

GRACE (in) FOCUS

ANOTHER GOOD YEAR

WHAT IS FREE GRACE?

HODGES' VIEW OF THE GOSPEL

PRESIDENTS & THE BIBLE

ASSURANCE BY INNER WITNESS?

GASLIGHTING GRACE

LESSONS FROM RUTH

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
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Letter from the Editor

Psalm 122:6 says, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you.’” While that petition was made to Israel, there is no reason to believe that only applies to God’s chosen people. Christians should pray for the peace of Jerusalem as well. Genesis 12:1-3 also says that God will bless those who bless His chosen people.

The demonstrations that have been occurring on U.S. college and university campuses in favor of Hamas and against Israel have been alarming. Cities all over the world have had gatherings of people calling Israel a terrorist state and blaming this war on Israel, not Hamas.

When the Lord Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation, all adult Jews will be believers walking in fellowship with Him (Rom 10:13-14; 11:26). In the Millennium, there will be three people groups: Israel, the Gentile nations, and the church, resurrected and glorified (1 Cor 10:32). After the Millennium, Jesus’ eternal kingdom will move to the New Earth, where He will rule from the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22).

God is not done with Israel or Jerusalem. He has not and will not abandon His people or His city.

The gift of everlasting life by faith—apart from works—came from the Jewish OT prophets and the Lord Jesus and His apostles, who were also Jewish. While most of the Jews of Jesus’ day rejected Him and His faith-alone message (John 1:11), there was



a remnant of believing Jews then and in every generation since then (Rom 9:27; 11:5).

As we look forward to the Lord Jesus’ soon return and the Judgment Seat of Christ, may we remember that He is Jewish and His chosen people are Jewish. While we are the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33; 2 Cor 11:2), we are not His chosen people. Since we love Him, we should love Israel even if it is not yet a believing nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wilkin". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Robert N. Wilkin

What is *Free Grace?*

BY KEN YATES



Introduction

In any field of thought, the people involved develop a specific vocabulary. They often forget that most people are unfamiliar with this vocabulary. For example, if I find myself in a group of auto mechanics, I quickly realize that I don't know what many of their words mean. They may talk to me about manifolds, suspensions, intake valves, brake linings, and ignition timing. I will nod in agreement as if I understand what they're talking about, but I have no clue. I could not point out where any of the things I just mentioned was located in my car. I might have heard those words before, but that's the extent of my knowledge.

The same is true in the field of theology. At GES, our focus is on Free Grace. Many people who read our literature, attend our conferences, or watch our videos use certain words, terms, and phrases. We often assume—just like a mechanic who might talk to me about cars—that the people we're talking to know what our words mean. But that's not always the case.

At a recent conference, this was brought to my attention. After a session, there was a time of questions and answers. A man raised his hand. His question was a simple one. He wanted to know if the speaker would define the terminology he had used. This man did not know what some of the words meant. That included *Free Grace*. The speaker assumed that everybody in the room understood the terms. The man asking the question did not.

This is not an isolated incident. Even some people who read a lot of theology are confused about what we mean when we use the term *Free Grace*. I think it would be a good idea to spell it out. It might help those who are new to the discussion. It might also remind us that people we meet might not understand our terminology like we do.

Serious Misunderstandings

In my association with GES, I have the opportunity to discuss Free Grace with many people. Some—like the man I just mentioned—have never heard the term. Many, however, have heard it and use it. They are theologians themselves. But

their definition is not the same as GES's definition. These theologians do not even agree among themselves on its definition. This leads to a lot of confusion.

Sometimes, I am privileged to teach in other countries. After speaking about Free Grace, pastors told me they knew what I meant. They told me that some preachers in their countries teach the same thing. Then they tell me what they think it means.

In their countries, Free Grace is a teaching that tells people to feel free to go out and sin all they want. God wants His children to enjoy themselves. That would include sexual liberation. The Lord does not want His people to be bound by any kind of moral law. In the United States, this view is sometimes called *hyper-grace*.

Of course, that is not what GES means by *Free Grace*. I have never known anybody associated with GES to say or write that God wants us to commit adultery! I have never met a group who want to live holy lives more than Free Grace folks. Thankfully, only a few people charge us with teaching immorality.

Hearing other misunderstandings of what Free Grace means is much more common. Many of them can be grouped together. Some say Free Grace teaches that all a person needs to do is walk an aisle at the end of a service. Others think we tell non-Christians they must say a sinner's prayer or confess their sins. Some accuse Free Grace teaching of encouraging people to make a decision for Christ. It is maintained that we at GES tell unbelievers that if they do any of these things, they are spiritually saved. Free Grace preaching, it is alleged, gives false assurance of salvation to people.

Popular revival meetings are often used as examples of Free Grace preaching. In the late 1800s, D. L. Moody was the most famous revivalist. More recently, it was Billy Graham. In years past, tents would be set up, and the floor covered in sawdust to prevent dirt from swirling around. Unbelievers were told to walk the "sawdust trail" to go to heaven.

I think many people think this is what GES teaches as *Free Grace*. It is not.

What Does GES Teach?

So, if these things are not the meaning of *Free Grace*, what is? The Free Grace gospel is that the unbeliever receives eternal life when he believes in Jesus Christ for it. At that moment, he knows he has eternal life because the Lord promises it. It cannot be lost.

What does it mean to believe? It is not a decision. One does not decide to believe. It is not saying a magical sinner's prayer or raising a hand. Neither is it walking down an aisle. Believing is being convinced that something is true. The unbeliever is eternally saved when he is convinced that what Jesus promises is true. He can believe without saying a word or leaving his seat.

Free Grace is a great name for this teaching. It is all by God's grace. Works play no part at all in receiving eternal life. We would say it is absolutely free.

It is sad that the Free Grace message has been equated with revivalism. Many have walked down the sawdust trail but did not receive eternal life. They thought that by responding to the preaching they heard and stepping out on that trail, they had taken the first step in making it to heaven. They were not convinced they had eternal life that could never be lost. The same could be said for many who have raised their hands or said a sinner's prayer at a religious meeting. After doing so, they hoped they would now live a good life. If they did so, they might make it into heaven. All such thoughts are far removed from what Free Grace means.

We see this is true in the examples of Moody and Graham. In their ministries, both utilized people from various theological backgrounds. Some of those people believed you could lose your salvation. Others said you had to work in order to get it. Some taught that you were not truly saved from hell unless you did good works. None of those views is Free Grace.

Conclusion

A Free Grace believer will never tell somebody to go out and sin all they want. Righteous living is important. At the same time, such living has nothing to do with being eternally saved. Jesus said He would give eternal life to anybody who believed in Him for it. When convinced that is true, the believer receives the gift of eternal life that can never be lost. The believer will live with the Lord forever in His kingdom.

If somebody equates the Free Grace gospel of eternal life with the requirement to say a sinner's prayer, confess one's sins, make a decision, or walk an aisle, it is clear that they do not understand the meaning of the expression. They are like the guy at the conference I attended who said he didn't understand what was being discussed.

There are a number of reasons why such misunderstandings might exist. Perhaps the person has never heard the term "Free Grace." Perhaps they have been told what it means by somebody who didn't understand it. It is even possible that people opposed to the Free Grace message have purposely distorted it.

Those of us who are Free Grace believers need to be aware that many do not share our vocabulary. We cannot assume that everybody we talk to understands our terms. A mechanic who talks to me about a piston ring would make a serious error if he thought I knew what he was talking about.

I mean no disrespect to auto mechanics, but the message of eternal life as a free gift by faith in Christ alone is much more important than understanding how a car operates. When we talk to people about this indescribably good news, let's ensure they know what we mean by our words. ■■



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



Ken with Dan & Ellie Strathman, their baby, Zoe, and Ellie's mom, Anita



Attendees of the Dallas Regional Conference



Bob after finishing his World Senior Games 5K race

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Alla Kristina, Jan Marek, and Manuela, some of our European translators, and Manuela's family



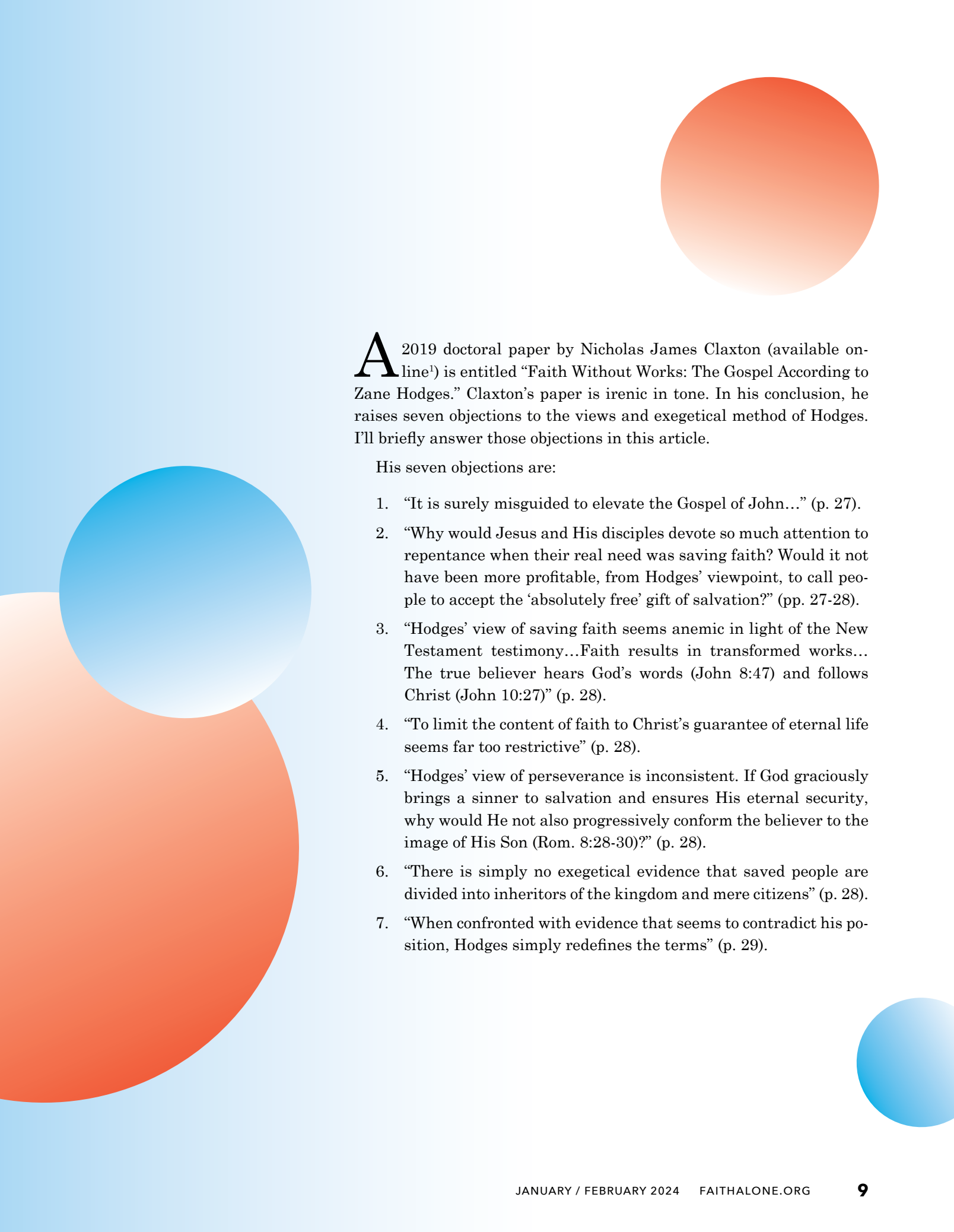
Ken and Kathryn met with Dr. Marino Martinez and Loren Faul to plan the Spanish Regional Conference in Florida



The Upland Bible Church (Las Vegas) congregation

**WAS ZANE
HODGES'
VIEW OF
THE GOSPEL
"MISGUIDED,
ANEMIC, IN-
CONSISTENT,
AND EVASIVE"?**

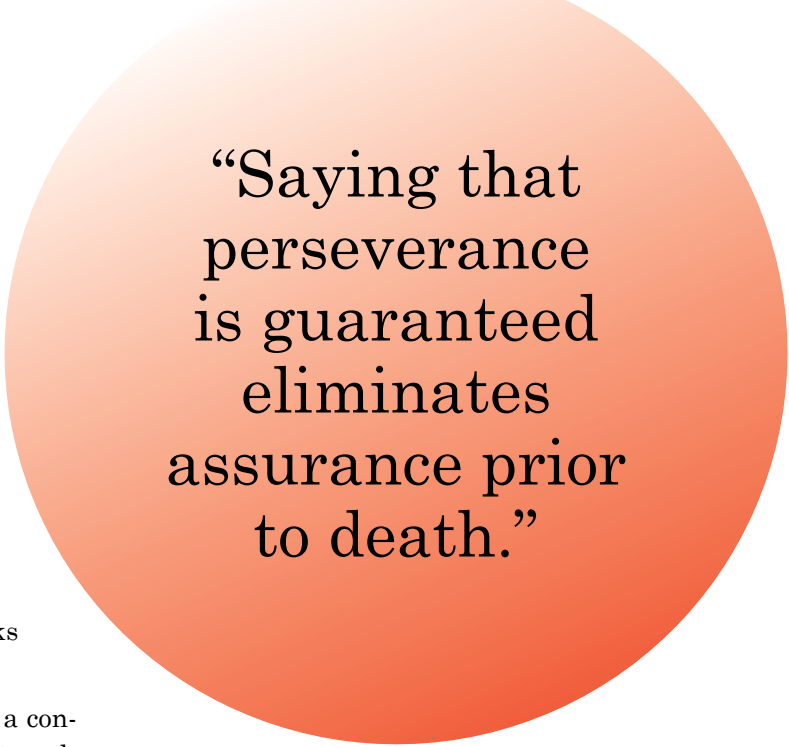
BY BOB WILKIN



A 2019 doctoral paper by Nicholas James Claxton (available online¹) is entitled “Faith Without Works: The Gospel According to Zane Hodges.” Claxton’s paper is irenic in tone. In his conclusion, he raises seven objections to the views and exegetical method of Hodges. I’ll briefly answer those objections in this article.

His seven objections are:

1. “It is surely misguided to elevate the Gospel of John...” (p. 27).
2. “Why would Jesus and His disciples devote so much attention to repentance when their real need was saving faith? Would it not have been more profitable, from Hodges’ viewpoint, to call people to accept the ‘absolutely free’ gift of salvation?” (pp. 27-28).
3. “Hodges’ view of saving faith seems anemic in light of the New Testament testimony...Faith results in transformed works... The true believer hears God’s words (John 8:47) and follows Christ (John 10:27)” (p. 28).
4. “To limit the content of faith to Christ’s guarantee of eternal life seems far too restrictive” (p. 28).
5. “Hodges’ view of perseverance is inconsistent. If God graciously brings a sinner to salvation and ensures His eternal security, why would He not also progressively conform the believer to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-30)?” (p. 28).
6. “There is simply no exegetical evidence that saved people are divided into inheritors of the kingdom and mere citizens” (p. 28).
7. “When confronted with evidence that seems to contradict his position, Hodges simply redefines the terms” (p. 29).



“Saying that
perseverance
is guaranteed
eliminates
assurance prior
to death.”

First, it isn't misguided to elevate John's Gospel concerning the saving message because that is the stated purpose of the book (John 20:31). No other book in the Bible has that purpose.

Isn't the Song of Songs the only Biblical book on marital love? Aren't the Pastoral Epistles the place to go for instruction on church leadership? Aren't 1-2 Thessalonians essential books dealing with the Church's Rapture? Don't certain books have themes that set them apart?

Second, why preach repentance if it isn't a condition for everlasting life? Claxton does not realize that he affirms Hodges' view of John's Gospel. Hodges said that is precisely why John never mentions repentance in his Gospel. John discusses repentance a dozen times in Revelation. Why not in John?

Jesus and His apostles were concerned about more than leading people to faith. We know from the Synoptic Gospels that they also called the Nation of Israel to repent so that the kingdom might come in that generation. Faith alone would not bring in the kingdom.

In addition, repentance is the way in which those out of fellowship with God return to the Father to regain His blessings and live productively again (Luke 15:11-32).

Third, Hodges' view of saving faith is "anemic" only if one has predetermined that saving faith is some special kind of faith. When Claxton says that transformation and obedience are the guaranteed results of saving faith, he implies that faith is commitment, surrender, repentance, and obedience.

He believes that perseverance in good works until death is required to avoid eternal condemnation. Saying that perseverance is guaranteed eliminates assurance prior to death. In Claxton's view, if a professing believer falls away and dies in that state, then he proves he never believed in Christ. Since no believer can be sure he will persevere (e.g., 1 Cor 9:27), assurance would be impossible until it was too late.

Fourth, Claxton agrees that everlasting life is guaranteed to all who believe in Jesus. However, he thinks that believing in Jesus requires more than believing in Him for everlasting life. He suggests that one must also believe "in Christ's atoning death and resurrection" and "in Jesus as 'the Son of God'" (p. 28).

This objection is a straw man. Hodges said that he always preached the death and resurrection of Jesus to explain how He could guarantee everlasting life to the believer. And Hodges taught that to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" is to believe in Him for everlasting life (cf. John 11:25-27; 20:31). Claxton's problem with Hodges' view of faith is that Hodges does not believe that faith is commitment, obedience, and perseverance (points 3 and 5).

Fifth, Claxton's question reveals a lot about his theology. He does not believe that God guarantees instant sinlessness. He's right. But wouldn't a better question be: *If God graciously brings a sinner to salvation and ensures His eternal security, why would He not instantly conform the believer to the image of His Son?* Why is the supposedly guaranteed conformation progressive? Wouldn't it glorify God more if it were instantaneous? And isn't that what we all want? Wouldn't we love to have glorified bodies immediately?

Claxton's view makes assurance impossible. If our progress is stalled or even goes backward, we

would rightly doubt our salvation if gradual, steady progress were guaranteed.

God does not guarantee success in this life because He wants to select those who prove faithful to rule with Christ in the future (1 Cor 4:1-5; 9:24-27; 2 Tim 2:12; 4:6-8; Rev 2:26). This life is a test that will determine our role in Jesus' kingdom.

Sixth, a *fiat* is not only a type of car. A *fiat* is a declaration. Anyone can declare anything. The truth is in the evidence. Claxton simply declares that there is no evidence that some believers will rule with Christ and others will not. He does not attempt to prove that declaration.

The most straightforward way to disprove Hodges on this point would be to select three or more passages Hodges uses to demonstrate that only some believers will rule with Christ. Claxton could have chosen Luke 19:11-27; 2 Tim 2:11-13; and Rev 2:26. Those are texts Hodges often cites in this regard. But he did not select those or any other passages.² He declared that Hodges was wrong and assumed the readers would take his word for it.

Seventh, Claxton suggests that Hodges redefined the meaning of expressions like *save*, *inherit the kingdom*, and *the outer darkness* in order to evade the obvious meanings of passages. But anyone who has read Hodges knows that is not true. He did careful word studies and interpreted the meaning of words in a given context based on that context. That is what lexicographers do. Claxton gives the impression that the word *save* always refers to regeneration, that the expression *inherit the kingdom* always refers to getting into it, and that the expression *the outer darkness* always refers

to the lake of fire. Words have fields of meaning. Hodges did not evade the meaning of various texts.

Dr. Dave Lowery recently retired from the NT department at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was a student under Hodges and later became his colleague. He famously said that if he were on trial for his life, he'd want Zane Hodges as his lawyer because Hodges left no stone unturned. That was my experience with Zane as well.

Hodges' view of the gospel was not misguided, anemic, inconsistent, or evasive *if the Bible is the standard by which we determine what the saving message is*.

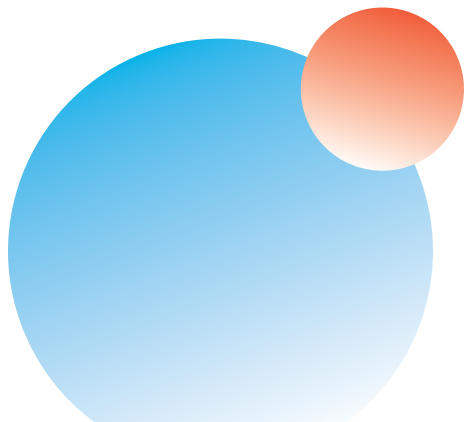
However, Hodges' view of the gospel is all those things *if the standard is Reformed soteriology*.³

What guides your understanding of the saving message, Scripture, or tradition? ■



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

- 1 See https://www.academia.edu/38883577/Faith_Without_Works_The_Gospel_According_to_Zane_Hodges.
- 2 Earlier in the paper, Claxton did discuss Hodges' view of eternal rewards (pp. 24-26). However, he did not explain why his views were wrong, and he did not exegete any of the key texts Hodges cites.
- 3 Claxton's suggested books to read include many Reformed Lordship Salvation books, including John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Wayne Grudem, *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*, J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, and D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*. See here for his list: <https://alexamenosfidelis1.blogspot.com/p/books.html>.



THROW THE CHALLENGE FLAG

By Dix Winston



In 1999 the NFL instituted the red challenge flag, allowing a coach to challenge certain calls made by the officiating team. Once the flag is thrown, the referee reviews the video replay from a number of different camera angles. If there is indisputable visual evidence, the ruling on the field will be overturned. If not, the ruling on the field stands.

I think we need to have a red-challenge flag for Bible teachers who “miss the call” and misinterpret the Bible. These bad calls can be divided into three categories: precept calls, promise calls, and principle calls. A precept is something the Bible tells you to do. A promise is something God is obligated to do. A principle is “a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.”¹

While Bible teachers do not have camera angles, they do have context. Referees can miss the call by having only one perspective. Likewise, Bible

teachers can miss the call by ignoring the context. The dictionary defines *context* as “the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning.”² It is true that “a text without a context is a pretext.”

Every verse in the Bible has a context. Think of an archery target. The bullseye is the single verse. The next ring is the verses before and after the verse. The third ring is the chapters of that book before and after. The fourth ring is other books the author wrote. And the outer circle is other books in the Bible. As you scrutinize a passage’s context, it is helpful to ask the following questions: Who is the original speaker? Who is the original hearer? Who is the original writer? Who is the original reader? Having answered these questions you can then ask: What does it mean to me?

So, let’s examine a precept, a promise, and a principle screaming for a challenge flag to be thrown. Keep the above questions in mind.

Throwing the Challenge Flag on a Misunderstood Precept: Mark 1:15

A precept is a rule or command to be obeyed by a believer. Precepts begin in Genesis 1:28 and conclude in Revelation 22:17.

I throw my first challenge flag on Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” According to some teachers, you must repent and turn from your sins before you can believe and be saved. I believe that those teaching repentance as being necessary for salvation have missed the call.

Let’s look at the “replay” (the immediate context).

First, John the Baptist had called for *the national repentance of Israel*.³ Mark 1:14 tells us that John had been arrested. His message was for national, not personal, repentance; the nation had disobeyed for centuries. Since John had been silenced, Jesus took up his message. John and Jesus echoed Moses’ message: “Return to the Lord your God and obey Him” (Deut 30:1-5).

Second, *gospel* simply means “good news.” One must avoid assuming that it always refers to eternal salvation. The context must determine the meaning. It should have been good news to the nation that “the kingdom of God was at hand.” A kingdom assumes a king. The Jews had not had a king since King Zedekiah in 586 B.C. when the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were carried into exile.⁴ Their King, Jesus, had come. Sadly, they would continue forsaking their God by rejecting His Son.

Third, Mark is not an evangelistic book. Of the sixty-six books in the Bible, only the Gospel of John is evangelistic (John 20:30-31). John’s Gospel never calls for repentance as a condition of eternal life. If repentance were necessary for everlasting life, John gave the wrong evangelistic message!

My challenge stands: Repentance is not a condition or prerequisite for eternal life. It was a precept for the Jewish nation, a condition for God’s earthly kingdom.⁵

Throwing the Challenge Flag on a Misunderstood Promise: 2 Chronicles 7:14

I throw my second challenge flag on those over-claiming promises. One such promise is 2 Chronicles 7:14. So many Bible teachers miss the call and claim this promise for the Church in America. The claim goes like this: “If Christians in America, will humble themselves and seek God’s face, He promises to heal the USA.”

Now, let’s examine the “replay.” First and Second Chronicles focus on the southern kingdom of Judah and the reign of the Davidic kings. Second Chronicles begins with the reign of Solomon following David’s death and ends with the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. The book chronicles the building and dedication of the Solomon temple. The context of 2 Chronicles 7 is “the glory of the Lord fill[ing] the temple” and “Solomon [keeping] the feast seven days, and all Israel with him.” Following this feast, the Lord appears to Solomon at night with a warning and a promise.

He warns Israel and the king not to forsake Him to worship and serve other gods. If they do, God will withhold the rain, send locusts, and spread pestilence among the people.⁶ All three of these judgments are catastrophic for an agrarian people.

But God is merciful. If His people (those of Judah) “will humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways,” He “will forgive their sins and heal their land.”

Upon further review, my challenge stands. This was a promise to Israel, not America. The healing of the land is agricultural, not societal. In short, those who teach this as a promise for America have “missed the call.”

Throwing the Challenge Flag on a Misunderstood Principle: Mark 6:38

Principles may be compared to razzle-dazzle plays, containing many moving parts. Because of

their complexity, they often call for the red challenge flag.

The prosperity principle is just such a “play.” It has many names: “seed-faith giving,” the “hundredfold return,” “word-faith,” “name it and claim it,” and “health and wealth.”

The most often-used verse for this principle is Luke 6:38:

Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

This verse is used to formulate the prosperity principle, whose essence is that if you give financially, God will give back above and beyond what you give. Therefore, the motive for giving is primarily to get! It obligates God to a financial return on investment. Our level of investment then dictates and demands God’s level of material reward.

I throw the red challenge flag on the prosperity principle. It is not Biblical and ignores context. The context of Luke 6 is a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount. The lead-in to Luke 6:38 begins at 6:27. This passage deals with personal relationships, not financial remuneration! This is verified by Jesus stating the Golden Rule, Luke 6:31, and is reinforced by the command to “be merciful, just as your heavenly Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Two negative commands and one positive follow this, none having the slightest thing to do with money (Luke 6:37).

The bottom line, considering the context, is that if you are relationally gracious—not judging or condemning, but forgiving and merciful—then you can expect the same from the Father. In Matthew’s account of the same sermon, Jesus said,

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” [not money] (Matt 5:7).

There are 31,102 verses in the Bible—23,145 in the OT and 7,957 in the NT. (No, I did not count them. I Googled them!) Each has a context that must be considered in order to interpret it correctly and make the correct call. The above passages are often taken out of context. And when you take a verse out of context, it ceases to be the Word of God.

So, the next time you hear a text without a context, throw the red flag and challenge it. And remember, unless there is indisputable contextual evidence, overturn the call. ■



Dix and his wife, Cynthia, live in Colorado and have been married for nearly five decades. Dix and Bob Wilkin have been friends since their seminary days, having both graduated from DTS in 1982.

- 1 *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford University Press (2010, 2016), Online Version.
- 2 *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition (Thomas Press India Ltd., 2020), s.v. “context.”
- 3 Matthew 3:1-12.
- 4 Second Kings 24-25, 2 Chronicles, and the Book of Jeremiah.
- 5 John’s epistles do call for repentance of sin for believers, not unbelievers.
- 6 Second Chronicles 7:13.



Gaslighting the Grace of God

By Kathryn Wright

Introduction

According to the American Psychological Association, to *gaslight* someone means:

“To manipulate another person into doubting their own perceptions, experiences, or understanding of events.”

This form of psychological manipulation is a common tactic of abusers who make their victims feel unstable or irrational by claiming that their legitimate concerns are minor or simply untrue. The term *gaslight* comes from a 1944 film about a husband (Charles Boyer) and wife (Ingrid Bergman). The husband moves objects around the house and turns the gas lights on and off. When his wife brings it up, he convinces her that she is imagining things. Eventually, the husband persuades his wife that she is to blame for the confusion and that she has gone insane. In short, to be “gaslit” is to be psychologically manipulated into thinking you are the problem, and that objective truth is wrong.

Spiritual Gaslighting

The same tactic occurs in the spiritual world. Following the Lord and doing good is often redefined as evil (Isa 5:20). Sadly, many well-meaning Christians have been gaslit into believing false doctrines due to subtle manipulation like that in the movie *Gaslight*. For example, many people within Christendom reject the message that eternal life is a gift, and that it is not by works (John 3:16; Eph 2:8-9). Catholics, Mormons, and many more say the message of grace is *easy believism* or *antinomianism*.

Others reject the doctrine of rewards, claiming believers should follow the Lord solely out of love and that rewards are a selfish motivation. The fact that believers cannot please the Lord unless they believe He is a rewarder is practically ignored by Christendom today (Heb 11:6).

A more obvious example of how even well-meaning Christians are being gaslit into false doctrine is the current pressure to support the LGBTQ community in the United States. Many churches have been gaslit into thinking that they should support the community because doing so shows the love of Christ.

In all these examples, people are caused to doubt the truth by being made to question reality. Notice that those who follow the Word of God are described as doing something evil or being selfish, un-Christlike, or lawless. People are manipulated into believing heresy and seeking emotional validation rather than looking to the source of truth in Christ and His Word. The result is that people doubt and question their spiritual sanity.

Here are a few common signs of gaslighting:

- » refusing to talk about an important topic.
- » shaming you for bringing attention to an issue.
- » accusing you of being in the wrong.
- » persuading you that a problem is not a problem.
- » minimizing your concerns while accusing you of being too sensitive or picky.
- » using loving words as a weapon.

One of the biggest indicators of gaslighting is that victims are encouraged to doubt themselves. Their motives or sense of reality are questioned, causing them to become unstable and confused. The objective of gaslighting is doubt.

Gaslighting Grace

It's this latter point that is of particular interest. While there are arguably countless examples of spiritual gaslighting in the church today, the attack on the assurance of salvation is one of the most common. Doubt has become commendable, while assurance is often demonized. Gaslighting distorts even the grace of God and redefines it as evil. The objective truth of the Bible is that eternal life is a gift freely given to those who have believed in Jesus alone for that gift (John 3:16; 4:10,14; 10:28-30; Eph 2:8-9). To believe in Jesus for eternal life is to be assured of one's salvation. The gift is eternal and thus cannot be lost. John tells us that—through the witness of the Father—we can and should be assured of our salvation (1 John 5:9-12). The Lord taught assurance, desires that unbelievers be assured of His promise of eternal life, and wants His children to remain confident in the knowledge that they possess eternal life, which can never be lost.

The sure light of the Word of God is far preferable to the distorted gaslighting the masses offer.

Sadly, many have been gaslit into thinking assurance is unattainable, unnecessary, or even outright sinful. Let's now consider three ways the church has been gaslit into either minimizing this doctrine or forsaking it altogether.

Three Ways Assurance Is Gaslit Today

SAYING THAT ASSURANCE IS IRRATIONAL

One of the more common examples of gaslighting concerning assurance is found in the popular teaching known as Lordship Salvation. Proponents of this view argue that assurance is found in our works and that falling into sin indicates you are not saved. They call for people to look at their lifestyles for assurance.

On his website, *Grace to You*, John MacArthur says this about assurance:

You've got to be able to look at your life, and if you ever are to know assurance, you must see a pattern of holy living in your life. You don't see that, there's no way that you can conclude that you're saved, logically.¹

In the same sermon, MacArthur says that assurance is a blessing given to believers who have good works. He argues that if a person is suffering from doubts, this is a sign that they are not truly saved.

This quote contains at least two indications of spiritual gaslighting. First, the listener is encouraged to doubt his salvation based on subjective evidence. Lordship teachers place their assurance on the ever-changing basis of our works.

A key component of gaslighting is psychologically manipulating the victim into feeling unstable and irrational due to subjective evidence. Doubt is one of the biggest indicators that gaslighting is going on. Part of the goal is to make the victim dependent upon the abuser so that they find stability in them rather than in objective truth. Instead of

looking to Christ and His promise of eternal life to those who believe in Him, MacArthur encourages his listeners to look at their works for stability. Since no believer lives perfectly, this will inevitably cause the Christian to suffer from instability and fear. In addition, church leaders have historically used their positions of authority to make their congregations seek comfort and certainty through them rather than Christ. This, too, is an indication of gaslighting.

Second, this quote is especially noteworthy due to MacArthur's inclusion of the word *logically*. As mentioned above, gaslighting often causes the victim to question his sanity. Arguably, MacArthur is doing that in this quote. For him and other Lordship teachers, assurance of salvation is accessible only to those living righteously. The implication is that those who have assurance even when they fail are spiritually illogical. The believer is therefore made to doubt his salvation by looking at subjective evidence and then, while in a vulnerable position, to question his spiritual sanity.

ASSERTING THAT CLAIMING ASSURANCE IS ARROGANT

Another example of spiritual gaslighting can be found in another of MacArthur's sermons. In response to a young woman struggling with assurance, MacArthur argues that her struggle is evidence of her salvation. The young woman's lack of assurance is redefined as a good thing. Please note that while MacArthur has argued that the lack of assurance is an indication of an unbeliever, in this example, he claims it is evidence of salvation! The fact that these are contradictory statements seems lost on MacArthur.

Other Lordship proponents claim that the lack of assurance indicates humility and that if someone claims to be sure of his salvation, this is prideful and sinful. Once again, gaslighting techniques are evident. One of the indicators of gaslighting is convincing victims that their real problems are not an issue. The young girl asking MacArthur about assurance is struggling and seeking truth. MacArthur's response is to convince her that her very real concerns aren't a problem at all. In addition, assurance is vilified and redefined as arrogant.

Even people with assurance are being told to question themselves and their motives. Uncertainty is proclaimed to be more righteous than assurance.

CLAIMING THAT ASSURANCE IS NOT ESSENTIAL

The previous examples of spiritual gaslighting are well-known. They are also easier to spot because they have been around for a while. Fortunately, they have been debunked by faithful teachers. However, there is a third form of gaslighting that has begun to creep into the theological landscape.

In the age of inclusivity, objective truth is now labeled as closed-minded and arrogant, while open-mindedness is heralded as the supreme virtue. The unbelieving world claims that nothing should be held too tightly. To believe anything with certainty is perceived as prideful or legalistic. Sadly, this postmodern thinking has also infiltrated the church. This is especially true when it comes to the issue of assurance.

For example, Focused Free Grace proponents uphold the importance of assurance and stress that for people to be saved, they must understand that they have a life that can never end. Sadly, this is often explained as adding an unbiblical condition to everlasting life. Focused Free Grace is attacked for making the narrow way too narrow. The fact that the saving message is inherently exclusive (Matt 7:13-14) is offensive to many. In addition, assurance of salvation has been increasingly labeled a peripheral issue, even among those who believe in the doctrine. Flexible Free Grace advocates argue that assurance is not an essential element of the saving message. Those who take this view desire inclusivity over certainty.

As stated above, another indication of gaslighting is the minimalization and deflection of issues. In this subtle form of manipulation, when an important concern needs to be addressed, the victims will be told they are too sensitive and that their worries are not worthy of discussion. Such attacks have been made on those who hold that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. In this form of spiritual gaslighting, unity is said to be the most important doctrine, while assurance is diminished and deemed divisive.

Once again, gaslighting techniques creep into the discussion. Seemingly loving language is used. Words like *unity* and *peacemaking* are elevated, while *division* over sound doctrine becomes increasingly demonized. Despite the fact that division is often necessary, taught, and even praised in the NT (2 John 7-11; Rev 2:2, 6), Focused Free Grace is labeled as legalistic and an overreaction when it stresses the importance of assurance. As in the previous examples, the victims are called to doubt themselves and question their motives. They are even defamed as evil. Objective truth is redefined.

It should be noted that even well-meaning Christians can be gaslit into this way of thinking. Like a wife who defends her abusive husband, believers can be manipulated into becoming some of the biggest defenders of heresy.

Conclusion

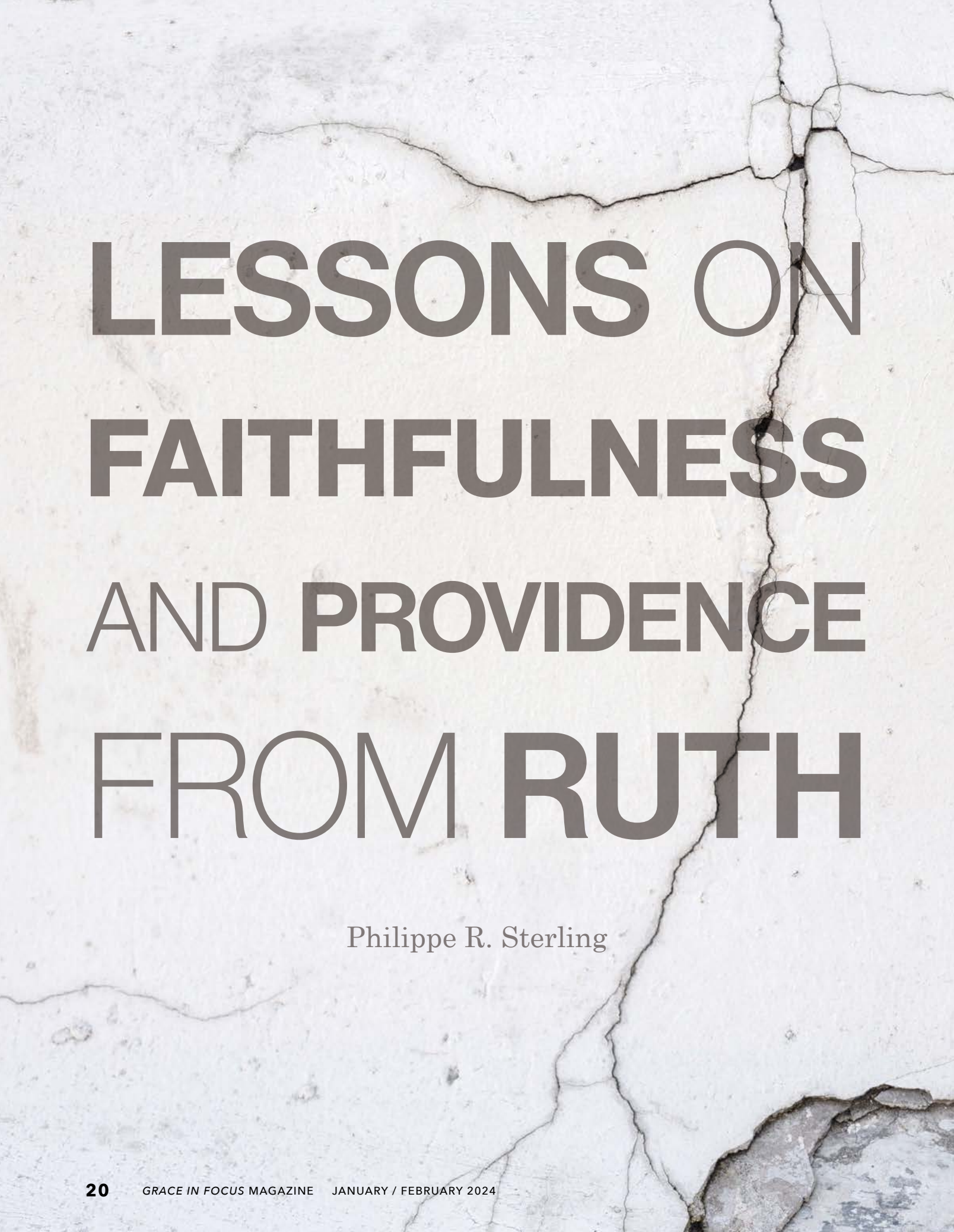
In all of this, the father of lies can be found. Satan is the author of confusion and doubt. He is the master of spiritual gaslighting. In comparison, the Apostle Paul tells us that God is not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor 14:33). Satan desires that people lack assurance and be “tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14; cf. Luke 8:12). Therefore, it is unsurprising that when sound doctrine is proclaimed, it is hated by the world and redefined as evil. In light of these issues, those who strive to walk in the truth should cling to Paul’s instruction to Timothy:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). ■



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1 www.gty.org. The Doctrine of Assurance. Accessed 10/25/2023.

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a light-colored, textured stone surface. A prominent, dark, irregular crack runs vertically down the right side of the image, starting from the top and extending towards the bottom. There are also several smaller, horizontal and diagonal cracks scattered across the surface, particularly in the upper half. The overall appearance is aged and weathered.

LESSONS ON FAITHFULNESS AND PROVIDENCE FROM RUTH

Philippe R. Sterling

Life is often difficult. One of my most difficult years was my second year in college. I was taking some of my most demanding classes: organic chemistry, physics, and physiology. Three weeks before finals I got a severe sinus infection, which made it look as if I had a softball under my cheeks and required hospitalization. I returned to school and tried to make up my incomplete work and continue with a new round of classes. That was a mistake. At the end of the term, I received a D in physics, a D in physiology, and an F in organic chemistry. I lost a tuition grant and had to drop out the next year in order to work.

What should we do when life is difficult? What is God doing? The true story of a young woman who lived 3,000 years ago provides a model of how we should respond to life's difficult experiences and of how God works in them. The story of this amazing woman will instruct us concerning the proven character we need to demonstrate, and the providential care God displays.

We Should Live Responsibly Through Life's Difficulties

Ruth provides a pleasing picture of responsible living in the midst of life's difficulties. We see her proven character through her choice, her conduct, and her commendation.

THE CHOICE OF FAITH: CHOOSE TO TRUST GOD AS RUTH CHOSE TO TRUST GOD.

The opening unit of Ruth is bleak (1:1-7). Because of famine, Elimelech and his family migrate from Bethlehem to Moab where, after his death, his two sons marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah.

Then the sons also die, leaving their mother Naomi bereft of her whole family. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem because she hears that Yahweh has providentially provided food for His people.

The first episode opens on a roadside in Moab with a farewell scene in which Naomi tries to dissuade her two daughters-in-law from going with her to Bethlehem. Three exchanges make up the dialogue. They show a repeated alternation of advice and response.

Naomi makes use of national, personal, and religious arguments to try to convince Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab. In the first exchange, she makes use of the national motive to urge the women to stay (1:8-9a). In their first refusal, the women indicate their determination to return to Naomi's people (1:9b-10). In the second exchange, Naomi ignores the national motive and focuses on the personal one of childlessness and marriage (1:11-13). She convinces Orpah with that argument (1:14). With Ruth, she again takes up the national motive and adds a religious one (1:15). Ruth's reply is an extraordinary statement of personal, national, and religious identification with Naomi (1:16-18). She ends her statement with an oath indicating that Yahweh is her God. It is likely that at some earlier time, through the witness of Naomi, Ruth had simply believed in the coming Messiah who gives eternal life and was regenerated. Now she was identifying with God's people much like a believer today may identify with the Body of Christ through baptism.

Ruth's choice, not chance, would determine her destiny. Once she decided to identify with God and His people in spite of difficult circumstances, God began to move in guiding her to His purpose for her.

I do not always respond in faith to my trying circumstances. But on the occasion of my sickness and scholastic failure, I did. After learning of my grades, I went back to my room and spent the afternoon reading the Bible and praying. I decided that, in spite of my situation, I would trust God. I wrote down my commitment in a journal: “God, I don’t understand why this is happening. I have failed but I know that You are with me and will be glorified through this. I will work through things with You.”

THE CONDUCT OF FAITH: LIVE RESPONSIBLY AS RUTH LIVED RESPONSIBLY.

Through her actions, Ruth demonstrates what the book calls loyal-love. In chapter one she clings to Naomi and returns with her to Bethlehem. In chapter two she takes the initiative to provide for Naomi and herself by gleaning in the fields. In chapter three she carries out Naomi’s instructions for claiming Boaz as a redeemer. She is a model of responsible living.

I dropped out of school for a while, moved back in with my parents, and found a job to earn enough money to return to school. Once I returned to school, I would have to face organic chemistry again.

THE COMMENDATION OF FAITH: WE CAN RECEIVE A SIMILAR COMMENDATION TO THE ONE RUTH RECEIVED.

Ruth receives commendation for her choice and her conduct. In 1:8 Naomi prays for Ruth because she practiced loyal-love with her husband and with her. In 2:11-12 Boaz prays for her because of the kindness she showed Naomi. In 3:10-11 he pledges to redeem her because of the loyal-love she shows in choosing him over other younger men and because all the people of the town know her to be a woman of noble character. Finally, in 4:14-15 the chorus of women praises Ruth and counts her of more worth than the ideal number of sons.

Ruth portrays the responsible way God calls His people to live even through the tough times of life.

She teaches us that we should choose to trust God and live responsibly through all of life’s experiences. If we do, we can be commended as she was commended.

God Leads Us as We Live Responsibly Through Life’s Difficulties

As we demonstrate our proven character, God displays His providential care. Ruth’s proven character is only half the story; the other half concerns the providential care of God. God is the main character in the story. He is continually on the scene, but in a hidden way—many events in the narrative evidence His activity without stating it directly. Let us look at three that reflect His providential care. God’s care is reflected in the commands of the law, the control of events, and the giving of conception.

THE COMMANDS FOR LIFE: GOD EXPRESSES HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE BY COMMANDING HIS PEOPLE TO PROVIDE FOR THOSE IN NEED.

An indirect way in which the Book of Ruth shows God’s involvement in His people’s lives is by the use of the provisions made through the Law. The narrative illustrates the implementation of three of the civil and social laws. Ruth makes use of the law concerning gleaning in order to gain sustenance for herself and Naomi (see Ruth 2:2 and Lev 19:9-10). Boaz redeems Elimelech’s land and marries Ruth in fulfillment of the law of redemption and the law of levirate marriage (see Ruth 4:9-10; Deut 25:5-10). Boaz provided for Ruth and Naomi according to the commands of God.

The application for us is that in difficult times we should seek and receive aid from each other. The NT gives numerous commands, principles, and examples concerning this aspect of body life. For example, the early church provided for elderly widows who had a reputation for good works (see 1 Tim 5:9-10).

While I was out of school, many people helped me with transportation and provided encouragement. When it came time to return to school, some even offered financial help.

THE CONTROL OF LIFE: GOD EXPRESSES HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE BY CONTROLLING THE EVENTS OF OUR LIVES.

The narrator subtly indicates the providential acts of God in several passages. In 2:3 he states that Ruth “happens” to come to the field of Boaz. The expression suggests chance, while the context indicates that this event was not accidental but providential, the result of God’s unseen influence. Naomi makes the connection in 2:20 when she states that Ruth’s meeting with Boaz was an expression of God’s loyal-love to them. God’s subtle direction is also seen in 2:4 and 4:1 where the emphasizing particle *behold* indicates the appearance of the right person at precisely the right time. God acts behind the scenes to guide His faithful people into the experience of His purpose for them.

The Book of Ruth shows that when a believer commits himself to live responsibly before God, He will act behind the scenes to direct the course of his life. A whole stream of events issues from such a commitment, raising in the believer’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings, and material assistance.

THE CONCEPTION OF LIFE: GOD EXPRESSES HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE BY TURNING OUR EMPTINESS INTO FULLNESS.

The narrator relates directly the acts of God in two key passages that enclose the story. The first is 1:6, where he states that Yahweh had visited His people in giving them food. This statement reflecting the sovereign care of God in relieving famine sets the story in motion. The second is in 4:13 where he states that Yahweh caused Ruth to conceive (she had previously been married for ten years without conceiving). This statement re-

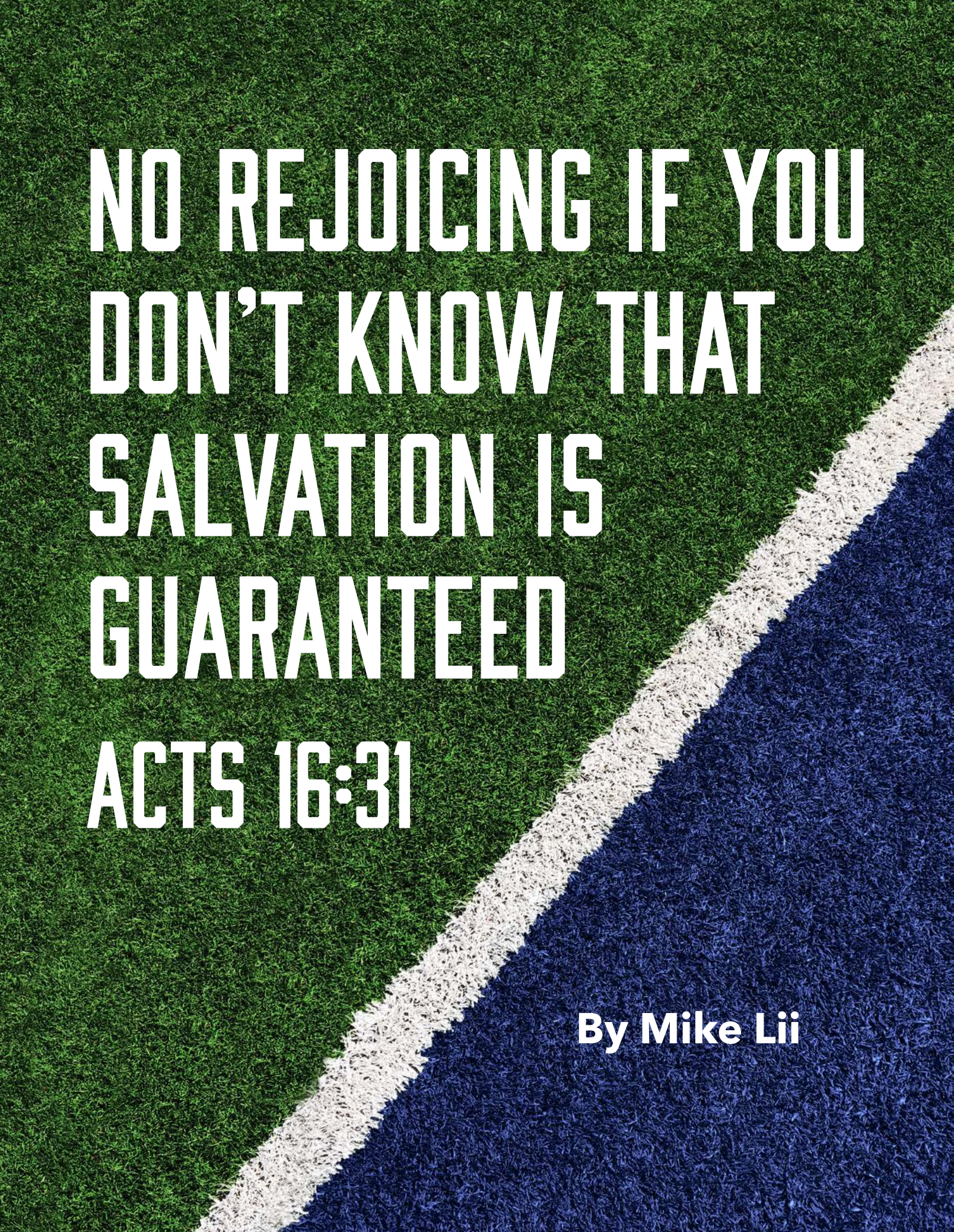
flecting the sovereign care of God in continuing the family line brings the story to a happy conclusion.

God worked behind the scenes in the lives of Ruth and Boaz, a man and a woman who chose to live responsibly before Him. Through them He brought about a special birth in the line of Judah. He brought together two people of proven character to become the ancestors of David and ultimately of Jesus Christ (4:18-22; Matt 1:5, 16). The principle is that *those who live responsibly may trust God to lead providentially*. We may never know the long-range effects of our faithfulness and steadfastness until we are rewarded by Christ at His Judgment Seat.

God allowed me to see some of the results of my faith during my college experience. While I was home working, my father and my sisters all believed in Christ for everlasting life. I returned to school, passed organic chemistry, and gained most of the grade-point average I had lost. I graduated just one semester late. The month I would have graduated was when I had my first date with my wife Brenda. The month I actually graduated was the month we became engaged. We might never have married had it not been for that postponement of my graduation. Without Brenda, I might not have gone to seminary. Without Brenda, I might not have been able to plant a church. That last term in college was also a fruitful period in ministry. I led a discipleship group of four men. Three of them went on to complete seminary. One has been a missionary, one a pastor, one a youth pastor, and one a staff member with Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru). God was faithful to fulfill His purpose for me as I trusted Him and lived responsibly before Him. ■■



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

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a baseball field. The image shows the green grass of the infield and the blue artificial turf of the outfield, separated by a white chalk line that curves from the bottom left towards the right. The text is overlaid on the grass area.

**NO REJOICING IF YOU
DON'T KNOW THAT
SALVATION IS
GUARANTEED
ACTS 16:31**

By Mike Lii

It is one of the most iconic moments in Super Bowl history and probably the most famous example of an athlete celebrating his victory too early. In 1993, during Super Bowl XXVII, Leon Lett of the Dallas Cowboys scooped up a fumble by Buffalo Bills' quarterback Frank Reich, then proceeded to run the football back for an apparent touchdown. About 10 yards from the goal line, Lett celebrated the impending touchdown by slowing down, trying to dance, and extending his arm with the football in his right hand.

Unbeknownst to Lett, the Bills' wide receiver Don Beebe was in hot pursuit. Just before Lett reached the goal line for the touchdown, Beebe caught up and swatted the ball out of his hands. Instead of getting a touchdown and seven points for his team, Lett lost the ball because he celebrated too early.

There should be no doubt that when Lett began celebrating, he thought his touchdown was assured. He wouldn't have begun celebrating had he thought there was a possibility of someone catching him from behind. Celebrations occur when a person believes victory is guaranteed. People don't begin celebrating when they believe victory is in doubt.

It is sometimes argued that the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:25-34 didn't know his salvation was eternally secure because the passage doesn't explicitly state that salvation can never be lost. Proponents of this view say that the Philippian jailer didn't have assurance of his eternal destiny.

However, let us examine Acts 16:25-34 to see if the Philippian jailer's behavior makes sense if he doesn't know that he is eternally secure. Paul and Silas have been unjustly imprisoned for their ministry in Philippi. While in prison, they continue to minister:

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself (Acts 16:25-27).

What is the jailer's state of mind at this time? He believes he has lost all the prisoners under his care. If this is true, he will be held responsible and be punished by his Roman superiors. Whatever the punishment may be, the jailer considers the pain inflicted by the Roman authorities to be worse than the pain he would suffer from killing himself with his own sword. Fortunately, the Apostle Paul intervenes: "But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here'" (Acts 16:28).

The jailer now has no reason to kill himself because Paul has reassured him that no prisoners have escaped. Although the jailer no longer fears torture and execution from the Roman authorities, he is still not at peace, having come within mere moments of dying: "Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" (Acts 16:29-30).

The consequences of death and one's eternal destiny are on the jailer's mind. After coming so close to death, he wants to know what will happen after he dies. In Paul and Silas' prayers and hymns—which the Philippian jailer may have overheard before falling asleep—there would surely have been references to eternal life and one's destiny after death. It's quite nat-

ural that the jailer would ask the men, “What must I do to be saved?”

Their response is one of the most famous evangelistic verses in Scripture: “So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’” (Acts 16:31). What is their answer to the question about one’s eternal destiny or the solution to death? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”

Now, some say that because Paul’s and Silas’ response doesn’t specifically communicate eternal security by attaching *eternal*, *everlasting* or some similar qualifier to the word *saved*, the Philippian jailer must have been using *saved* in some unspecified sense that would not include salvation’s being eternal, everlasting, forever, guaranteed, and irrevocable. They argue that the jailer could have understood that his salvation was not eternal because he would have needed to persevere in good works to keep his salvation, and that failure to persevere in good works would result in his losing salvation.

Others will argue that the jailer knew he was saved for the time being but was ignorant—or had not even considered—whether he was saved forever with a salvation that was guaranteed, irrevocable, and could not be lost. If the jailer was asked whether he was “once saved always saved,” these will argue that he would have responded that he did not know. But does this understanding make sense, given the jailer’s subsequent behavior?

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and *he rejoiced*, having believed in God with all his household (Acts 16:32-34, emphasis added).

Consider these questions: Would the jailer have rejoiced if he thought his salvation still depended upon his persevering in good works, or if he believed his salvation could be lost if he failed to persevere? Would the jailer have rejoiced if he was ignorant or unsure of the fact that his salvation was forever, that it was guaranteed, and that it could

never be lost? Human beings do not rejoice over uncertain victories or unknown gifts. The jailer must have understood and believed that the salvation he received was forever guaranteed, irrevocable, and eternally secure. Otherwise, there was no reason for him to rejoice.

Like Leon Lett and his touchdown celebration, the jailer began to celebrate and rejoice over his salvation. They both celebrated because they were certain of what they believed they would receive—for Lett, a touchdown, and for the jailer, a salvation that could never be lost. Neither had doubts about what they were going to receive, so they both began to rejoice and celebrate. Unfortunately, in Lett’s case, the celebration was premature because his belief in a certain touchdown proved erroneous.

Thankfully, in the jailer’s case and for all of us who have believed in Jesus for an irrevocable and eternally secure salvation, our rejoicing and celebrating are not premature and are not based on a falsehood. God’s Word promises only one kind of salvation—a salvation that can never be lost and that is eternally secure. A person who does not know or believe that his salvation is eternally secure does not believe what Paul and Silas told the jailer. That person is not believing what God means by *saved* in Acts 16:31.

Paul and Silas communicated to the jailer an eternally secure salvation. That is why the jailer rejoiced. We must give the answer Paul and Silas gave to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” *Salvation is guaranteed and eternally secure.* Many will, like the jailer, rejoice when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. ■



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

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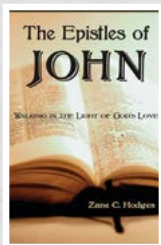


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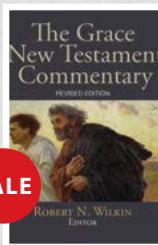


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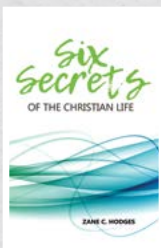


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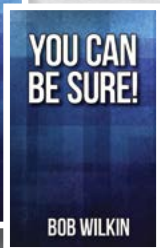
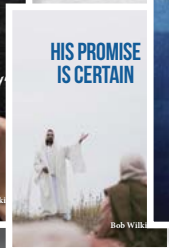
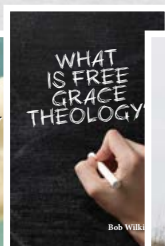
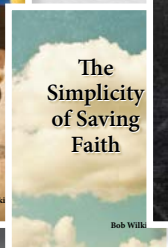
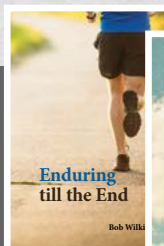


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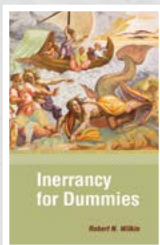


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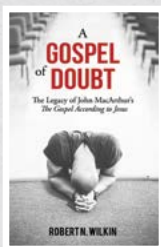


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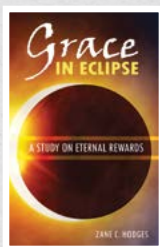


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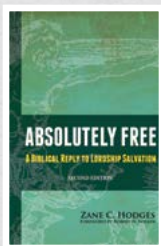


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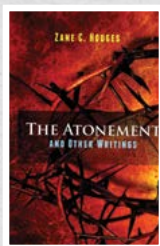


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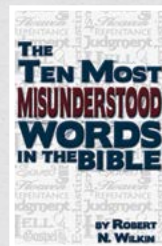


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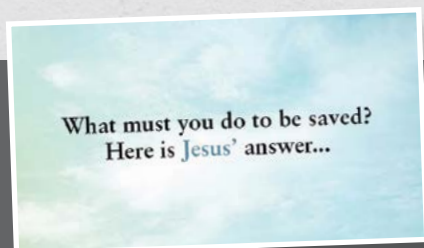


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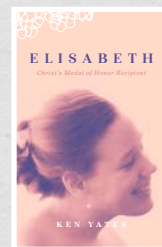


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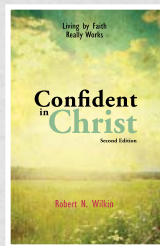


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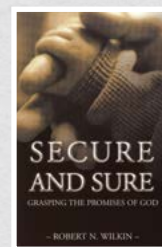


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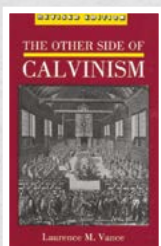


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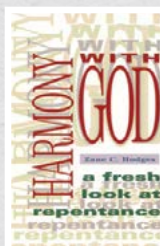


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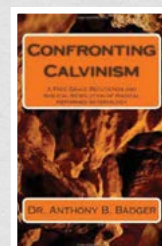


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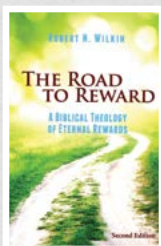


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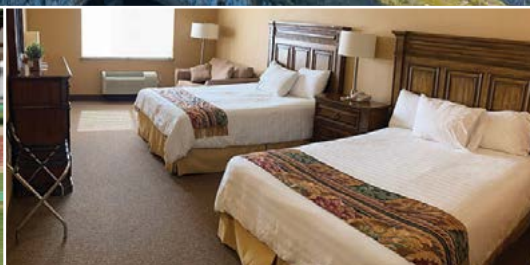
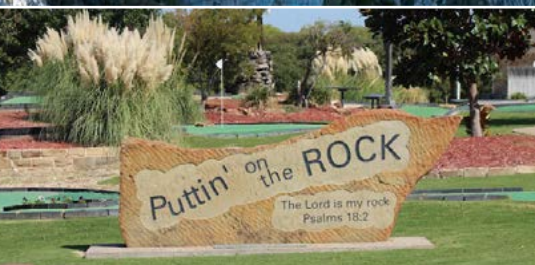
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Assurance by Inner Witness?

By Bob Wilkin

**This article first appeared in the March 1993 issue of Grace in Focus. It has been slightly edited.*

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, there are three pillars of assurance of salvation: the promises of God's Word, the works which the Holy Spirit produces through us, and the inner witness of the Spirit to the believer.¹ All three of these witnesses are considered necessary for one to be reasonably confident of his salvation.

According to the GES Affirmations of Belief, there is only one pillar of assurance: the promises of God's Word.

Since the GES Affirmations do not even mention the so-called inner witness of the Spirit, I thought it might be helpful to address that issue here.

DOES HE WITNESS TO US OR WITH US?

Most people misread Rom 8:16: "The Spirit Himself bears witness *to our spirit* that we are children of God." But the text says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness *with our spirit* that we are children of God."

The Greek makes this clear. One Greek verb (*summartureō*) conveys the meaning "bears witness along with." It is a compound verb that has a

preposition prefixed to it. The preposition clearly means *along with*, not *to*.

Romans 8:16 speaks of two witnesses: the Holy Spirit and our human spirit. They both bear witness together. This is in keeping with the OT principle that all matters need to be verified by at least two witnesses.

TO WHOM DOES HE BEAR WITNESS?

The Holy Spirit bears witness along with our human spirit that we are children of God. But to whom does He bear witness? The answer is clear in the context. Verse 15 indicates that we (i.e., our human spirits) cry out, "Abba, Father." In other words, our witness is to God the Father. If the Spirit is bearing witness *with* our human spirits, then He, too, must bear witness to God the Father. This conclusion is confirmed by v 26, which asserts that whenever we pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Clearly the Person with whom He is interceding for us is God the Father.

God the Father is the One to whom our human spirits, and the Holy Spirit, bear witness.

IT HAPPENS AS WE PRAY

The Holy Spirit's witness does not occur constantly. Rather, it happens as we pray. Whenever our human spirits cry out to God saying, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6; see also the Lord's Prayer, Luke 11:2, "Our Father. . ."), the Holy Spirit witnesses to God the Father that we are indeed His children.

To call God our Father is a way of reminding Him that we are His children. Whenever that greeting is true—that is, whenever a genuine child of God is praying—the Holy Spirit confirms its validity.

THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS IS UNDETECTABLE

While we are aware of when our human spirits cry out to God in prayer, calling Him our Father, we are unable to monitor the Holy Spirit's confirming witness. We cannot infallibly feel, see, hear, or in any way tune in to the Holy Spirit's witness to God the Father that we are His children—even though we might, in our experience of prayer, have a general sense that the Holy Spirit is at work. The only sure way we know that He does this is because the Bible tells us that He does.

GOD DELIGHTS IN THESE REMINDERS

God takes pleasure in this twofold testimony of our status as His children. This should motivate us to do our part.

And what is our part? Our part is to pray. As we say, "Our Father," the Holy Spirit says, "Yes, this is a child of God."

What a joy it is to realize that God delights in being reminded by us, and by the Holy Spirit, that we are His children.

GOD'S PROMISES ARE ALL WE NEED

According to the Apostle John, if we accept the testimony of God concerning His Son, then we *know* that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Assurance is objective. It is sourced in the Gospel. If we accept Jesus' claim that "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47), then we *know* that we have everlasting life!

It goes without saying that if we can know we have eternal life simply by accepting the testimony of God, then nothing else is needed.

I have a birth certificate that says I was born in Los Angeles in 1952. That objectively testifies to me that I am a citizen of the United States. I need not evaluate how I feel in order to determine whether I am really a U.S. citizen. My birth certificate is all I need.

The birth certificate of the believer is God's Word. It objectively testifies to us that we are citizens of heaven.

ASSURANCE IS THE BACKBONE OF CONFIDENT PRAYER

Those who search for the so-called inner witness of the Spirit do so in vain since that is His witness to God the Father, not to us.

Feelings can be deceptive. Liver quivers are unreliable.

Look to the Biblical promise that he who accepts the testimony of God concerning His Son has everlasting life. That and that alone is the only way to know for sure that you are a child of God. The Scriptures are the Holy Spirit's actual witness to us. The Spirit's work in assurance is through the Word, not through feelings.

Only on the basis of the promises of God as found in His infallible and inerrant Word can we know for sure that we are His children. And only with such assurance can we confidently call God our Father.² ■



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

1 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 18, "Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation," Sections 1-4 (esp. Section 2).

2 Editor's note: Until we believe in Jesus for the promise of everlasting life, we remain unregenerate. Once we believe His promise of life, we are secure forever, even if we later stop believing the promise and lose assurance. Everlasting life is guaranteed. Assurance of everlasting life, however, can be lost if we take our eyes off Christ.



The Bible

and the

Presidents

BY
ART FARSTAD¹

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

February is a presidential month for historically minded Americans. And rightly so. Our first and truly great president, George Washington, was born in February (Feb. 11, 1732, “Old Style” calendar, Feb. 22 “New Style”). So too was Abraham Lincoln, perhaps our greatest and most beloved president of all (Feb. 12, 1809). Their respective birthdays have been holidays in most states—or at least one of them was. Now it’s “Presidents Day”—and it’s supposed to include all of the presidents.

The office of President of the United States has become a very powerful one. People are influenced (no matter how much they may complain and deny it) by what these men—some great, some weak, and some mediocre—say and do.

The Grace Evangelical Society is interested in God’s Word—its teachings, and its application to everyday life. A very large percentage of U.S. presidents, whether definitely known to be believers or not, have said and written some very worthwhile things about our favorite Book.

I have chosen remarks on the Bible from a handful of presidents during the three centuries in which there have been presidents of the United States.

Eighteenth Century

The first president, George Washington, in office from 1789 through 1797, said, *“Above all, the pure and benign light of Revelation has had a meliorating influence on mankind, and increased the blessings of society.”*

Nineteenth Century

John Quincy Adams, president from 1825 to 1829, said, *“The first and almost the only book deserving of universal attention is the Bible. I speak as a man of the world... and I say to you, ‘Search the Scriptures.’”* Upon hearing a man defaming God’s Word, Andrew Jackson, president from 1829 to 1837, rebuked him with the following well-chosen words: *“Sir, that Book is the Rock on which our Republic rests!”* Abraham Lincoln, president from 1861 to 1865, had devout Christian parents but apparently didn’t become a believer till the darkest days of the Civil War. As a boy he read the Bible so much that his style was ever after heavily influenced by the King James Version. The following quotation is no doubt from the period before he found his faith: *“I am profitably engaged in reading the Bi-*

ble. Take all of this book upon reason that you can and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man." Ulysses S. Grant was a man of integrity. As he was dying of cancer he wrote his memoirs, not for prestige, but so as not to leave his family in debt. He finished in time; the royalties saved the family from financial ruin. Grant, who was president from 1869 to 1877, wrote: *"Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet anchor of your liberties; write its precepts on your hearts and practice them in your lives. To the influence of this book we are indebted for the progress made, and to this we must look as our guide in the future."*

Twentieth Century

President William McKinley, president from 1897 to 1901, was a genuine believer in Christ. His words are sorely needed by our currently Biblically illiterate, "Christian-bashing" culture: *"The more profoundly we study this Book and the more closely we observe its divine precepts, the better citizens we will become and the higher will be our destiny as a nation."* Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901 to 1909, said, *"Almost every man who by his life-work added to the sum of human achievement of which the race is proud, of which our people are proud, almost every such man has based his life-work largely upon the teachings of the Bible."* It was Herbert Hoover's misfortune to be presiding over the nation when the great stock market crash took place, though he was not responsible for it. Hoover, during his presidency from 1929 to 1933, did much to help the world's needy between the World Wars. He said, *"Whether it be of the law, business, morals, or that vision which leads the imagination in the creation of constructive enterprises for the happiness of mankind, he who looks for guidance in any of these things may look inside its covers*

and find illumination." We have read just a few presidential quotations—*powerful* men speaking of the *powerful* Book. If we had more space the list could be augmented at least fourfold.

Since our newsletter has British Commonwealth readers as well as U.S., let's have a royal quotation for our Canadian and other Commonwealth friends:

King George V, who ruled from 1910 to 1936, said words that are greatly needed in the British world today: *"It is my confident hope that my subjects may never cease to cherish their noble inheritance in the English Bible, which, in a secular sense, is the first of national treasures and is, in its spiritual significance, the most valuable thing that this world affords."*

Having dealt with men of power sufficiently, I would like to close with a few lines from one of North America's finest men of *poetry*:

We search the world for truth, we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful,
From graven stone and written scroll,
From the old flower-fields of the soul,
And, weary seekers for the best,
We come back laden from our quest,
To find that all the sages said
Is in the Book our mothers read.

—John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-92) ■



Art Farstad earned a Master of Theology in Old Testament and a Doctor of Theology in New Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary, where he also taught Greek for five years. He was the editor of the *New King James Version*, the *New Scofield Study Bible*, and the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. He passed in 1998.

1 This article originally appeared in the February 1992 issue of *The Grace Evangelical Society News*, a four-page newsletter.



Bob & Sharon with the Bryants (Bob & Sherry) and Sterlings (Philippe & Brenda) before the Dallas Regional Conference in October



Bob with Pastor Rich Olsen of Upland Bible Church



Old DTS Motto, "Preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2)" in Greek in Pastor Rich Olsen's office

MORE OF WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Bob and Sharon with Mike and Letitia Lii



Ken and Marino speaking at the Tallahassee Regional Conference



Bob visited with Pastor Leon Adkins, his wife, Sheila, and Veneeta Thomas

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BY KEN YATES

Introduction

I am a guy who likes creature comforts. I like indoor plumbing, a nice hot meal for supper, and a comfortable bed. Two or three pillows are pretty much a necessity as well.

When I joined the Army, I had to make a few sacrifices regarding these comforts when I trained with soldiers in the field. My first time in the field was in chaplain school. Regarding my sleeping arrangements, I had a little pup tent with a cot. On the cot, I had a sleeping bag. These things would keep me warm and dry at night. To make myself more comfortable, I brought a nice pillow for the seven days we were in the field. Such a scenario was not optimal, but it kept my complaining to a minimum.

After chaplain school, I was assigned to my first real Army unit—a parachute battalion. I didn't know what to expect. When I arrived, the unit was already in the field, and I was told I could visit and spend three days and nights with them. It would be a good opportunity to meet the soldiers and see what real Army life was like.

I was eager to do so but a little apprehensive. This wasn't like chaplain school, where I had been with fifty other chaplains. Those guys were like me. Now, I would be with younger soldiers who were medics, infantrymen, radio operators, and the like. I was not sure how I would relate to them.

The only thing I knew was that at night, I could curl up in my sleeping bag, on my cot, in my tent, relax, and get a pretty good night's sleep. It couldn't be too bad. I could handle whatever the next three days would bring when I considered my little sanctuary in the field.

My world was about to fall apart.

Meeting the Guys

Three soldiers and I drove out to the field in a military Humvee. It was my first time in such a vehicle, and everything was strange to me. I learned you had to wear your military Kevlar helmet anytime you were in the Humvee. That was a little uncomfortable. The Humvee didn't have any doors and thus had no heat. It was a little cold as the wind blew through the vehicle. I made a mental note to dress more warmly next time. Up to that point, my irritants were minor. Besides, not everything was bad. The hour-long drive gave me an opportunity to talk with the three infantrymen who were with me and get to know them better.

We arrived at our destination around 6 p.m. The unit commander, who would be my boss, was there. So were about fifty other soldiers. Even though I had no idea what was going on, I could walk around and introduce myself to the men. I tried to figure out their jobs and asked some of them what they were doing. They were very nice as they explained their responsibilities.

After a couple of hours, it began to get dark. I had done about all the talking I wanted to do for the day, so my thoughts turned to my little refuge. It would be great to lie down and rest. I had even brought a little transistor radio and some cheap headphones. I hoped to pick up a local station and listen to Country and Western music while I fell asleep.

My ignorance of the situation knew no bounds.

Where Are the Pup Tents?

I hadn't noticed something while I was walking around talking to everybody. It was only when I thought about going to bed that I realized there weren't any tents or cots out there. I didn't see any sleeping bags either. I assumed our sleeping arrangements were a short distance away, perhaps on the other side of a nearby hill. Finding that place was my focus, so I asked a sergeant operating a radio a really important question.

"Excuse me, Sergeant, but where are you going to sleep?" He pointed to the ground at his feet and said, "Right here, sir." Obviously, there was no tent, sleeping bag, cot, or pillow. I didn't know if he was joking or if he was one of the guys I'd heard about. I had been told there were guys in the Army who thought they were Rambo and liked to tough it out to prove they were macho. That may have been what that sergeant wanted, but that wasn't me. I went to look for my pup tent.

As I did, I ran into the commander. I was thrilled because I knew he would have the best sleeping accommodations in the field. Wherever he went to sleep, I would see if I could get in the tent next to his.

So, I asked him: "Sir, where are you going to sleep?" He pointed at an area about 10 feet away and said, "Right next to that bush." I looked at that bush. You probably already know what I didn't see. There wasn't a tent, cot, sleeping bag, or pillow in sight.

At that point, I had a revelation: I was in trouble.

I'm Glad I Didn't Know

I quickly learned that a parachute unit didn't have all the things I was looking for. When they

trained, they only took what they could parachute with. All my creature comforts were not allowed. As long as I was with that unit, when it trained, the ground would be my bed. That first night was brutal. I found a level place on the ground and slept there. My only comfort was that it didn't rain.

Looking back, I'm glad I didn't know what awaited me in the field. Had I known, there's a high probability that I wouldn't have entered the chaplaincy. I would have assumed that I couldn't cut it. That would have been a tragedy because I was able to adjust pretty quickly to the difficulties of Army life, including spending many nights asleep on the ground. I stayed in for a long time and had a long and satisfying career.

Discipleship Is Like That

It has occurred to me that discipleship in the Christian life is like my experience in the Army. After a person believes in Jesus for eternal life, he has the privilege of following the Lord in discipleship. That is a process by which the believer becomes more like Him. Eternal life is absolutely free, given by faith in Him alone, and can never be lost. Discipleship involves costly sacrifices.

Like me on my first night in the field, the new believer cannot possibly know what those sacrifices involve or what difficulties he will face as he follows the Lord. In many respects, he is blissfully ignorant of what awaits him. The Lord tells us we will face these trials, but the details will differ for each believer who sets out on that path.

We see an example of this in Luke 9:57. A person who is a picture of a believer tells the Lord Jesus that he will follow Him wherever He goes. We all realize this person has no clue what

he will encounter if he decides to follow through on this promise.

But I have to smile when I read what the Lord tells him. He says, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). This new believer might think that following Christ will not involve giving up any creature comforts. He probably hadn’t even considered the possibility.

The Lord tells him that foxes and birds have beds to sleep on. The Lord does not. He doesn’t even have a pillow. Christ gives this person more information than I had when I first joined the Army. There were many details this guy still didn’t know, but he knew a heavy price would be paid to spend time with the Lord.

We don’t know how he responded. I don’t know how I would have responded if the Lord had told me that. But as I draw an analogy to my experience in the Army, I’m glad I stuck it out that night so many years ago. I hope this young man responded wisely as well.

Conclusion

When I set out on my first adventure in the Army, I knew it would be different and that there would be some difficulties. Thankfully, I didn’t know all the details.

For the believer, following Jesus in discipleship is like that. He tells us that sacrifices will

need to be made, but there is no way we can know exactly what that will involve. It will be different for each believer.

If you had told me I’d have to sleep on the ground for extended nights in order to be a chaplain, there’s a good chance I would have decided not to become part of that life. That would have been a mistake. I received a great many rewards for staying in the military. My ignorance wound up being a blessing.

The same thing is true of discipleship. We don’t know what we might encounter if we follow the Lord. But He tells us He will be with us and strengthen us so that we can do what He asks us to do. He also promises that if we are faithful and endure, He will reward us in His kingdom more than we can possibly imagine.

It is a good thing that we don’t know all the details. The Lord tells us to follow Him. It is enough for us to say that wherever He lays His head at night, we don’t mind laying our heads in the same place. ■



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



A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Another Good Year

By Zane Hodges¹

You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance (Ps 65:11). So wrote King David centuries ago. Or perhaps he wrote this as a young man taking care of his father's sheep. Or he might even have written it while he was a fugitive from the hatred of King Saul.

It doesn't really matter *when* he wrote it, for he could have written it in *any year* of his life. And in any year since then, right up through 1991! For what David has written is a timeless truth about God's way of dealing with His people throughout the ages.

And it *is* with God's people that David is chiefly concerned. In fact, he opens the Psalm with these words: "*Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion.*"

A little later he writes: "*We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple*" (Ps 65:4b).

So it is of Israel, God's Old Testament people, that David is mainly thinking.

But his thoughts branch out to all mankind when he says: "*By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us [Israel], O God of our*

salvation, You who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas..." (Ps 65:5).

And it is of the entire earth that David is thinking in the verses that come right before the verse we are looking at (v 11). In those verses he expounds God's "goodness" in these words: "*You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth*" (Ps 65:9-10).

The complete simplicity of David's gratitude is touching. It is not of great achievements that David speaks, but of the regular and ordinary things that God does in and through His creation. These constitute the "goodness" with which God crowns the year, and for which David praises Him.

Perhaps, then, in this opening month of 1992 we should cast a backward glance at 1991. Was 1991 a year that God crowned with the simple things that make our lives livable and tinged with joy? Of course it was.²

But 1991 was also a hard year for many. Some lost loved ones in the Persian Gulf War. Others suffered financial reverses in a year of recession. Others experienced grave illnesses and other misfortunes. But David does not say that God makes every aspect of every year an undivided joy. Instead he says that God CROWNS the year with His goodness.

No matter what your experience in 1991 might have been like, I am sure you can find more than a few expressions of God's goodness which are the *crowning* aspects of your life last year.

Did you have food on your table? Did you have moments of happiness with your family?

Did God teach you anything about Himself? Did you enjoy some special times of prayer fellowship with Him? Were there answered prayers? What are the good things with which God crowned 1991 for you?

"Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion," David wrote. Does praise wait for Him among *us* as well? *Especially* among us who believe in God's absolutely free salvation? Surely, we can gratefully say with the Apostle Paul: "*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*" (2 Cor 9:15).

The song which we sang so often in a small Baptist church I attended in my childhood still speaks to me today:

Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God has done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God has done! ■



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

- 1 This article originally appeared in the January 1992 issue of what was then a four-page newsletter called *The Grace Evangelical Society News*.
- 2 Editor's note: In what ways was 2023 a year that God crowned with blessings for you? Now is a great time to reflect on His goodness to you.



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