doing the work of God. Those who heard and saw Jesus were hearing and seeing what God was doing. The One dying on the cross was displaying supernatural power.<sup>2</sup> In the centurion’s belief system, for example, the emperor was a son of the gods because he had great authority on earth. The emperor was doing the work of the gods, providing for the well-being of the people of the empire.

Roman soldiers often adopted the beliefs of the people in whatever region they were living. They believed that local areas were governed by local deities. The centurion was in the capital of the Jewish people, very near to the temple of the Jewish God. He came to the conclusion that Jesus was approved by the God of that area. The God of the Man on the cross was with Him. In fact, the centurion had heard Him call out to His God (v 34).

Mark explained why the centurion came to that conclusion. He said that the man “saw” that Christ had “cried out like this” when He died. The centurion saw the manner in which Christ died, and this made an impression upon him. He had seen many men die by crucifixion. All the others had died in agony, suffering from extreme dehydration. In such a state, men were delirious and unable to speak clearly. But Jesus was in complete control. He seemed to determine the point of His death. He was able to speak clearly.<sup>3</sup> The centurion had never seen anything like this before.<sup>4</sup>

But the centurion was also aware of the darkness around him. The word “saw” in v 39 is the first word of the sentence in the Greek text. What this man saw is being emphasized. He had never “seen” it turn dark for three hours in the middle of the day. It was clearly a miraculous event. This, along with the way Jesus died, convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God. The Jewish God was revealing

<sup>1</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 250-51.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis J. Kavanaugh, “The Ambiguity of Mark’s Use of *Huios Theou* in Mark 15:39,” (PhD Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2011), 272-73.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (X-XXIV)*, vol. 2 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1519; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978): 874-76.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth W. Yates, *Centurions in Luke/Acts* (PhD Dissertation: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2014): 186-208.

something by this darkness, and the centurion would have understood this darkness was affecting the land of the Jews.

While it is impossible to know exactly how he saw the significance of the darkness, the culture of the centurion provides clues. Many in the ancient world saw a darkened sky as signifying the death of a great person. This could happen, for example, with an eclipse of the sun. It would indicate that that person went to be with the gods. It could be a sign that the gods were angry and were about to punish the inhabitants of earth. Roman army generals would often point to changes in the sky, such as a comet or shooting stars, as indicating that the gods were about to act, and they would motivate their armies in the light of such signs.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that as a longtime member of the Roman army, the centurion would have witnessed such teachings by his superiors.<sup>6</sup>

Grandez says that the background of this military man would have caused him to see the darkness in one of three ways, or even a combination of these three. He would interpret what was happening around and in front of him in light of these things, even though he had no knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. The darkness showed that an important man was dying, that the God of the Jews was intervening in what He was seeing, or that the Jewish Deity of that region was angry.<sup>7</sup>

When the centurion saw the darkness and the composure of Christ on the cross, he made this surprising evaluation of Jesus. This crucified criminal was pleasing to the God of that country. The God of Israel was on His side.

Even though he came to this conclusion from a pagan understanding and background and still fell very short of the full significance of the title he gave to Jesus, this man saw things that others did not. The darkness allowed him to perceive such truths. He was, theologically speaking, moving in the right direction. He was open to what God was revealing to him by the darkness.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Eli E. Burriss, "The Roman and His Religion," *Classical Journal* 8 (1929): 596; Plutarch, *Rom.* 27:6-7; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 2.26-30; Josephus, *Ant.* 17.6.1-4.

<sup>6</sup>On average, it took approximately fifteen years in the Roman army to obtain the rank of centurion.

<sup>7</sup>Rufino M. Grandez, "Las tinieblas en la Muerte de Jesus," *Estudios Biblicos* 47 (1989): 217.

<sup>8</sup>Robert J. Karris, "Luke 23:47 and the Lucan View of Jesus' Death," *Journal of Biblical*

The Gospel of Mark began with a statement that Jesus is the Son of God (1:1). Now, with the words of this centurion at the death of Christ, this truth was restated. These words form an *inclusio*, or bookends, of the book.

The words of the centurion, therefore, are central to the Gospel of Mark. The reason is that they provided a rebuke to the nation of Israel. They also provided a rebuke to the disciples. His interpretation of the darkness at the cross, as theologically flawed as his understanding may have been, allowed the centurion to provide a contrast to both.

### **A. A Rebuke to the Nation**

The response of the centurion was shocking when compared to the pronouncements of the Jews concerning Jesus. When the high priest asked Him if He was the Son of God, the Lord confirmed His identity. The high priest and the highest governing body of the nation condemned Him as being a blasphemer, worthy of death (14:62-64).

Before a crowd of Jews, Pilate referred to the Lord as the King of the Jews (15:9). This title was equivalent, in Jewish thinking, to being the Son of God (John 1:49). The Jews in the crowd called for Jesus to be crucified (15:13). The confession of the centurion at the cross was declaring that the Jewish nation was killing their King.

There was also an inscription above the cross of Christ which called Him the King of the Jews (15:26). Even though it was a sarcastic statement on the part of the Romans and was meant as a slur to the Jewish people, it stated the truth. The Jews around the cross were offended that the Romans would make such a statement about a man hanging on a cross.

The darkness around the cross made the contrast between the centurion and the Jews stand out. In the midst of that darkness, the centurion confirmed what the sign on the cross said. The Jews, however, could not recognize the obvious. The crucifixion was in a public place, and as crowds passed by, they ridiculed Him. Specifically, they mocked Him for what false witnesses had said about His claim of destroying the temple in Jerusalem. They taunted Him, telling Him to come down from the cross. Somebody who could destroy the

temple and raise it up in three days could surely come down from a cross (15:29-30).

The religious leaders of the nation agreed that He was worthy of ridicule at the cross as well. They commented that He had healed others but could not save Himself (15:30-31a).

Even the Jewish criminals crucified alongside Him blasphemed Him. The nation of Israel had placed Him between two of the lowest segments of society and even their verdict was that He was not the King of Israel, the Son of God (15:32b). That was how all the Jews saw what was happening on the cross.

Schmidt points out that the darkness brought out the magnitude of the centurion's comment. He expressed "wonder" and "insight" about who Jesus is. The Jews at the cross, from every level of society, showed their "blindness" in the middle of the same darkness. The Jews, who should have been enlightened, were not able to see in the darkness. The Gentile centurion, whom the readers would have expected to be in the dark regarding spiritual matters, received from God a "ray of enlightenment" in the midst of the dark sky.<sup>9</sup>

When one compares the account of Christ's death in the Gospels of Luke and Mark, the contrast between the Jews and the centurion in Mark becomes even more stark. In Luke, one of the criminals crucified with Christ became a believer and recognized that Jesus is the King of Israel (Luke 23:42). Luke described this man's spiritual insight; he was like the centurion in that regard.<sup>10</sup> Mark, however, did not mention the conversion of the Jewish criminal. Luke also described other Jews who were sympathetic to Jesus at the cross (Luke 23:48).<sup>11</sup> Once again, Mark did not discuss such positive insights by the Jews.

Mark, then, emphasized how blind the Jews were in the darkness. They mocked and killed Jesus. The centurion, although he was not a Jew, understood more about the King of the Jews than they did. He proclaimed Jesus' dignity. He was a strong rebuke to God's chosen people.

---

<sup>9</sup> Thomas E. Schmidt, "Cry of Dereliction or Cry of Judgment? Mark 15:34 in Context," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994): 152-53.

<sup>10</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 822-27.

<sup>11</sup> David M. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor: Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 49 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 78, 90.

## B. A Rebuke to the Disciples

The confession of the centurion at the cross was not only an indictment of the nation of Israel, but it was also a foil to the disciples.<sup>12</sup> In the darkness, the centurion saw things the disciples did not see, even though the Lord had taught them for three years.<sup>13</sup>

First of all, the centurion saw things at the cross the disciples did not because the disciples had fled from the Lord after the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:50). They were not even present. Even though the disciples understood that He is the Christ, they were also blind to certain aspects of what that means. That was the reason they had fled.

When Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, he understood that Jesus is the promised King who was to come. However, when Jesus immediately told him and the rest of the disciples that He was going to suffer and die, Peter rebuked Him (Mark 8:29-33). It is clear that Peter was speaking for all the disciples and that none of the disciples could accept that the King would suffer and die.

Jesus continued to teach the disciples that He would be mocked and killed by both the Jewish nation and the Romans (Mark 9:31; 10:33-34). Every time the Lord spoke of these things, Mark recorded how the disciples did not understand. It was inconceivable to them that the King of the kingdom of God could experience such humiliation.

But the King is also the Son of God. The centurion saw the bloody Man on the cross and witnessed the mocking of the religious leaders who were present. This Man had suffered greatly. The centurion even saw Christ die an agonizing death after all He had gone through. After all of that, he proclaimed that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. He recognized that He was doing the will of the God of Israel.

## C. Summary

In the darkness surrounding the cross, the centurion was able to see things that others should have been able to see but did not. The Jewish nation could not see through the darkness. Neither could the disciples. How strange it was that a pagan Gentile could.

---

<sup>12</sup> J. F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 336.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth W. Yates, "The Healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52): Part 1," *JOTGES* (Spring, 2016): 8-10.

How did Mark want the readers of his Gospel to interpret the darkness? As in the case of the centurion, it seems that he wanted these readers to see in it a message for the nation of Israel and for the disciples.

Before looking at those messages, let us consider other possible but less likely reasons for the darkness.

### III. OTHER REASONS FOR THE DARKNESS

There have been a number of suggestions as to the significance of the darkness at the cross. Grandez and Moo list at least eight.<sup>14</sup> Some of these have been considered under the discussion of how the centurion interpreted the darkness. A few other views are popular among evangelicals. However, they should be rejected when the context and purpose of Mark are considered.

#### A. God the Father Looked Away

Mark recorded only one saying from the Lord while He was on the cross: Jesus asked why His God had forsaken Him (15:34). Many have interpreted this cry, which came from Psalm 22, as a statement that Jesus felt abandoned by His Father.<sup>15</sup> The darkness is seen in connection with this cry of desperation and the emotions of Christ.

As the Father turned His gaze from the Son, the world turned dark. The sin of the world was put upon Him, and the Father could not gaze upon sin. In addition, the death of Christ was the greatest wickedness ever committed in the history of the world, and the darkness revealed it.<sup>16</sup> The whole scene was a picture of the pain felt by Christ and His Father. It was as if nature itself sympathized with the Father, as the Son died for the sin of the world.<sup>17</sup> Creation itself expressed grief.

---

<sup>14</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Narratives* (Sheffield, ENG: Almond Press, 1983), 342-43; Grandez, "Las tinieblas," 217.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "The Passion according to Luke," *Worship* 60 (1986): 8. Brown compares this to the last words of Christ on the cross in Luke, which are words of trust and confidence in God.

<sup>16</sup> Hal M. Haller Jr., "The Gospel according to Matthew," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 133.

<sup>17</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 89; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible*

However, this view does not take into consideration the context of the Gospel of Mark. The reader cannot determine the subjective emotions of the Lord on the cross. Mark did not give any clues of such things in the crucifixion account. Schmidt makes this point and regrets that the early church fathers used this verse to argue for certain theological doctrines. For example, they pointed to the cry of the Lord to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, since Jesus spoke to the Father. It is highly doubtful, however, that Mark wanted to teach on these matters. Schmidt rightly states that these early writers also looked at the darkness in order to simply speculate about Christ's feelings and experiences.<sup>18</sup>

This view is also defective because it assumes that the words of Christ in Mark are a cry of abandonment. As will be discussed, the words from Psalm 22 were a cry of victory.

## **B. Eschatological Judgment**

Some have seen the darkness at the cross as a demonstration of the eschatological judgment that OT prophets spoke of. Joel 2:28-32 speaks of darkness associated with the Day of the Lord.<sup>19</sup> God was judging the world, and the inhabitants of the world were going to be judged. It was a warning for people to be prepared for what was coming.<sup>20</sup>

In the same vein, some see the darkness in Mark 15:34 as a direct allusion to Amos 8:9. In the death of Christ, God had finally intervened in human history. Eschatological judgment had arrived.<sup>21</sup>

The view that the darkness at Calvary pointed to these OT references has some weaknesses. Amos 8:9 is not addressing the judgment in the last days. The prophet was speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel and telling them what God was going to do to them because of their sin.

More importantly, the eschatological judgment of the world did not occur at the crucifixion of Christ. Later, Peter would appeal to

---

*Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 276.

<sup>18</sup> Schmidt, "Cry," 145-46.

<sup>19</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1858.

<sup>20</sup> Wiersbe, *Bible*, 165.

<sup>21</sup> Francis J. Mooney, *The Gospel of Mark* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 325; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 475.

Joel 2:28-32 when he preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21) and discussed the darkness of that coming day. This certainly seems to point to a still future day. The darkness that Joel spoke of will occur before the second coming of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation coming upon the earth. It does not describe what happened when He died.

### **C. A New Creation**

Another view of the darkness at the cross also looks to the OT to find its significance. It goes back to Gen 1:2. In the beginning, the world was shrouded in darkness. This darkness yielded to the light when God spoke that light into being. The same thing happened at the cross. Jesus, in His death, was bringing in a new creation. It began in darkness but lasted for three hours. That darkness also yielded to the light. We could even say that the entire old creation could be described as darkness. But there is a transition. The new creation brought by the work of the Lord will be one of light.<sup>22</sup>

This view also brings in Paul's discussion of Christ as the Second Adam (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:20-22). Adam failed, but on the cross Jesus succeeded. The Lord undid what Adam did. Kline comments:

With the first Adam, son of God, creation dawned, and all those in him share in the results of his covenant failure. With the second Adam, Son of God, new creation dawned, and all those in him share in the benefits of his covenant faithfulness.<sup>23</sup>

When compared with Genesis 1, the darkness in Mark 15 means that Jesus was inaugurating a latter-day new creation.<sup>24</sup>

This view suffers from the same weakness as the view that the darkness signified eschatological judgment. The death of Christ did not bring in a new creation. In addition, this introduces a foreign concept in the Gospel of Mark. There is nothing in the context of Mark 15 indicating that Mark wanted the reader to make that connection.

---

<sup>22</sup> Dane C. Ortlund and G. K. Beale, "Darkness over the Whole Land: A Biblical Theological Reflection on Mark 15:33," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 75 (2013): 236.

<sup>23</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 97-99.

<sup>24</sup> Ortlund and Beale, "Darkness," 224-25.



When one looks at the purpose of Mark and the context of Mark 15, there are better options to explain the reason for the darkness at the cross of Christ.

#### IV. A MESSAGE FOR ISRAEL

As already noted, the confession of the centurion was a rebuke to the unbelief of the Jews at the cross and the nation as a whole. Not surprisingly then, it is clear in Mark 15 that the nation should have understood what the darkness was saying to them. What happened at the cross was an ominous sign for Israel.

##### A. Judgment on the Nation

The Gospel of Mark opened with John the Baptist and then Jesus Himself offering the kingdom of God to that generation of Jews (1:15). However, beginning with their leaders, it was clear that they would reject that offer (3:6, 22; 6:6, 27; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Because of that rejection and their killing of the King, God would severely judge the nation. This was inherent in John's and Jesus' call for the nation to repent. If they repented, they would be blessed. If they did not, God would discipline the nation.

The last week of the Lord's life brought this coming judgment into sharp focus. He entered Jerusalem and cleaned out the temple, rebuking the leaders who oversaw its operation (11:15). He cursed a fig tree, which was a symbol of Israel, giving a parable about her coming destruction (11:20-24).<sup>25</sup> He then gave a much longer parable, saying the nation would indeed be judged because they had rejected Him (12:1-11). The final time He was in the temple, He pointed to a poor widow, who was a walking advertisement for the evil of the nation and how it deserved the punishment coming its way.<sup>26</sup>

The Olivet Discourse in Mark's Gospel is the longest teaching section of the Lord (13:5-37). Jesus said that the temple would be destroyed to such a degree that there would not be one stone left upon another.

---

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth W. Yates, "Faith That Moves Mountains (Mark 11:20-26)," *JOTGES* 33 (2020): 6-17.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth W. Yates, "Discipleship and the Widow's Mites (Mark 12:41-44)," *JOTGES* 32 (2020): 18-20.

The greatest illustration of their deserved judgment is what they did to the King. They accused Him of blasphemy and turned Him over to the Romans. They had Him crucified and mocked Him. When He died, the veil of the temple was ripped in two, which was another illustration of the coming destruction (15:38).<sup>27</sup> The fact that it was ripped from top to bottom tells the reader that this destruction would come from God Himself.

In the Gospel of Mark, the only recorded words of the Lord on the cross, quoted from Psalm 22, pointed to this judgment too.

## **B. Psalm 22**

The Lord's cry about being forsaken by His Father (15:34), though often taken as a cry of abandonment, needs to be reconsidered. It is the first verse of Psalm 22, but it is clear that Mark also had in mind other parts of the psalm. In 15:24, he described how the soldiers cast lots for Christ's clothes, which is found in Ps 22:18. The mocking the Lord was subject to in 15:29-32 is foretold in Ps 22:7-8. The crucifixion itself is seen in Ps 22:14-17. In addition, the One who cried out in Ps 22:1 was delivered by God, as recorded in Ps 22:22-25. This looked forward to the resurrection of Christ recounted in Mark 16:1-8.

Years ago, Dodd argued that when the NT writers quoted OT verses, they were not taking them out of context. Nor were these verses simply to be taken in isolation. Instead, often the writers were expecting the reader to look at the whole context of the verses cited. The believing readers had exposure to the OT as well as the teachings of the church. The writers expected them to know these passages. Dodd specifically referred to Psalm 22 as an example.<sup>28</sup>

Mark, then, by his references to Psalm 22, wanted us to consider the entire psalm. It is a psalm about a Righteous Sufferer, who

---

<sup>27</sup> There were two veils in the temple, an inner and outer one. Scholars are divided on which veil was torn when the Lord died. The inner one was immediately before the Holy of Holies and was a symbol of access to the presence of God. In light of this discussion on the coming judgment upon the nation of Israel, it is best to conclude it was the outer veil. This would have been a public display of what was going to happen, much like the darkness was a public phenomenon as well.

<sup>28</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 59-60; Richard M. Davidson, "Interpreting Scripture according to Scripture," *Perspective Digest* 17 (2012): 23.

although He suffered, was delivered by God. It is a Psalm of victory, not defeat.

Concerning Psalm 22 and the darkness at the crucifixion of Christ in Mark 15, Ps 22:4-5 is of particular interest. It speaks of the fathers of Israel who cried out to God, and He delivered them. The most obvious and well-known example of such a deliverance was when the nation cried out to God, and He brought them out of Egypt.

On the cross, the Lord had Psalm 22 on His lips. He was put to death during the Passover feast, which also celebrated the time when God delivered Israel from Egypt. God brought this salvation about through ten plagues. The ninth plague was one of darkness which fell over the land of Egypt. It was a plague that lasted for three days (Exod 10:22). On the cross, the darkness lasted for three hours. The tenth plague was the death of each firstborn son in Egypt. On the cross, the firstborn Son of God died.

The parallel here is striking. Darkness in Egypt was a sign that God was judging the nation of Egypt. Here, in the death of Christ, the nation of Israel had rejected their King. All that happened leading up to the cross and all that was happening there cried out for judgment of the nation Israel. The darkness in the land was a sign of judgment coming upon them for their sin.

There are many similarities between the darkness described in Egypt in Exod 10:21-22 and the description of the darkness at Christ's cross in Mark 15:33. The Exodus passage is the only place in the Greek translation of the OT in which the words for "was" and "darkness" are found, followed by the phrase "over all the land." That the same words are found in Mark 15:33 strongly suggests that Mark had in mind the ninth plague in Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

In the past, as mentioned in Psalm 22, God had fought for Israel. The darkness at the cross showed that He would now fight against them. There is a parallel idea in this regard found in Jer 21:5. Jeremiah told the Jews of his day that God would fight against them with His outstretched hand and strong arm. God had fought for them in Egypt in this manner. The point is that God would do *to* them what He had done *for* them in the past (Exod 6:6; Deut 4:34; Ps 136:12). In

---

<sup>29</sup> Ortlund and Beale, "Darkness," 227.

Jeremiah's day, as in the day of Christ, the temple would be destroyed and the people scattered in captivity.<sup>30</sup>

Christ, then, is the Righteous Sufferer to whom Psalm 22 pointed. Even though He was righteous, the nation had rejected and killed Him. But He would be delivered. The cry of Ps 22:1 on the lips of Christ pointed to His victory. The nation, however, would be judged. The darkness at the cross was a clear picture of that coming judgment.

It seems likely that this was the main purpose for the darkness at the cross. It also seems likely that even the centurion understood this at some level. As mentioned above, this was a rebuke to the nation. Here, we see that the Jews were blind about the judgment coming their way. But the centurion also served as a rebuke to the disciples. His understanding of the darkness also pointed to their blindness. They could also learn something from the darkness which surrounded the cross.

## **V. A MESSAGE FOR THE DISCIPLES**

The Jewish religious leaders, as well as the nation as a whole, should have been able to see that the darkness which fell over Israel when Christ was on the cross was a message to them. But the darkness also contained a message for the disciples.

When the Lord began His ministry, not only did He offer the kingdom to Israel, He also encountered Satan (Mark 1:12-13). Satan, of course, was the one responsible for bringing sin into the world. Mankind has been enslaved to the power of sin since that time. That sin also meant that every man would die. This was the curse put on man because of sin.

It is clear that on the cross, Christ took on the sin of the world (John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:21). In Luke 22:53, as Christ was leaving the Garden of Gethsemane to face His fate, He referred to that hour and the "power of darkness." This was almost certainly a reference to Satan. Just as the Lord had faced Satan when He began His ministry, He would face him again at the end of it.

In Mark 10:45, the Lord is speaking to the disciples about the cost of following Him in discipleship. He speaks of Himself as a Servant

---

<sup>30</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 151.

who gives His life as a “ransom.” The word means the price paid to set someone free from slavery.<sup>31</sup> This pointed to the cross, when the Lord paid the price to set His people free from slavery to sin.

Just as the darkness on the cross pointed to the judgment that would fall on the nation, the darkness also pointed to Christ’s judgment on sin. The power of darkness had brought the curse to this world. How appropriate it was that when the One who paid the price to release His people from that curse, darkness would fall over the land. He came to undo the darkness and curse (Gal 3:13).

In His resurrection, He would, of course, defeat death. But there is another emphasis here. The Gospel of Mark is about discipleship. If believers are to follow Christ in discipleship, they need to be released from the power of sin. The resurrection of the Lord shows that the believer can now live righteously because the power of sin has been broken. The believer no longer has to serve it (1 Pet 2:24; Rom 5:8-10).<sup>32</sup> The power of sin, the power of darkness, has been broken.

This is the message that the darkness has for the disciple. The supposed cry of abandonment by the Lord when the sky turned dark (15:33; Ps 22:1), was in actuality, a cry of victory. The disciples thought that all was lost. They had abandoned the Lord. But He was once again teaching them about discipleship. He had told them that as disciples they would have to suffer for Him. They would have to become servants like Him (Mark 8:34-38; 10:43-45). If they did so, they would be greatly rewarded in His kingdom. As seen in the example of the centurion, however, the disciples did not see any of this. They did not understand the need to suffer, either on their part or the part of the Lord.

On the cross, He showed them all these things. He was serving them by dying there in order to save them from death and the power of sin. He suffered greatly. He endured the darkness. But His Father heard Him and exalted Him. The disciple who suffered and served would be exalted by the Father as well. Jesus’ death on the cross made such service possible. We could say that His service for us broke the power of darkness.

---

<sup>31</sup> BDAG, 605.

<sup>32</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 140-44.

Just as Mark used Psalm 22 to show the coming judgment on the nation, the same psalm also pointed to what the death of Christ means for the disciple. The author of Hebrews quotes from Ps 22:22. He said the verse means that the disciple of the Lord can look to Christ as his example (Heb 2:12). The Lord had told His disciples to take up their own crosses and follow Him. They could trust in Him to fulfill His promises of great rewards for faithfulness towards Him. The Lord showed on the cross that God exalts those who suffer for Him.<sup>33</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

Many reasons have been given for the darkness, described in Mark 15:33, that fell upon the land of Israel for three hours when Christ hung upon the cross. While there may be theological truths contained in a number of these, there appear to be two reasons in the Gospel of Mark that are most likely; these are based on the purposes of the book.

One of the major themes in Mark is that the kingdom of God was offered to the Jews of Jesus' day. The other is that even though the gift of eternal life is absolutely free, following Christ in discipleship is costly. The darkness at the cross was a message for the nation and for the disciple. In both cases, judgment was involved. In both cases, as well, Psalm 22, which runs throughout the crucifixion account, points to the meaning of the darkness.

For the nation, the darkness was an ominous sign. Their rejection of the offer of the kingdom and their murder of the King meant that judgment was going to fall upon them. Whereas God had once brought darkness upon their enemies as a sign of His displeasure towards those enemies, it would now be a sign directed towards them.

For the disciple, the darkness was both an example and glorious news. Christ gave an example of what being a suffering servant meant, as well as showing that trusting in God in the midst of that suffering will result in exaltation. The great news was that the darkness was also a sign of the judgment upon the power of sin.

---

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth W. Yates, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 45-47.

In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples had failed so often. They had misunderstood almost all of what Jesus had taught them about discipleship. They simply did not understand the necessity of suffering. Now, they could follow His example, and in the power provided by His resurrected life, they knew they could do what He commanded them to do.

One author rightly summarized what the darkness at the cross in Mark means. He says that, “the unnatural darkness signified God’s judgment on sin, as well as His displeasure with Israel who rejected their King.”<sup>34</sup>

The nation of Israel should have been able to grasp what the darkness meant for them. A believer in Jesus Christ who reads the Gospel of Mark should be able to see the significance of that miraculous darkness for him as well.

Mark gave us a central figure in his Gospel to show us that such insight is indeed possible. A Gentile, unbelieving Roman soldier at the foot of the cross was able to see in the dark. He “saw” what was happening. When he did, even he came very close to realizing what it signified. He stated a truth of which he did not know the full significance. But the believer who reads the account of the crucifixion of the Lord can.

---

<sup>34</sup> Barry Mershon, Jr., “The Gospel according to Mark,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 213.

# INDEXES OF THE *JOURNAL OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY* (1988–2022)

JOHN YANTIS

## I. EDITOR'S NOTE

The Spring 2022 issue of the *JOTGES* included a subject index through the word *salvation*. This issue concludes the subject index from *sanctification* to *worship*.

## II. SUBJECT INDEX OF *JOTGES*: *SANCTIFICATION TO WORSHIP*

### **Sanctification**

“Getting Sanctification Done: The Primacy of Narrative in Tim Keller’s Exegetical Method,” by Timothy F. Kauffman. Spring 2014, 81-108.

“The New Realm and Rules of the Christian Life: Romans 6:1-14,” by James R. Congdon. Autumn 2013, 47-63.

A Voice from the Past: “Sanctification: What Is It?” by C. H. Mackintosh. Autumn 1992, 45-56.

We Believe In: “Sanctification—Part 1: Introduction,” by Arthur L. Farstad. Autumn 1992, 3-9.

We Believe In: “Sanctification—Part 2: Past Sanctification,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Spring 1993, 3-18.

We Believe In: “Sanctification—Part 3: Present Sanctification: God’s Role in Present Sanctification,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Spring 1994, 3-16.

We Believe In: “Sanctification—Part 4: Man’s Role in Present Sanctification,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Autumn 1994, 3-23.



We Believe In: “Sanctification—Part 5: Future Sanctification: Perfect, or Ultimate Sanctification,” by Arthur L. Farstad. Spring 1995, 3-9.

### **Self-Examination**

A Voice from the Past: “Self-Examination as It Relates to Assurance,” by James H. Brookes. Autumn 1993, 53-55.

### **Spiritual vision**

“The Challenge for Spiritual Vision: An Exegesis of Hebrews 12:1-3,” by Frederic R. Howe. Spring 2000, 25-35.

### **Spiritual Warfare**

“The Gospel and Spiritual Warfare: A Review of Peter Wagner’s *Confronting the Powers*,” by John F. Hart. Spring 1997, 19-39.

### **Tribute**

“Dr. Art Farstad: A Legacy of Love,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Autumn 1998, 5-6.

“Earl D. Radmacher: Man of Grace,” by Stephen R. Lewis. Autumn 2013, 5-8.

“Eulogy for Dr. Arthur Leonard Farstad,” by Frank D. Carmical. Autumn 1998, 7-11.

In Memoriam: “Winifred Mary Griffith Thomas Gillespie (1902-1998),” by Arthur L. Farstad. Spring 1998, 109

Grace in the Arts: “Some Personal Reflections on Dr. Arthur Farstad And This Section of the Journal,” by James A. Townsend. Autumn 1998, 63-73.

“Special Zane Hodges Memorial Issue,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Spring 2009, 3-12.

“Zane Hodges: The New Testament Scholar Who Actually Studied the New Testament,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Autumn 2008, 3-14.

## Works

“Another View of Faith and Works in James 2,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Autumn 2002, 3-21.

“A Response to Thomas R. Schreiner’s Objection to My Presentation in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Spring 2014, 17-32.

“A Review of Alan P. Stanley’s Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? The Role of Works in Salvation in the Synoptic Gospels,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Autumn 2008, 65-71.

“The Role of Good Works in Justification: A Review of Chapter 16 of Thomas Schreiner’s *Faith Alone – The Doctrine of Justification*,” by Robert N. Wilkin. Autumn 2015, 3-19.

We Believe In: “Good Works,” by Arthur L. Farstad. Autumn 1989, 3-12; Spring 2013, 37-48.

## Worship

“Lifting Holy Hands? Comparing Contemporary Practice with Biblical Injunctions and Descriptions,” by Calvin Pearson. Spring 2008, 65-76.

“The Return to Ritual: Should Free Grace Churches Adopt Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Other Emergent Church Practices?” by Phillipe R. Sterling. Autumn 2009, 29-43.

## III. INDEX OF CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Editor’s Note: The Spring 2022 issue of the *JOTGES* included this section. This issue concludes the indexes, with an Index of Editorial Staff and an Issue Cross-Reference.

## IV. EDITORIAL STAFF

**Arthur L. Farstad** – Autumn, 1988 – Spring, 1998

Associates – Zane C. Hodges, Robert N. Wilkin

Production – Stephen H. Bils, Trudi L. Bils, Mark J. Farstad, Lyndon Gaither, Sue Johnston, Steve St. John, Cathy Beach, Sue Broadwell

**Robert N. Wilkin** – Autumn, 1998 – Autumn 2013

Associates – Grant Hawley, Shawn C. Lazar

Guest Editor – Stephen R. Lewis. Autumn, 2013

Production – Cathy Beach, Sue Broadwell, Michael Makidon, Daniel Mosburg, Jeremy D. Myers, Kyle Kaumeyer, Holly Melton, Grant Hawley, Shawn C. Lazar

**Ken Yates** – Spring, 2014 –

Associate – Robert N. Wilkin

Associate and Layout – Shawn C. Lazar

Layout – Matthew Simmons

Index – John Yantis

## V. ISSUE CROSS-REFERENCE

Vol.	Num.	Date
1	1	Autumn 1988
2	2	Spring 1989
2	3	Autumn 1989
3	4	Spring 1990
3	5	Autumn 1990
4	6	Spring 1991
4	7	Autumn 1991
5	8	Spring 1992
5	9	Autumn 1992
6	10	Spring 1993
6	11	Autumn 1993
7	12	Spring 1994
7	13	Autumn 1994
8	14	Spring 1995
8	15	Autumn 1995

Vol.	Num.	Date
9	16	Spring 1996
9	17	Autumn 1996
10	18	Spring 1997
10	19	Autumn 1997
11	20	Spring 1998
11	21	Autumn 1998
12	22	Spring 1999
12	23	Autumn 1999
13	24	Spring 2000
13	25	Autumn 2000
14	26	Spring 2001
14	27	Autumn 2001
15	28	Spring 2002
15	29	Autumn 2002
16	30	Spring 2003

<b>Vol.</b>	<b>Num.</b>	<b>Date</b>
16	31	Autumn 2003
17	32	Spring 2004
17	33	Autumn 2004
18	34	Spring 2005
18	35	Autumn 2005
19	36	Spring 2006
19	37	Autumn 2006
20	38	Spring 2007
20	39	Autumn 2007
21	40	Spring 2008
21	41	Autumn 2008
22	42	Spring 2009
22	43	Autumn 2009
23	44	Spring 2010
23	45	Autumn 2010
24	46	Spring 2011
24	47	Autumn 2011
25	48	Spring 2012
25	49	Autumn 2012
26	50	Spring 2013

<b>Vol.</b>	<b>Num.</b>	<b>Date</b>
26	51	Autumn 2013
27	52	Spring 2014
27	53	Autumn 2014
28	54	Spring 2015
28	55	Autumn 2015
29	56	Spring 2016
29	57	Autumn 2016
30	58	Spring 2017
30	59	Autumn 2017
31	60	Spring 2018
31	61	Autumn 2018
32	62	Spring 2019
32	63	Autumn 2019
33	64	Spring 2020
33	65	Autumn 2020
34	66	Spring 2021
34	67	Autumn 2021
35	68	Spring 2022
35	69	Autumn 2022



## BOOK REVIEWS

***Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe.*** By Voddie T. Baucham, Jr. Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021. 251 pp. Hardcover, \$24.99.

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

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

Baucham is a strong Calvinist. He says he became a believer when he believed the gospel and repented of his sins (p. 24).

He points out that the antiracism movement is a religion that does not offer any salvation because it sees racism as incurable (p. 67). In that view, white people oppress people of color even when they do not realize it. A professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary states that white people created whiteness in order to enslave black people (p. 71).

One problem in Evangelicalism is that many leaders are falling for the teaching that being white is the problem and that America and the American church are indeed racist to the core. Racism is no longer seen as a problem with certain individuals or a matter of the

sinful heart but is systemic. We must confess our sins of white racism, supremacy, and privilege (p. 77). Even when we do, it will remain. We must acknowledge this sin that can never go away or be forgiven.

Oppressed minorities include more than people of color. Women, LGBTQIA, non-citizens, the disabled, the obese, the poor, and non-Christians, among others, are part of the group. All the oppressed have special knowledge and are able to see things that whites cannot. Baucham calls them “ethnic gnostics” (p. 92). Whites must listen and learn from them. Personal experience trumps any attempt at objective truth (p. 100). Statistics do not matter. Readers of the *JOTGES* will be in complete agreement with Baucham when he says that Scriptures are our source of truth, not the personal feelings of oppressed groups (p. 120). He says we should pursue justice, peace, and unity, but they cannot be obtained by associating ourselves with movements that are contrary to the Scriptures and distort the gospel.

One of the strong points of the book is how Baucham describes what is going on in Evangelical seminaries and denominations like his own Southern Baptist Convention. Seminary professors are warned not to say things contrary to the social justice mantra. Pastors must watch what they say as well. These leaders risk being fired for telling the truth (p. 138). A recent president of the Southern Baptist Convention is an outspoken proponent of the social justice movement. Other leaders are afraid to oppose him. Evangelical seminaries are hiring based upon diversity, and now there are professors who support philosophies that are contrary to the Scriptures and based upon Marxist ideology (pp. 140-43). Even Albert Mohler, the president of Southern Seminary, is afraid to speak out publicly on some occasions (p. 148).

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

Baucham calls out conservative Evangelicals for bowing to the pressure. People like Tim Keller, David Platt, and Mark Dever have

opined that a political candidate who is pro-choice is acceptable. It seems that systemic racism is more of a problem than killing unborn children (pp. 186-88). The social justice movement promotes abortion, and it is rare to find a strong pro-life leader in the black community. Baucham says that even someone like John Piper seems to be falling for what the social justice warriors are teaching (p. 194). The bottom line is that the critical social justice movement is large and powerful. It is having more and more influence in the Evangelical world (p. 198). Churches are being split over the issue. Ministries are beginning to drift. Seminary faculties and denominations are being balkanized (p. 206). We must realize that compromise with these cultural forces involves joining forces with those who want the demise of Biblical Christianity. Whites are told to check their privilege. Soon, Christians will be told to do the same. It has already begun (p. 209).

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

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

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*



---

***Rapture Imminence on Trial: An Examination of the “Any Moment Rapture” of the Church.*** By Tom Keeley. Township, NJ: BookBaby, 2020. 188 pp. Paper, \$15.07.

For many years, Tom Keeley believed in the pretribulation Rapture of the church. After much study, he concluded that he was wrong. He adopted the prewrath view. This position maintains that the Lord will take the church out of the world sometime after the middle of the Tribulation. Only after the Rapture will the world experience the wrath of God. The church will not go through this final period of the Tribulation.

Keeley makes many arguments in favor of his new position. As with any viewpoint, some arguments will be stronger than others. This reviewer feels that Keeley would agree. One objection that he has about the pretribulation Rapture view is that it is less “reasonable” than the prewrath position because the former does not seem to allow enough time for certain events to happen (p. 58). This may be, but we cannot base our eschatology on what we think is more reasonable. For that reason, this is not one of his stronger points.

Another one of his weaker arguments is that the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation cannot be described as the wrath of God. Keeley feels that most of the Tribulation will be the result of the wrath of Satan. The church will go through that wrath. God’s wrath is not manifested until the Tribulation is almost over. The church will be spared that wrath. Most of the seals in the book of Revelation describe the wrath of Satan. The trumpets and the bowls describe the wrath of God (pp. 82-84). Even though Keeley would almost certainly disagree, this reviewer thinks this distinction between the wrath of God and the wrath of Satan is not as clear as Keeley argues.

Space does not permit this reviewer to address all the arguments. Therefore, I will discuss what I consider the strongest argument for and the strongest argument against the prewrath view of the Rapture.

The pretribulation Rapture view maintains that Christ can come for His church at any time. Keeley’s strongest case against this imminent return is that the New Testament gives many prophecies of things that must happen. How could the Rapture happen until after these prophecies were fulfilled? For example, the Lord said that Peter would die for Him (John 21:18-19). The Rapture could not

happen until Peter was put to death. It was, therefore, not imminent prior to that time. In Acts 21:11, a prophet said that Paul would be arrested if he went to Jerusalem (pp. 35-38). The Rapture could not happen until that event took place. The Lord said that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed (Matt 24:2). This happened in AD 70. The Rapture could not have happened before the Romans subdued the nation (p. 44). Therefore, it was not imminent for believers living in the time from AD 35-69.

Pretribulation Rapture believers would respond to these objections in various ways. In the case of Paul, this was a conditional prophecy. He did not have to go to Jerusalem. Some believe the Gospel of John was written very early. The Rapture of the church was a mystery that was not revealed until after the time of Cornelius, and the prophecy about Peter was given before that. In any event, Peter could have died at any moment. The Rapture could have happened as well. The destruction of the temple could have occurred immediately after the Rapture of the church.

The strongest argument against Keeley's position is the verses which deal with the imminency of Christ's return. The Scriptures say we do not know the day or the hour and that He will come like a thief in the night. Many times, the Lord exhorted His followers to be looking, since they did not know when He would return. Keeley refers to these verses (Matt 24:36, 42-44; 25:13; 1 Thess 5:1-9; 2 Pet 3:10) (p. 27).

Keeley maintains that all of these statements do not mean Christ could return at any time. Instead, they mean He is coming soon. We are to be eagerly and expectantly waiting for that event (p. 25). The return of Christ is in the not-too-distant future (p. 27). Since, in Keeley's view, the Rapture cannot occur until after the middle of the Tribulation, it is at least three-and-a-half years away. In addition, the idea that Christ will come like a thief in the night means He will come that way in reference to unbelievers. They do not know He is coming. Believers will know when He is about to come (p. 28).

Keeley summarizes his view on the supposed imminency of Christ. He says, "Jesus is coming soon! Jesus is coming soon! Jesus is coming soon, but not as soon as you may think!" (p. 136). It is doubtful that many pretribulation Rapture believers will be convinced by these arguments. At face value they certainly seem to run contrary to the warnings of the Lord.

Other areas of interest in this debate include the motivation for godly living. Pretribulation adherents claim a great motivation for holiness is that the believer can appear before the Lord at any moment. Keeley feels that a greater motivation is the belief that we believers could face the wrath of the Antichrist at any moment, and we need to prepare for that persecution. We need to live with the realization that we might be called upon to die for our faith (pp. 3, 130).

While there are differences in details among those who promote the prewrath view, it appears that adopting that belief might soften the dispensational distinctives between Israel and the church (p. 131). Keeley did not spend much time on this topic, and this reviewer was left with some questions about his views.

Keeley gives a strong free grace gospel presentation (p. 186). Unfortunately, he then ties it together with an appeal to say a sinner's prayer, which leads to confusion (p. 187).

Many are not familiar with the prewrath view of the Rapture. This book is a clear presentation of it. Keeley writes in a way that is easy to understand and very informative. I recommend this book for those interested in eschatology.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

---

***How to Interpret 1 John: Fresh Insights & Observations to Consider.*** By Dennis M. Rokser. Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2015. 96 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

This is not a commentary on 1 John. Instead, it discusses certain themes and issues which will help the exegete rightly understand the book. However, it does address certain verses.

One of the first topics covered is whether John wrote this book for believers or unbelievers. Rokser rightly, and forcefully, demonstrates that the recipients were Christians. In the process, he shows that in 1 John 2:2, John teaches unlimited atonement (pp. 4-12). Additionally, there is a difference between being a believer and being in fellowship with the Lord, a topic which is the source of much confusion about the spiritual condition of the original readers (p. 13).

Rokser also rejects the view that 1 John is a book which calls for the reader to test whether he is saved or not. Lordship Salvation finds eleven such tests in the epistle, such as being sensitive to sin, rejecting this evil world, and eagerly waiting for Christ's return (pp. 25-27). But no one can consistently do any of the eleven tests. Such a view of 1 John will result in the loss of assurance of salvation. When discussing the church at Corinth, Rokser notes that the believers there would not have passed these tests (p. 45).

Missing in the tests of salvation proposed by the adherents of Lordship Salvation is the only one that exists. Rokser states it as believing that Christ died for your sins and rose from the dead in order to give you eternal life. First John 5:9-13 makes faith alone in Christ alone the only condition for knowing if you have eternal life (pp. 32-33). The author correctly points out that any theology that does not lead the believer to have absolute certainty that he has eternal life is not from God. Lordship Salvation does not give that certainty. In fact, it cannot. Some believers have lost the assurance of salvation because of their exposure to that false teaching (p. 37). This reviewer would only add that Rokser should have said "many" have been negatively impacted by it.

The tragedy of all of this is that there are many professed Christians who are not saved because they look to their works. They believe that good deeds will deliver them from the lake of fire. They have never received eternal life as a free gift through faith alone (p. 41).

Instead of 1 John containing tests to see whether the original readers were Christians or not, the epistle gives tests by which believers can determine if they are in fellowship with Christ (pp. 46-55). This is in line with the prologue of the book found in 1 John 1:1-4. The reader who does not understand the difference between believing and being in fellowship with God will not understand the epistle.

Rokser does deal with 1 John 3:9 at length. He rejects the idea that it means that a real Christian will not "habitually" sin. That cannot be quantified and would mean that Solomon was not a believer. Even David took many months to repent of his habitual sinning. Rokser takes the view that sin can never spring from the experience of abiding in Christ. In addition, no believer commits sin as the expression of the new nature he has as the result of the new birth (pp. 76-78).

A similar understanding of 1 John 3:15 is obtained in this manner. A believer in fellowship with Christ loves his fellow believers. A Christian who hates other Christians is out of fellowship with the Lord (p. 86). Rokser also correctly sees that 1 John 5:16 is not talking about spiritual death, but a physical one. He sees the death here as also including the idea that being out of fellowship with Christ is a temporary experience of death (p. 90).

There are many commentaries on 1 John which miss the point of the book completely and deny believers assurance of their salvation. Rokser has written this small book, laying down certain exegetical principles which will allow the reader to avoid such a serious error. It is a book from which the layman can benefit, even though it only discusses a few verses in detail. I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates  
Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

---

***Once in Christ, in Christ Forever: More Than 100 Biblical Reasons Why a True Believer Cannot Be Lost.*** By William MacDonald. Grand Rapids, MI: Gospel Folio Press, 1997. 208 pp. Paper, \$15.99.

Even though this book was first published many years ago, it is still available. The title of the book would attract many readers of the *JOTGES*. The author was part of the Plymouth Brethren movement, of which many Free Grace writers were a part. A reader today may think this book would be helpful in defending Free Grace Theology. The reader would be mistaken. It is a lesson not to judge a book by its cover.

The title of the book shows that MacDonald believes in the eternal security of the believer. He wants to address those verses in the Bible which appear to contradict that doctrine (p. 12). Some of his points are outstanding. He points out that eternal life is a gift, with no conditions at all. Believers are the sheep of the Lord and can never perish (John 10:4-5, 28; p. 16). Even the believer cannot snatch himself from the hand of the Father. A Christian cannot remove

himself from the body of Christ (p. 37). Perhaps the best statement in the book is MacDonald's comment that it is the "consistent testimony of the New Testament that God gives eternal life to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." This life cannot be forfeited (p. 43). On the issue of assurance, the author states that we cannot add works of any kind to the offer of salvation. No believer can know if he will meet those standards (p. 49).

However, MacDonald quickly adds conditions to this offer. Good works are the result of true salvation. There will be fruit in the life of the believer (p. 20). Christ will ensure our "continual" salvation through His ministry in our lives (p. 30). The author also hedges his bets when he refers to those who are "genuinely" born again (p. 47). James 2 is a passage he thinks proves that such people will manifest their new birth with good works (p. 98). True faith might have a temporary lapse, but repentance will take place, and the faith will live on. John 8:31-32 also shows that believers will abide in the teachings of Christ (p. 103).

Concerning Romans 8, the author says that predestination means that God knew who "would choose Christ as Savior." Romans 8:31-39 also teaches the eternal security of the believer and is not describing the experiences of a believer who suffers for Christ (p. 23).

MacDonald takes on the warning passages in Hebrews and concludes that they are addressed to people who were never saved in the first place. If a person apostatizes, this is proof that he was not a believer. MacDonald seems to imply that a person who claims to be a believer and renounces the faith can never be saved, but it is not clear (p. 61). He thinks true believers can never renounce their faith; the Lord will not allow it (p. 177).

The author does not see 1 John as a book addressed to believers only. The sin that leads to death in 1 John 5:16 refers to spiritual death and describes the fate of unbelievers. The same thing is true for the apostates in Jude (pp. 75-76). In the Parable of the Four Soils, the first three soils do not produce fruit and are a picture of unbelievers (p. 82). There is no such thing as an unfaithful servant, so such a "servant" in the Parable of the Talents is cast into the lake of fire (p. 88). Any person who loves the world and claims to be a Christian, such as Demas (2 Tim 4:10), is a liar (p. 89). Simply put, Demas was

an unbeliever, even though he professed to be a Christian and had served along with Paul for some time.

MacDonald does have a good, but short, comment on rewards. He says that the good works of the believer will result in eternal rewards that will be enjoyed in the kingdom. Verses which speak of such things deal with discipleship and not the reception of eternal life. There is a difference between the two. He plainly states that rewards are earned, and salvation is not. Believers who momentarily backslide will experience the temporary discipline of God (pp. 110-11, 151). The branches who do not abide in Christ in John 15:1-8 are believers who experience that discipline. They lose their testimony and are rejected by men as hypocrites.

It is not difficult to see that MacDonald engages in contradictions. He maintains that there are no conditions for receiving eternal life but often speaks of the reception of that gift as needing to meet certain conditions. These conditions cannot be measured. For example, regarding 1 John, he says that believers cannot “habitually sin,” even though all believers sin (p. 125). We should doubt the salvation of any professed believer who backslides but also realize that if he repents, we should conclude he really was a child of God after all (p. 129). We might have misjudged a true believer who was experiencing the discipline of God in his life.

This book is disappointing. A reader looking at the title might expect a book that would encourage him in grace. What he would find, however, is typical Lordship fare. Not surprisingly, MacDonald favorably quotes John MacArthur’s view of salvation and discipleship (p. 160). After reading the book, one would be left questioning whether he had eternal life or not. What good is the teaching of eternal security if no one can know whether he has it? This book is a reminder that many who teach the eternal security of the believer in one minute rob the listener of that assurance in the next. There are plenty of books like it. I do not recommend this one.

Kenneth W. Yates  
Editor

*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*

---

***Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition.*** By Jonathan Bernier. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2022. 318 pp. Paper, \$29.99.

Bernier is an assistant professor of New Testament at Regis College, University of Toronto.

I was drawn to this book by the subtitle. I thought Bernier would follow the lead of Robinson fifty years ago in arguing that all the books of the NT were written by AD 70.

He does not. But he comes close. And the fact that he is open to some books being written in the second century makes his pronouncements on the other books that much more powerful.

According to the author (see, for example, pp. 181-82, 277-78), Mark was first, being written between AD 42-45. That is a very early suggested date for Mark. Next, he suggests Matthew (45-59), Galatians (47-52), 1-2 Thessalonians (50-52), Hebrews (50-70), Romans (56-57), the prison epistles (57-59), Luke (59), 1-2 Corinthians (56), 1-2 Peter (60-69 if Petrine; 2 Peter 60-125 if pseudo-Petrine), 1-2 John (60-100), James (prior to 62), Acts (62), the pastoral epistles (63-64 if Pauline, 60-175 if pseudo-Pauline), Revelation (68-70), Jude (prior to 96), 3 John (prior to 100).

It is interesting to see how Bernier determines the dates of books. He does not cite the findings of church history (other than to establish the latest possible date for various books) or the commonly accepted dates suggested by most NT scholars today. Instead, he considers correlation with other books, incidents reported and other contextual clues, the ecclesiology, and other aspects of theology.

I recommend this book. While Bernier is not coming from a conservative position, most of his findings match up with the views of conservatives. The fact that he leaves some doubt on some books serves to strengthen his unreserved early dating of most of the rest of the NT.

I think this is a must-read book for seminary students and faculty, pastors, and theologians. I think many missionaries would find it helpful as well.

Robert N. Wilkin  
Executive Director  
*Grace Evangelical Society*



---

***Mom, I'm a Girl.*** By Judy Glenney. Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2017. 246 pp. Paper, \$16.99.

This book tells the story and lessons learned by a mother who lost her son to suicide at the age of 19. The son struggled with what is called transgenderism, though his counselors questioned that diagnosis.

Glenney and her husband have been involved in Christian ministry their entire adult lives, with him serving as pastor of various churches. It is clear that they placed a large emphasis on the Bible in their lives. Their son, Scott, attended church and Sunday school classes all the years he was growing up, even attending Christian schools until high school.

The presentation of the gospel is a mixed bag in the book. Glenney told Scott that he could be with Jesus forever if he would ask Him to be his Savior and “take away your bad things.” At a young age, Scott prayed with his mom, saying he knew that Jesus died for his sins. At that point, Glenney writes, he became a child of God, and they had complete assurance that no matter what happened, he would be with Jesus forever (pp. 15-16). Throughout the book, the author describes salvation as a “decision.” At the end of the book, even after Scott’s sexual sins, rebellion, and suicide, Glenney says she knows her son is with the Lord (p. 182). Scott said the same thing towards the end of his life. Glenney speaks of her conversion as a young girl, commenting that God gives eternal life as a free gift, if we accept that Christ died for our sins. John 3:16 caused her to believe in that promise (p. 44).

Glenney expresses her guilt because she at one time felt that perhaps she had passed this gender confusion on to her son. He asked her at a young age if she ever thought she should have been a boy (p. 38). Glenney has a section in the book describing how she was a tomboy and was not into feminine things, even becoming a weightlifter.

As Scott was entering his teen years, he told his mom that he was a girl (p. 56). His parents wanted to take him to a counselor, but he insisted it not be a Christian one. He had other mental issues as well, as he became involved in the “furry” community, assuming the personality of a female cat (p. 59).

The book tells the heartbreak of Scott’s parents trying to get him help. They prayed. They searched the Scriptures. They looked for counseling but could not find anyone who could help. Scott changed

his hair, used make-up and nail polish, and began to dress in feminine clothes. His parents said they loved him, and he lived in their home until he turned 18, but they would not buy anything for him that supported such changes.

In his sophomore year in high school, he asked if he could go to the public school to be closer to his friends, but Glenney also knew it was because they had an LGBT club. Scott began changing in more and more ways, including in his beliefs (p. 75). He had his name legally changed to Sydney Royal. Then he asked his parents to refer to him as “she” and their daughter. They refused to do so (p. 80). Scott eventually started going on dates with boys. The author and her husband were at a loss as to what they should do.

In his senior year in high school, Scott began taking female hormones without their knowledge. They were still hoping that he would repent of what he was doing and that God would answer their prayers (p. 97). A counselor Scott trusted said he was “gender neutral” and not transgender, so Scott would no longer see her. Scott spoke of committing suicide and was hospitalized. The doctors blamed the parents for his mental condition because they did not fully support him (p. 112).

After high school, Scott wanted to have surgery to complete what he saw as a transition. He was going to do it in Thailand and asked his parents for money. They refused. They also told him that because of the tension in the home, he would need to move out of their home at that time. He did and would live on the streets of Portland and in halfway homes. They would see him on occasion, and he kept in touch through social media.

Scott asked to borrow his parents’ van. He used it to commit suicide by breathing helium (p. 176). He was their only child.

This is a heart-wrenching story. Scott’s parents obviously loved him and would have done anything they thought would have helped him. They constantly asked how to love him without supporting his sin and mental illness. Glenney and her husband struggled with guilt over whether they did what was right in all the different situations but rested on 1 John 1:9 and that God had forgiven them when they had failed (p. 188).

Glenney states that the death of her son still brings pain. She feels sadness when her friends enjoy their grandchildren, and she knows

she will never have any. Through it all, she has learned to rely on God for everything. She has turned to prayer and the Scriptures to find the spiritual strength she needs. She rests in the sovereignty of the Lord, even concerning the death of her son (p. 213). She finds great comfort knowing she will see Scott in the kingdom.

Christian parents reading this story cannot help but feel for Glenney. She does not fall into the trap of accepting the world's standards on the issue of transgenderism. She sees it as a disorder and warns against society's promotion of the transgender agenda (p. 244). In many cases, these children are doing it as a way to rebel against their parents (p. 149). Most people reading this would have responded in a way very similar to how Glenney and her husband dealt with their son.

It has been 13 years since Scott's suicide. This has become an even bigger issue. Churches are facing this and will face it. Everyone reading this story should be moved to compassion for those who must face what Glenney faced. She felt the church offered her little help. If nothing else, her story should cause us to be merciful towards those involved in such a terrible situation. I recommend the book.

Kathryn Wright  
Missionary  
Columbia, SC

---

***Scandalous Grace: A Book for Tired Christians Seeking Rest.***

By Preston Sprinkle. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2021. 188 pp. Paper, \$17.99.

The title of this book catches the attention of those who promote the grace of God. Sprinkle desires to show how great the grace of God is. He starts off by discussing Jeffrey Dahmer, who murdered and cannibalized numerous young men. In prison, Dahmer said he had become a Christian, but many people felt that his sins were too great and that a person like him could never be saved. Sprinkle disagrees and says that God's grace extends to any sin whatsoever (pp. 18-19). In fact, all of us need God's grace.

This book is different from most that discuss the grace of the Lord because it focuses on Old Testament stories. Sprinkle says the OT is full of grace and cannot be understood apart from it (p. 23). He points out that the heroes in the OT were men and women who were sinners who rested on that grace. Abraham was a liar, Jacob a cheat, Moses a murderer, and Samson was a “vengeful porn star.” Esther broke more commandments than she kept and did not even mention the name of God (p. 24).

Sprinkle relates stories from his own personal experiences that show we are no different. He tells of young, conservative, religious Evangelicals who have confided in him that they are homosexual or addicted to pornography. Those we think are living holy lives are often involved in various sins (p. 117). Kids who come from Christian homes, were homeschooled, and involved in AWANA are often hurting, involved in sexual perversions, but put on a Christian face.

The author says that we need to start with the proposition that God wants to have a relationship with undeserving sinners. God delights in that prospect (p. 42). He called Abraham from Ur when he was a pagan idolater. The Jewish and Christian faiths started with such a man. Abraham’s life was filled with doubt and deceit (p. 49). When a person comes to faith in Christ today, he too must depend on the same grace. Christian living is based upon it as well (p. 53).

Judah, the man from whom Christ would descend, was also what we would call a vile sinner. He had sex with a prostitute, who was actually his daughter-in-law. From this union came an illegitimate son named Perez. He was used to bring in the Savior of the world.

The nation of Israel itself began with a people in need of God’s grace. At Sinai, they immediately became idolaters and committed spiritual adultery. But God still dwelt in their midst in the form of a tabernacle (p. 72). The family tree of Christ would also include a pagan prostitute named Rahab (p. 78).

Sprinkle points out that David, a man after God’s own heart, was also a notorious sinner. Some would treat him as many today view Dahmer and his conversion. David would not be welcomed in many churches because he too was a murderer. Christians today often shun repentant believers, such as addicts and people who have messy marital histories (p. 88).

But we are all like Gomer, a prostitute and the unfaithful wife of the prophet Hosea. The Lord looks at all of us and says that He does not care what we have done. He accepts us as we are. He loves us because of who He is and what Christ has done for us (pp. 103-104).

The author also speaks of the grace of God shown in the New Testament. Christ's humiliation when He became a man shows that He came to redeem broken humanity. When the Lord picked His closest disciples, He picked "thugs" (p. 143). Peter denied the Lord; James and John had anger problems; Simon the Zealot was like the suicide bombers of today since he was a terrorist; and Matthew was a traitor to his people. Mary Magdalene, the first person to have the privilege of seeing the risen Lord, had previously been completely controlled by demonic forces.

Sprinkle rightly points out that the death of Christ paid for all the sins of the world. When the believer sins, Christ's death extends to those sins as well. He believes that a believer cannot lose his salvation due to the grace of God (p. 165).

This is a book that the layman will enjoy reading. It is easy to follow, since the author uses many human-interest stories. It is also a book that reminds us that the OT is full of grace as well. It is unfortunate, however, that Sprinkle pulls back on the magnitude of God's grace. He says that if a professed Christian does not show evidence of his conversion by his works, there is room to doubt whether he is a believer (p. 18). Good works are "inevitable." He says that it is impossible that a genuine follower of Christ will not "render obedience to Christ" (pp. 178-80). Most disappointing of all, for this reviewer, is that Sprinkle rejects "free grace" teaching because it is "too weak." It falls short of grace (p. 176).

Sprinkle does not give a clear gospel. He seems to imply that if a person recognizes he is a sinner in need of God's grace in Christ, he will receive it. Certainly, he would reject the idea that we can have assurance of salvation, even though he believes the "true" believer has it. The value of this book is that it reminds us that the OT worthies were men and women with feet of clay. It tells us that those we consider the worst of sinners are able to be eternally saved. It shows, as well, that we are all in the same condition. Unfortunately, the author dims the beauty of that grace by pointing to good works in our lives to

see if we have really experienced it or not. It is inevitable that we will question whether we are worthy recipients of that marvelous grace.

Kathryn Wright  
Missionary  
Columbia, SC

---

***Apprehension of Jesus in the Gospel of John.*** By Josaphat C. Tam. WUNT 2/399. Edited by Jörg Frey. Tübingen, GER: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. 265 pp. Paper, €89,00.

Tam is an assistant professor at Evangel Seminary in Hong Kong. This book is a revision of his 2014 Ph.D. thesis at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

The key word in the title is “apprehension.” Tam clarifies this on page 1:

These terms [seeing, hearing, knowing, witnessing, remembering, and believing] appear in every chapter of GJohn [Gospel of John], in ways not found in any other gospels. They pertain to what I call “apprehension,” that is relating to how the characters encounter and grasp Jesus the divine logos in the gospel. The author puts very clearly in the beginning... [In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God] (1:1). Thus, grasping the divine, the Christ and the Son of God (20:31), remains the author’s complicated and yet important task towards the readers. In this regard, I use the umbrella concept of “apprehension of Jesus.”

Tam (pp. 8-9) rightly rejects the notion that “sign faith” is an inferior kind of faith. He also (pp. 39-41) briefly summarizes the conclusions of various scholars regarding the meaning of *pisteuō* (believe). He has pertinent arguments against the common myths that *pisteuō eis...* (believe in...) is a superior kind of faith, while *pisteuō* + dative (believe...) or *pisteuō hoti...* (believe that...) are supposedly inferior kinds of faith. He rightly concludes, (p. 41), “...these two expressions are used synonymously in GJohn. Thus, he who ‘believes’ God (...) in 5:24 belongs to the same category of persons as he who believes

‘in’ God (...) in 12:44. The first has eternal life (5:24) and the second does not remain in darkness (12:46).”<sup>1</sup>

In light of this, one might expect chapter 3 to give a good treatment of John 2:23-24. He starts out well (pp. 65-66):

In John 2:23, John mentions that many people saw (*theōreō*) Jesus’ “signs” just as his disciples did (2:11). They appear to have believed in Jesus’ name in the manner that is required in 1:12. Contrary to many commentators, from the plot of the narrative up to 2:23, the author provides no clues for us to identify their faith as “shallow” or “inauthentic.” On the contrary, the portrayal of their faith, though based on signs, falls in line with what the author has been persuading the readers about so far.

Unfortunately, after such a promising start, Tam makes a huge assumption: That Jesus not entrusting Himself to these believers implies that they actually remained unbelievers. Tam goes on to claim:

Nevertheless, a negative judgment is ascribed to Jesus in 2:24. How is the people’s faith different from the disciples’? I assert that the difference hinges, not on the so-called “signs faith,” but on Jesus’ own authoritative discernment...The discernment rests exclusively on Jesus himself. One really knows Jesus only when Jesus recognizes that one does. True faith, like that of the disciples, goes hand in hand with Jesus’ omniscience.

Tam claims, “This [John 2:23-25] that some professing faith could be unreliable.” No, the testimony that these people believed is not their self-profession. John himself says that they believed.

Despite not correctly apprehending Johannine soteriology (pardon the pun), Tam’s volume organizes a huge topic within John in an accessible way. He examined J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (N.p.: United Bible Societies, 1988), to find every reference to seeing (*horaō/ eidon, theaomai, theōreō, blepō*); hearing (*akouō*); knowing (*ginōskō*); witnessing/testifying (*martureō, marturia*); remembering (*mimnēskō*,

---

<sup>1</sup> Tam is not crystal clear on the meaning of *pisteuō* (believe). He could have benefitted from Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983).

*hupomimnēskō*, *mnēmoneuō*) and believing (*pisteuō*). Tam rightly sees a semantic relation between these terms. Analyzing a comprehensive concept has the potential to unlock some interpretive issues which word studies of the individual words might not.

Unfortunately, part of his analysis compares apples with oranges. He does so by including some “communication” words under apprehension. He says (42): “According to Louw and Nida, the apprehension vocabulary all belong to Domains 24–36, falling under domains relating to (1) **sensory events and states** (24.1-75); (2) **learn** (27.1-62); (3) **know** (28.1-83); (4) **memory and recall** (29.2-18); (5) **think** (30.1-122); (6) **hold a view/believe/trust** (31.1-107); (7) **understand** (32.1-61); (8) **communicate** (33.1-489); and (9) **guide, discipline, follow** (36.1-43)” [underlining and bold added].

The underlined category, “communication,” is definitely out of place. Tam (44) lists one pair of words under Louw-Nida’s communication category *martureō* (to testify) and *marturia* (testimony):

4. *Witnessing* (Domain 33: Communicate).

33.262 *martureō*, *marturia* (33.264 also).

Common terms in other domains but with different lexical features: Domain 31 Hold a view/Believe/Trust...

Yes, a linkage does exist between testimony and believing. Eyewitness testimony is given for the express purpose of encouraging others to believe the testimony. The first pair of uses of *martureō*, *marturia* in John’s Gospel occur in John 1:7, a verse that also uses *pisteuō* (believe):

He [John the Baptist] came for testimony [*marturia*]—to testify [*martureō*] about the light—so all might believe [*pisteuō*] through him. [Faithful Majority Translation]

Although a relationship exists between testimony and belief, only one is a term of apprehension. Why? John’s belief (apprehension) concerning Jesus had occurred prior to his testifying about Him. *Martureō* and *marturia* refer to John’s testifying for the purpose that Israel might believe (apprehend) in Jesus as the Christ.

Tam compares apples and oranges when he treats communication words as terms of apprehension. Let me anticipate an objection. An eyewitness is someone who apprehends first-hand, but fear might prevent that witness from testifying. However, all forty-seven uses



of *martureō* and *marturia* in John's Gospel refer to the giving of testimony.

Another issue is that Tam does not neatly distinguish apprehension by unbelievers from that of believers. Clearly, the Last Discourse (John 13–17) weighs heavily towards believer apprehension.

Despite the foregoing criticisms, Tam's work opens some avenues for further study. He has four charts showing the "distribution of apprehension vocabulary" (the Greek words listed immediately above) for John 1–4 (48), 5–12 (82–84), 13–17 (127), and 18–21 (168–69).

I compiled statistics for the Majority Text. Four hundred twenty-eight of Tam's apprehension words (omitting *martureō* and *marturia*) appear in 313 verses (of 879). The number of uses per chapter are: 1 (27), 2 (11), 3 (19), 4 (23), 5 (20), 6 (31), 7 (21), 8 (33), 9 (38), 10 (22), 11 (27), 12 (27), 13 (12), 14 (28), 15 (6), 16 (20), 17 (11), 18 (6), 19 (12), 20 (23), 21 (11). Of course, one would want to distinguish responses by believers from those of unbelievers.

Tam does not understand that everyone who believes Jesus for His promise of everlasting life has it. He wrongly sees John addressing both believers and unbelievers. His Calvinistic assumptions will be evident to the discerning reader. His view of faith does not nail its meaning, but he is closer than most, because he does reject some common misconceptions.

The book can be helpful for a few readers of this journal. It is not for the neophyte. It certainly is not for the casual reader.

John H. Niemelä  
*Message of Life*  
 Knoxville, TN

---

***Rooted: Connect with God, the Church, Your Purpose.*** Kenton Beshore, et al. NP: Rooted Network, 2020. 227 pp. Cloth, \$15.00.

*Rooted* is a 10-week discipleship course that invites participants to practice seven "rhythms" based upon Acts 2: Daily Devotion (Acts 2:42, 46), Prayer (Acts 2:42), Repentance (Acts 2:37–39), Serve the Community (Acts 2:44–45), Sacrificial Generosity (Acts 2:44–45), Share Your Story (Acts 2:14–36), and Worship (Acts 2:26–28, 46–47).

The premise is that when Christians commit to practice these seven rhythms in community, as the early church did, they will see growth and transformation in both their personal lives and communities (pp. 7-8).

Each week contains five devotional readings from Scripture and Christian authors and leaders, teaching, and daily response questions intended to prompt personal reflection and application. I especially enjoyed the practical suggestions given by the authors for most of the seven rhythms.

I greatly appreciated the authors' intent to see Christians live radically counter-cultural lives by being rooted in God's Word and truth (p. 12). At this point the authors seem to correctly distinguish the freeness of salvation from the costliness of discipleship. Sadly, however, this distinction is not clearly maintained throughout the book.

I found several sections to be helpful for discipleship, including the weeks focusing on spiritual warfare (pp. 87-110), serving others (pp. 111-135), expressing Christ's compassion through a lifestyle of service (pp. 137-56), God's view of money (pp. 157-76), and why the church is important (pp. 207-224).

The primary weaknesses of the book are an unclear gospel message and blurring the distinction between the freeness of salvation and the costliness of discipleship. For example, when answering the question, "*How do you accept Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf?*" we are told to "*just think of your ABC's*" (p. 37). These include:

"A. Admit you're a sinner..." (p. 37).

"B. Believe in Jesus and what He has done" (p. 37). So far, so good here. But then they add, "*Baptism is our outward response and declaration of the inward decision to believe and follow Jesus.*" Now they are adding discipleship conditions (baptism and following Jesus) to salvation.

"C. Commit to follow Jesus" (p. 37).

This is a far cry from what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:16: "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Christ never said, *Whoever commits to follow Me and is baptized will not perish but has everlasting life.*

While the authors do occasionally refer to belief or faith in Christ as a condition for salvation (pp. 17, 37, 51, 112, 197, 215), more often

they employ unclear evangelistic invitations such as *ask Jesus to be the Lord of your life* (p. 37), *ask Jesus into your life* (pp. 37, 50, 125, 196), *give your life to Christ* (pp. 40, 98, 122), *follow Christ or commit to follow Christ* (pp. 11, 16, 37, 51, 100, 104, 125, 190-191, 197), *commit to Jesus or commit your life to Jesus* (pp. 186, 190, 192, 195-196), *change the way you were living* (pp. 112, 196), *receiving Jesus Christ as Savior (trusting) and Lord (obeying)* (p. 216; cf. p. 122), all of which do more to confuse the gospel than clarify it. Instead of using the words God uses the most in evangelism—*believe* and *faith* (over 200 times in the New Testament)—they use substitutes that can hinder their readers from believing in Christ alone for His gift of eternal life.

This unclear gospel in *Rooted* is not a solid foundation upon which to build one's Christian life. Not being clear on the gospel can prevent a lost person from getting saved because he is confused about what God requires for eternal life (*believe in Christ*). It also reduces the evangelistic effectiveness of believers who are taught to be less clear in communicating the saving message with the unsaved.

For example, when teaching believers how to share the gospel with the unsaved, telling others of your faith in Christ alone is left out, and the readers are instructed to share “[your] commitment (your decision to follow Christ)” (pp. 190-91). The authors refer to Paul's faith story before Agrippa in Acts 26:1-23 as an example of someone whose conversion was the result of a commitment to follow Jesus and the subsequent changed life (pp. 191-96).

So, when a nonbeliever is told that he must commit to follow Christ and experience a changed life to be saved, it is likely to raise more questions than answers. *How much must I commit to follow Christ to know I am saved? How much change in my life must take place to have or know I have eternal life?* Sadly, the danger of using this invitation is that the nonbeliever is more likely to believe in his commitment to do good works rather than believe in Christ to obtain eternal life (John 3:14-16).

For those who do believe in Christ, such a foundation will likely crumble when they encounter temptations and trials. It will set them up to lose their assurance of salvation when they struggle with living a consistent, holy life in an unholy world. If Christians doubt their salvation because they don't live up to the discipleship conditions said

to be required for salvation in this book, they are more likely to live like the unsaved (cf. Prov 23:7).

Sadly, the book makes no mention of eternal rewards as a motivation for discipleship. This relates to the failure of the book to consistently distinguish salvation from discipleship (see for example p. 98).

Because of the unclear gospel message in *Rooted* and the failure to distinguish conditions for discipleship from conditions for salvation, I cannot in good conscience recommend this book. There are much better discipleship materials which are very clear in these above areas and therefore provide a much better foundation for discipleship.

Jeff Ropp  
Online Missionary Pastor  
*Des Moines, IA*



Find over 1000 free magazine  
articles and over 350 free journal  
articles and other resources at

**[www.faithalone.org](http://www.faithalone.org)**



Grace Evangelical Society  
P.O. Box 1308  
Denton, TX 76202  
[ges@faithalone.org](mailto:ges@faithalone.org)