

# GRACE (in) FOCUS

## “EASY” BELIEFISM

The Gift and the Giver   Honoring a Janitor   Language, Lips, and Loving Words  
Focused vs Flexible Free Grace   Is Assurance 'of the Essence of Saving Faith?'  
Myremecology   Sheep in Wolf's Clothing   A Saint or Ain't?   And much more

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# Letter from the Editor

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**I**srael is at war with terrorists. The war might end before you receive this issue. But it might spread to include Hezbollah. Iran could even attack Israel directly.

The free gift of everlasting life by faith in Christ, apart from works, is tied to the nation of Israel. They are God's chosen people. Just as God has promised to be faithful to His promises to the Jewish people, so He will be faithful to His promise of everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

Paul made that very argument in Romans 9-11. He wrote, for example, in Rom 11:1-6:

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.



Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and Israel.

I hope our magazine causes you to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many challenging articles in this issue. I was moved to tears by Ken Yates' article about a janitor named Bill at the Air Force Academy.

Maranatha.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Bob Wilkin".

Robert N. Wilkin



# Believing in the Gift and the Giver

By Vince Deegan



When Free Grace folks tell unbelievers what they must believe to have eternal life—that is, to be saved from the lake of fire and live in the kingdom of God forever—we tell them they must believe in the *gift* and the *Giver*. The gift is eternal life. The Giver is Jesus Christ. Jesus guarantees that the one who believes in Him for eternal life receives it. Since the gift is eternal, it can never be lost.

When believed, such a wonderful offer brings assurance. At the very moment of faith, the person who has believed in the gift and the Giver knows he has eternal life. He knows he will live with Jesus forever.

One of the many passages used to support such a presentation of the gospel that brings eternal life is John 4:10. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He told her that she needed to know the gift, and who it was who was speaking to her.

Recently, I was studying and came upon another passage that supports the view that one must believe in the gift and the Giver. Not surprisingly, it too gives the believer wonderful assurance of the gift of eternal life. That passage is 1 John 5:10-11.

First John 5:10-11 is found within a section of Scripture that clearly states the believer has the assurance of eternal life. In verse 13, John writes, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” No doubt, John writes this because there were those who were teaching that the believer cannot know he has eternal life. These teachers were attempting to take away the assurance that John’s readers had (1 John 2:24-26).

Whatever these teachers were saying was wrong. Of course, we have teachers like that today. They stand in pulpits and say we cannot be sure we have eternal life. We must do good works. We can lose our eternal salvation. We need to live in fear.

But that is not what God says. He has testified to the truth. John says so in verse 10:

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself...

And what has God said about this, the most important message of any age? John clearly states it in verse 11: “That God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” God declares the gift and the Giver. The gift—eternal life—has been given to the one who believes. This gift is given by the Giver, God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

In verse 10, John says that those who don’t believe this have made God a liar. It is obvious why that is the case. If God says that you must believe in the gift and the Giver, anybody who says that you don’t have to believe in those things—that you can believe in something else—proclaims that God did not tell the truth.

Theologians often speak of the content of saving faith. This refers to what the unbeliever must believe to spend eternity with Jesus in His kingdom. Many messages are out there telling people what this content is.

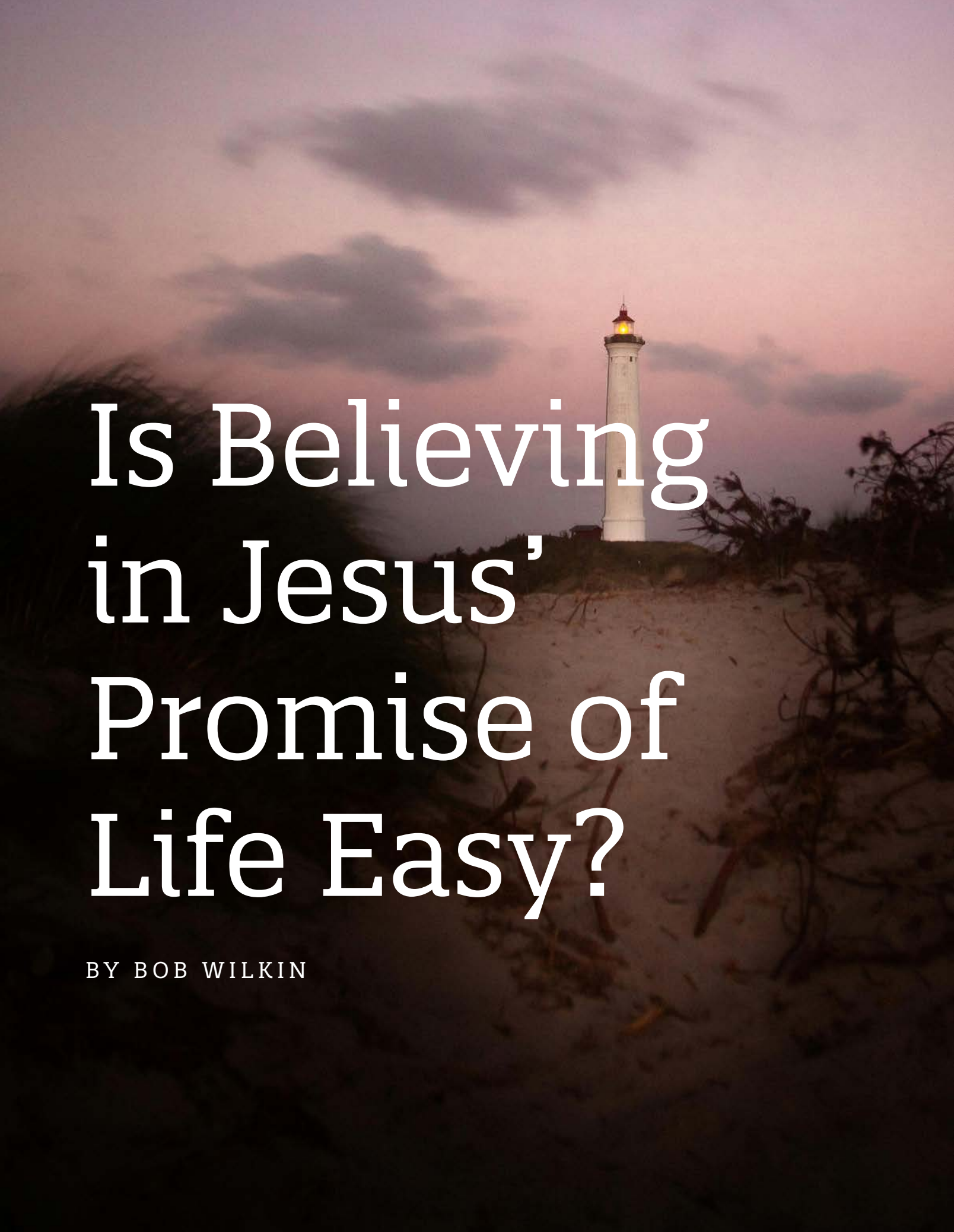
I am sure the false teachers in John’s day had great things to say about Jesus of Nazareth. Every preacher and teacher in Evangelicalism today does the same. But they give different answers to the question: What is the content of saving faith?

The answer is simple. Jesus gave the answer to the woman at the well. John tells us that the Father says the same thing. The unbeliever must believe in the gift and the Giver. The one who believes in Jesus for eternal life has it forever. ■




Vince Deegan has a small lawn maintenance business, and lives in Mesquite. Vince had been mentored by Zane Hodges and Bob Wilkin, and has been a subscriber of GES, since the early 90s. He teaches senior Sunday school at Ridge Pointe Fellowship.



A photograph of a white lighthouse with a red top and a glowing light, situated on a sandy dune. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and grey, suggesting dusk or dawn. The foreground is dark and shows some sparse vegetation. The title text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Is Believing in Jesus' Promise of Life Easy?

BY BOB WILKIN



**M**any people charge that the faith-alone view of salvation is easy believism. A while back I did a seven-minute YouTube video entitled, “What Is Easy Believism?” Check it out if you have time.

In this article, I’ll discuss whether believing in Jesus for everlasting life that can never be lost is easy. Is it?

If you ask people from non-Christian religions, they will say that having a blessed afterlife is not by faith in Jesus Christ. It is by following the tenets of their religion. One must stay on the path that leads to salvation. That is true for Muslims, Orthodox Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and other religions.

But what about within Christendom?

The cults do not believe the faith-alone message.

Most Protestants don’t believe the faith-alone message either.

Neither do most Catholics and Orthodox people.

If the message of faith alone, apart from works, is so easy to believe, why do so few people believe it?

The obvious answer is that it is not easy to believe. It is hard to believe.

But why is that the case?

First, it is hard to believe because it runs contrary to human nature. We think we have to earn our way in this life and in the life to come.

Second, it is difficult to believe because most traditions, even within Christianity, do not teach it. It is a view with far fewer adherents than the faith-plus-works perspective.

Most religions, including most within Christendom, oppose the faith-alone-in-Christ-alone position in print, in social media, on television, and face-to-face.

In an article entitled, “What is easy believism?” [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org)—in opposing what it considers easy believism to be—makes this bold statement:

“Faith alone” does not mean that some believers follow Christ in a life of discipleship, while others do not. The concept of the “carnal Christian,” as a separate category of non-spiritual believer, is completely unscriptural. The idea of the carnal Christian says that a person may receive Christ as Savior during a religious experience but never manifest evidence of a changed life. This is a false and dangerous teaching in that it excuses various ungodly lifestyles: a man may be an unrepentant adulterer, liar, or thief, but he’s “saved” because he prayed a prayer as a child; he’s just a “carnal Christian.” The Bible nowhere supports the idea that a true Christian can remain carnal for an entire lifetime. Rather, God’s Word presents only two categories of people: Christians and non-Chris-

tians, believers and unbelievers, those who have bowed to the Lordship of Christ and those who have not (see John 3:36; Romans 6:17–18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:18–24; Ephesians 2:1–5; 1 John 1:5–7; 2:3–4).<sup>1</sup>

The last paragraph in that article is quite telling:

Salvation is certainly free, but, at the same time, it costs us everything. We are to die to ourselves as we change into the likeness of Christ. Where easy believism fails is its lack of recognition that a person with faith in Jesus will lead a progressively changed life. Salvation is a free gift from God to those who believe, but discipleship and obedience are the response that will no doubt occur when one truly comes to Christ in faith.<sup>2</sup>

Compellingtruth.org has an article entitled “Easy Believism—What Is It?” The concluding paragraph reflects the same thinking as found at gotquestions.org:

The Gospel is easy to believe in one sense, yet the call to follow Christ is difficult. In fact, Jesus taught, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Therefore, easy believism is not an accurate expression of the call to follow Jesus. The call to believe in Christ is one based on faith, yet a faith that leads to action and a changed life.<sup>3</sup>

An article at John MacArthur’s *Grace to You* website heartily agrees:

The gospel according to Jesus explicitly and unequivocally rules out easy-believism. To make all of our Lord’s difficult demands apply only to a higher class of Christians blunts the force of His entire message. It makes room for a cheap and meaningless faith—a faith that has absolutely no effect on the fleshly life of sin. That is not saving faith.<sup>4</sup>

I could supply many similar quotes. Opposition to the faith-alone message is widespread in Christendom.

Third, Satan opposes the grace message (e.g., Luke 8:12; 2 Cor 4:4), making it hard to believe.

Do you believe in believism? Do you believe the message of John 3:16? Is it true that all who believe in Jesus will never perish and have everlasting life? If you believe that, you are an outsider as far as most people are concerned. If you share your faith with others, people will oppose what you are saying. They may mock you to your face or behind your back.

It is not easy to believe that simply by believing in Jesus, a person is saved once and for all. Jesus said that the way is narrow that leads to life, and few find it (Matt 7:13–14). Paul made it clear that the message of works salvation is the man-pleasing message and that the message of justification by faith alone, apart from works, is the God-pleasing message (Gal 1:10).

Easy believism? Hardly. It is hard to believe something that is widely rejected. But it is the truth. And once you believe, you know you are secure forever in Christ. That is truly good news, don’t you think? ■



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

- 1 See here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/easy-believism.html>. Note: We do not say, as gotquestions.org charges, that someone who prays a prayer or walks an aisle is eternally secure. We say that someone who believes in Jesus for everlasting life has that life. We do not believe or teach decisionism.
- 2 Ibid. What the author writes here is contradictory. Salvation cannot be a free gift and also cost us everything. Jesus paid it all. We pay nothing.
- 3 See here: <https://www.compellingtruth.org/easy-believism.html>. Note: The author confuses salvation and discipleship. Instead of faith in Christ being the condition for irrevocable salvation, he suggests following Christ in discipleship is the condition.
- 4 See here: <https://www.gty.org/library/Print/Blog/B160404>.



# WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



*Greekin' out during the first meeting of  
Ken's Greek 102 class*



*Bob puts on his party hat to  
celebrate finishing the New  
Year's Day 5K race*



*Whoa! Is that  
Moldova down there?  
Hint: it is*



*Another souvenir. That's a pretty handsome  
medal they pass out there*



*All the lovely people at Bayside Community Church*

*There's more on page 45.*

# HONORING A JANITOR

By Ken Yates

I attended one of our nation's military academies when I went to college. There were around 4,000 young cadets at the institution. We were studying to become future military leaders. The buildings where we worked and lived were named after past military leaders. We read of their exploits and saw their portraits hanging on walls around campus. These men were our heroes, and we aspired to be like them. On occasion, one of these heroes would come and speak to us. It was always thrilling to hear their stories.





There were other people, however, whom we barely noticed. Most people we met did not have the drive we had. In our opinion, they had not accomplished anything extraordinary. We did not see anything in them that we wanted to emulate. One of those people was Bill Crawford.

## JUST A JANITOR

Bill was one of the many janitors who worked at the academy. These men were responsible for cleaning the communal areas of the school. They would buff the floors of the long hallways we walked through daily. We also had communal bathrooms. The toilets and shower stalls needed cleaning. Young men generated a lot of trash, and Bill's job was to ensure the trash cans were emptied regularly.

While we did not outwardly disrespect Bill, it was easy to overlook him. He was around sixty years old and began showing signs of his age. He did not have the energy that we twenty-year-old cadets had. We saw him taking trash to dumpsters and waxing our floors with a buffer. If we ever thought about him, we looked at him as somebody who had never done anything great in his life. He was, after all, reaching retirement age and was cleaning up our messes.

I remember when generals like Jimmy Doolittle and Omar Bradley came and spoke to us. They were the kind of guys we noticed and applauded. Bill was not like that. Even though we saw him daily, most of us didn't even know his name.

That was about to change.

## A STARTLING DISCOVERY

As cadets, we studied military history. One night, one of my classmates was reading about Medal of Honor recipients. These men were the epitome of what it means to be a hero. Most of us had never met one personally. We could only read about how great they were.

My classmate was reading an interesting account of a World War II soldier named William Crawford. Crawford was a young Army private originally from Colorado. While fighting in Italy, he and his fellow soldiers were pinned down by machine gun fire. Crawford saved many of his fellow soldiers' lives by rushing toward the enemy that was firing at them. With bullets flying all around him, he approached and destroyed three machine gun nests. He had faced almost certain death to save the lives of his friends.

After the battle, Crawford was captured by the Nazis and became a prisoner of war. The Army thought he had been killed, but still wanted to honor him because of his amazing heroic deeds. His father, back in the United States, accepted the Medal of Honor on behalf of the son he and our nation thought was dead. It is the highest honor our nation can give its military heroes. A year later, Crawford was set free and returned home.

This is the kind of story that a cadet at a military academy would find awe-inspiring. He would want to meet a man like William Crawford and buy him dinner. As my classmate read the story, it occurred to him that our janitor probably had the same name as this hero from WW II. *Bill* is usually short for *William*. He vaguely remembered that someone had mentioned that Bill was an Army veteran. It sure was a coincidence that our academy was located in Colorado, which was the home of that heroic soldier. Bill, our janitor, was also roughly the same age as the private who saved all those lives in Italy years before. There was a picture of William Crawford, and even though it was over thirty years old, it bore a striking resemblance to Bill the Janitor.

Those were some strange coincidences. But surely, our Bill could not be William Crawford, could he? The man who cleaned our toilets and took out our trash—a man we saw daily but hardly noticed—could not be the greatest military hero we had ever met.

To put such a notion completely to rest, my classmate decided to ask Bill. Surely, Bill would find it hilarious that anybody would think he was such a national treasure.

## IS THIS YOU?

When Bill came to work the next day, the curious cadet showed him the article with William Crawford's picture. He got right to the point and asked, "Bill, is this you?"

I am told that Bill looked at the picture for a while before answering. He said, "Yes. That was a long time ago."

I am not sure a person who has never had any connection with the military can fully appreciate the impact this revelation had on the cadets who knew Bill. There were also active-duty Air Force personnel who worked at the academy. They were astonished to learn who this janitor was. To say that Bill's life changed from that moment on would be a gross understatement.

Whenever the cadets had a military function, their janitor would be the guest of honor. He was asked to give speeches. When cadets greeted him in the hallways, "Hey, Bill," would no longer do. It was now, "How are doing, Mr. Crawford?" I don't know this for sure, but I would venture to say that some cadets carried their own trash to the dumpster instead of leaving it for Mr. Crawford. I bet they were also tidier in a lot of different ways. It didn't seem right that Mr. Crawford had to clean up after twenty-year-old cadets.

The bottom line is that Mr. Crawford was given the respect he so richly deserved. But he would soon get an even greater honor.

## THE PRESIDENT IS COMING TO TOWN

It is customary that when a living recipient is awarded the Medal of Honor, the President of the United States makes the presentation in person. Because William Crawford was in a POW camp and thought to be dead, that did not happen for him in 1944. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan came to the academy to address the graduating class. When he heard about the janitor in Colorado, he decided to make things right.

The graduation took place in a packed football stadium. Thousands of people were there, many

for the first time. As they looked, through binoculars, at the honored guests on the stage, they would have recognized many of them. There were plenty of generals. Many dignitaries from Washington, DC accompanied President Reagan. Guests would have seen many of these men and women on television.

There was one man on that stage, however, whom they did not know. He was an older man and was not wearing Air Force blue. He wore Army green. If anybody gave him a second look, they might have thought he was part of the president's security detail. Maybe he was the person who would pick up the trash after all the important people left when the ceremony was over.

I can only imagine what the people in that stadium thought when President Reagan said he wanted to honor a particular man on that stage. Of all the powerful people on that stage, he called William Crawford to join him at the podium. The actions of a private who fought in World War II in Italy four decades earlier were read. It almost sounded like a myth. After they were recounted, Reagan placed William Crawford's Medal of Honor around his neck.

On a day when graduates were honored for their accomplishments and numerous honored guests were in attendance, the man with the greatest honor was an unknown janitor. Only he stood side by side with the president.

## AN ILLUSTRATION OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

The events of William Crawford's life provide an illustration of the parable the Lord taught in Luke 14:7-11. He said that when we are invited to dinner, we should not seek to sit in the seats reserved for honored guests. Instead, we ought to take a lowly seat. We should allow the dinner host to call us forward and seat us in a place of honor.

A major point in this parable is that we should not think too highly of ourselves. We should be humble, as Jesus was. We should not concern ourselves with how the world sees us but with how He



...we should not seek to sit in the seats reserved for honored guests...we ought to take a lowly seat. We should allow the dinner host to call us forward and seat us in a place of honor.

sees us. He will exalt those who humbly do what He commands them to do in His Word.

William Crawford was a military example of what that looks like. He had faithfully served his country. For years, he was surrounded by people who did not appreciate his sacrifices. They were not even aware of them. Yet, he continued to do what was required of him. He continued serving those in the military who were around him. He was content with living outside the spotlight. If we could picture him at a dinner with the cadets and Air Force people around him, he would be sitting in the back row.

The Commander-in-Chief, however, called him forward. The president gave him the most honored seat in the house.

## THE KING IS COMING TO TOWN

Just as President Reagan came to Colorado and honored William Crawford, we are told that the King of Kings, Jesus Christ, will one day come and judge believers. Everybody who has believed in Him for eternal life will live in His kingdom forever. But Luke 14:7-11 tells us that He will honor those who did what He told them to do. He will call them forward and give them positions of honor in that kingdom.

I must admit, I am thrilled by the story of William Crawford. But I know that it will not be nearly as thrilling as what we see when Christ comes and honors His humble servants. In our churches

and in our lives, there are Christian heroes walking around incognito; we are probably unaware of how great they are. They are not famous. They don't pastor large churches or have fancy theological degrees. Others might even look down on them. They might even be called heretics.

What they do, however, is humbly serve the Lord. They are faithful to Him. They are content knowing that He is the Owner of the house—the Host of the dinner. Only His opinion matters.

I try to picture what it will be like when the Lord comes and judges His servants at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will call some forward to stand with Him. He will declare their deeds done in service to Him (Matt 16:27). Instead of Medals of Honor, He will give them eternal crowns.

I have a lot of questions about that day. I wonder what it will be like. William Crawford surprised a lot of people. I don't know whether he was a believer or not, but I know that when the Lord comes there will be a lot of people like him. There will be Christian William Crawfords who surprise us. How great will it be to see the heroes of the faith get the honor they deserve from the King? ■



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.

# Is Assurance “of the Essence of Saving Faith” in the Gospel of John?

By Bob Vacendak





**I**s assurance of salvation “of the essence of saving faith” in the Gospel of John? Of course, when we say *of the essence* we mean: “Is assurance of salvation *a necessary part* of saving faith?” Since the Reformation, scholars have debated the assurance of salvation. The crux of the issue is: Can people be certain they will be with God forever, or is this impossible? And if they can be certain, must they be certain before they can have everlasting life?

Confusion about assurance is rampant. Among the most learned and well-known evangelical teachers and writers are those who are totally uncertain of their own eternal destinies. As a result, the uncertainty—along with its miserable side effects—that grips these Christian leaders is passed on to those in the pew and the classroom. The words of long-time professor Gary Burge illustrate this. Burge writes:

I am frankly astonished at the number of times I have explained to classes of Christian college students about the unmerited love God has for us...and how in the course of my explanation students from strong evangelical churches literally will cry...they point to the *insecurity* they have learned at their home churches. “If I don’t feel like God’s child, maybe I’m not.” “If I can’t always act like God’s child, perhaps I never was.” My office has witnessed such statements from the children of our evangelical households every semester for years.

I can relate to this. I was one of those students. My personal experience with this uncertainty that plagues Christianity was a key motivation for writing my dissertation. Scripture is clear that belief in Christ’s assuring promise involves 100% certainty that one *has* eternal life. Therefore, my goal in this article is to answer the following question: Does John’s Gospel expect 100% certainty of eternal life at the very moment of saving faith? In other words, does assurance occur *at the moment* a person believes in Christ for eternal life? Or is assurance in some way probationary, partial, or contingent upon post-conversion obedience and perseverance in faith?

In the Gospel of John, assurance is of the essence of saving faith. In other words, *inherent* in Christ’s promise of eternal life in John’s Gospel is His absolute assurance of eternal life at the very moment of faith to the one who believes His promise. Therefore, no one is born again until he is 100% certain that Christ has saved him forever.

Having said that, please allow me to insert a caveat. While born-again people *can* lose their assurance of eternal life, they *cannot* lose eternal life itself. That is very important to note. Jesus promised that He would not lose *one person* who ever believed in Him (see John 6:39).

## KEY TERMINOLOGY

Now, two key phrases we need to be familiar with are *partial assurance* (which is less than complete certainty that Christ has given one eternal life) and *absolute assurance* (which is complete certainty that Christ has given one eternal life and that he will never be condemned).

Free Grace theologians view assurance as absolute—i.e., 100% certainty. Calvinist and Arminian theologians view assurance as partial. Both Calvinists and Arminians believe that people can be saved without being certain they will be with God forever.

A study of what has been written regarding assurance of salvation reveals two things. The first is that assurance has been a central focus of scholarly debate since Luther and Calvin. The second is that most scholars *deny* that absolute assurance is even possible. In contrast, Free Grace theologians argue that in John’s Gospel, assurance is not only possible, but *a necessary part* of saving faith.

When one examines the history of the theology of assurance, it is seen that both Luther and Calvin *rediscovered* the Biblical truth that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. However, a century later, the Westminster divines rejected the Reformers’ words (as well as the Apostle John’s intent), and, in 1647, wrote: “...infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of saving faith.” Westminster’s theology introduced a scourge of uncertainty that plagues professing Christians to the present day.

Ironically, the *Westminster Confession* verifies that absolute assurance is not the novel theology that many contemporary scholars claim. The words of Westminster prove absolute assurance's existence *prior to* the Confession's 1647 publication. If absolute assurance was not taught before 1647, it makes no sense that those words were included in Chapter 18 of the *Confession*.

## KEY ARGUMENTS

### *The “Never” Passages*

Four units of passages in John's Gospel *confirm* absolute assurance and *deny* partial assurance. The first verification of absolute assurance can be called “The ‘Never’ Passages.” Seven times in John's Gospel, Jesus gives an assuring promise that the one who believes in Him for eternal life that will:

- » never thirst (4:14; 6:35b).
- » never hunger (6:35a).
- » never be cast out (6:37).
- » never die spiritually (8:51; 11:26).
- » never perish/be snatched out of His hand (10:28).<sup>1</sup>

The Greek phrase for *never* (*ou mē*) is emphatic. Jesus seeks to preclude doubt via divine promise. The believer in Christ has Jesus' promise—His ironclad guarantee—that he will *never* perish in hell; it is a total impossibility. Thus, at the very moment of faith in His assuring promise, Jesus bestows eternal life, and the believer is sure of it. It has become the believer's permanent and irrevocable possession. Belief in Christ is the only contingency. The “never” passages in John argue that absolute assurance of eternal life is part and parcel of saving faith.

### *The “Has” (or “May Have”) Everlasting Life Passages*

The second piece of evidence in John for absolute assurance is what can be called “The ‘Has’ (or ‘May Have’) Everlasting Life Passages.” Six times in John's Gospel, Christ promises the believer that eternal life is his *the very moment* he believes (3:15-

16; 5:24; 6:40; 6:47; 6:54).<sup>2</sup> Two examples are as follows:

- » “...he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me **has** everlasting life...” (5:24).
- » “...he who believes in Me **has** everlasting life” (6:47).

Calvinists and Arminians say that a believer must wait until death to be absolutely certain of eternal life. But Jesus says the opposite. He promises that the believer has eternal life *right now*! Thus, failure to understand that Jesus—right now—has absolutely assured one's eternal destiny, is to believe something *less* than Jesus' actual promise.

### *The “For Eternity” or “Forever” Passages*

The third piece of evidence in John may be called “The ‘For Eternity’ or ‘Forever’ Passages.” Six passages in John argue that assurance is inseparable from saving faith. Jesus gives assuring promises that the one who believes in Him for eternal life will:

- » never thirst **for eternity** (4:14).
- » live **forever** (6:51, 58).
- » never experience spiritual death **for eternity** (8:5; 11:26).
- » never perish **for eternity** (10:28).

(*For eternity/forever* = (*eis ton aiōna*) lit., “into the ages.”)

If the double-negative *never* were not emphatic enough, Jesus adds the words *for eternity*. In John 10:28, Jesus promises those who believe in Him for eternal life that they will never ever perish in hell *for all eternity*! Thus, failure to comprehend *at the moment of faith* that Jesus guarantees one's eternal destiny is to believe something *less* than what Jesus has actually promised.

### *The Future Resurrection Passages*

The fourth and final piece of evidence in John for absolute assurance is what can be called “The Future Resurrection Passages.” In three passages,



Christ's assuring promise to those who believe in Him is that He will physically raise them from the dead:

- » 6:40: "...everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; **and I will raise him up on the last day.**"
- » 6:54: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood [a metaphor for believing] has eternal life, **and I will raise him up at the last day.**"
- » 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life... he who believes in Me, though he may die, **he shall live.**"

Jesus does not promise believers a future resurrection body based on *a lifetime* of faith and obedience, but on *one moment* of faith in His promise. Thus, to believe in Jesus for His promise of everlasting life is to know—at that very moment—that one will live eternally. Certainty of eternal life and future resurrection is Christ's assuring promise.

## SUMMARY

In all four sets of evidence derived from John's Gospel, Christ's assuring promises *demand* that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. All four *deny* that assurance is merely probationary or impossible before death. One who has *never* possessed certainty of eternal life has *not yet* believed Christ's promise. His promise is the guarantee of eternal life by the God who cannot lie. Thinking that absolute assurance is only possible after death *totally* misreads Christ's assuring promises.

## CONCLUSION

Three over-arching arguments are presented in this article.

1. **Absolute assurance is not a novel theology, but a NT truth that Luther and Calvin rediscovered.**

Jesus, the apostles, and the early Reformers all taught absolute assurance of salvation. Faithful followers of Christ continue to teach it today.

2. **Those theologies requiring life-long perseverance for "final salvation" fatally compromise the doctrine of absolute assurance.**

Calvinism and Arminianism cannot provide 100% certainty of salvation. Both theologies treat *perseverance* (not *assurance*) as of the essence of saving faith. These systems make final salvation *impossible* apart from lifelong perseverance. As a result, they necessarily make absolute assurance *unattainable* in this life. Free Grace theology, however, argues that Jesus makes assuring promises so believers will know *with certainty* that their destiny is secure.

3. **Christ's promises in John's Gospel establish assurance of salvation as of the essence of saving faith.**

The promises of Christ are clear. The one who believes in Him for eternal life *has it*—and is sure of it—the moment he believes, because *eternal life* is what Christ promises. To possess what is eternal is to be certain that it is one's forever. If a person has *never* been 100% certain that he currently possesses eternal life, that person has *not yet* believed Christ's promise of eternal life. In the Gospel of John, assurance of salvation *is* of the essence of saving faith. The basis of this assurance is not the believer's feeble hold on Christ, but Christ's sure grip on the believer. ■



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- 1 Hebrews 13:5 is another passage (outside of John's Gospel) where Jesus gives a "never" promise: "...He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"
- 2 John the Baptist adds a seventh passage in John 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life..."

# *Language, Lips, and Loving Words*



A FREE GRACE RESPONSE  
TO ISAIAH 19:18

By Kathryn Wright

Recently, I have read some writings by Bible teachers who say we can determine true believers by what they say. These teachers propose that Isaiah does that by describing the language a believer uses and what a believer does with his lips. It is then maintained that the NT Book of James supports this kind of proof of salvation.

These arguments are unconvincing, to say the least. More importantly, they are unbiblical.

## Language: Isaiah 19

Isaiah prophesied during times that were desperate and dark. The Assyrians were about to invade. Destruction was coming, not only for Israel but for many of the nations that surrounded her. In chapters 13–23, the prophet describes the judgment that will fall on Israel’s Gentile neighbors. For example, in chapter 19, Isaiah predicts the destruction that will fall upon Egypt. That nation will be taken into captivity.

However, there is still hope. In contrast to the gloom and doom of his day, Isaiah provides a glimpse into Egypt’s future (vv 16-25). Speaking of the Lord’s future earthly reign from Jerusalem, he says:

In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak *the language of Canaan* and swear by the Lord of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction (Isa 19:18, emphasis added).

During the millennial reign of Christ, some major Egyptian cities will incorporate the Hebrew language and swear by the Lord of Hosts. Many see this description as indicative of regeneration. For example, the Nelson Study Bible makes this succinct comment: “These new habits spring from the miracle of regeneration.”

Motyer, however, argues that this is an indication of genuine faith, saying:

It is typical of Isaiah (cf. 6:5, 7) that the foremost mark of true religion is speech (cf. Jas 1:26) (J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 168).

These comments spring from a Calvinistic perspective. Under that theological system, born-again people make their salvation evident through their habitual good works. In this example, the good work would be the incorporation of the Hebrew language. The Calvinist would argue that spiritually saved people show this condition through their speech. It is maintained that the Egyptians of Isaiah 19 prove they are saved by their use of the Hebrew language.

## Lips: Isaiah 6

Motyer cites two passages to support his view that Isaiah has “true religion” in mind. First, he cites Isaiah 6, which describes the Lord’s commissioning the prophet to preach to the Nation of Israel. In this famous passage, Isaiah has a vision of the throne room of God. The Lord is seen on His throne surrounded by angels who, in respectful awe, praise and worship Him (6:2-3). In response to this vision, the prophet is moved to confess the sin of having unclean lips (v 5). After this confession, he is purged (via a live coal on his lips), then assigned to preach to the nation.

Regarding this verse, Motyer writes:

The touching of the lips with the live coal shows how God ministers to the sinner at the point of confessed need (cf. verse 5). The effect is instantaneous. The two verbs, *has touched* and *is taken away*, are co-ordinate perfects, stressing that as soon as the one happened the other happened also. Isaiah contributes nothing; all is of God... Isaiah confessed what he knows (lips) but God deals also with his guilt/iniquity, the inner reality of the deviant nature, and with his sin, the specific instances of shortcomings. All of this arises from the payment of the price... God covers guilt out of free grace... (Motyer, *Isaiah*, 78, emphasis added).

Motyer sees this passage as a conversion experience. However, despite his use of the phrase *free grace*, and his insistence that Isaiah does nothing to obtain this purging, Isaiah does confess his sin. The prophet had a role in this cleansing process. It is a process. He had to do the work of confession.



Then the angel had to take the coal, bring it to Isaiah, and put it to his lips to cleanse him. This is not an instantaneous cleansing. Human confession, the actions of an angel, and the use of coal were all involved in this purging.

Jennings remarks on this passage:

Isaiah instantly recognizes that it is his lips that are unclean, not merely those of his neighbors...In the light of that glory, there is “no difference, for all have sinned and come short” of it. He is no better, any more than that one thief on Calvary was better than the other, he was no less a thief. The publican in the temple was not “better” than the Pharisee. The only difference was that these confessed that there was no difference. But that is of so vast a difference as to bring a blessing instead of a curse, a kiss instead of a blow, heaven instead of hell (F.C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah*, 64).

Motyer and Jennings would agree that this is an account of Isaiah’s spiritual conversion. Jennings speaks of the necessity of confession in order for that conversion to take place. Similarly, Ironside writes:

It is ever thus when man is brought consciously into the presence of God. When Job saw the Lord, he cried, “I repent in dust and ashes.” When Simon recognized in Jesus the Creator of the fish of the sea, he fell at His feet and cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” And so with our prophet. When he saw himself in the light of the holiness of God, he at once acknowledged his sinfulness... (H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*, 39).

In response to this confession, Ironside continues:

As the coal touched his lips, Isaiah heard the comforting words, “Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.” The divinely sent messenger proclaimed the good

news of redemption and purification from sin... (Ironside, *Isaiah*, 39-40).

To summarize, scholars generally agree that Isaiah 6 is a description of the prophet’s salvation, and that his confession was a requirement for receiving that salvation. However, there are many problems with this interpretation.

First and foremost, confession is not a requirement for receiving eternal life. The unbeliever is saved by faith in Jesus alone for eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:40; 11:25-28; Eph 2:8-9). In the Gospel of John, the only evangelistic book in the Bible (John 20:30-31), confession of sin is never mentioned as a requirement for salvation. Its absence from the Gospel of John shows that confession is unnecessary to one’s receiving eternal salvation. Furthermore, Isaiah 6 never mentions faith or eternal life, or that what Isaiah is receiving is a gift. Isaiah is cleansed via a hot coal on the mouth.

This is a passage about the purging of sin, about judgment, and about the consequences of sin. If Isaiah were an unbeliever at the beginning of the passage, his acknowledgement of sin, while good, would not save him from the lake of fire. Unbelievers can acknowledge their sins. Many Catholics, Mormons, and members of cults regularly confess their sins as a part of their rituals. The acknowledgement and confession of sin are works. Therefore, no one has received eternal life because they knew or acknowledged that they were a sinner.

Second, believers confess their sins. Much of the discussion of Isaiah 6 loses sight of the fact that in the Bible, believers are the ones who most often confess sins. Church-age believers, for example, are encouraged to confess their sins as they walk with the Lord (1 John 1:9). Job and Simon were already believers when they made such confessions.

While confession is not required in order to receive eternal life, it is a prerequisite for receiving the forgiveness of sins as we walk with the Lord. In Isaiah’s case, it was a necessary part of his preparation for going out as the Lord’s mouthpiece. The Book of Isaiah deals with a rebellious nation that

needed to confess and repent of its sins in order to restore its intimacy with God. As God's representative, Isaiah needed to be an example of this. This is a fellowship passage, in preparation for a job. However, nothing involved is a salvific issue.

Finally, Motyer uses Isaiah 6 and 19 to show that the prophet connects true religion and speech. However, the contexts of these two chapters are vastly different. In addition, neither chapter explains how a person receives eternal life. Isaiah 19 speaks of the Hebrew language being used in Christ's millennial kingdom. Isaiah 6 describes the Lord's preparing a prophet who is already a believer for the ministry to which God has called him. Using these two chapters to argue that true believers will change their speech is invalid.

## Loving Words: James 1:26

Motyer cites Jas 1:26 as a cross-reference to the passages in Isaiah:

If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's *religion is useless* (Jas 1:26, emphasis added).

Motyer believes that such a person—one with unclean speech—is not saved. But James is written to believers who are being admonished to be slow to speak during trials (1:19). In short, this passage deals with discipleship truths rather than with proving our eternal salvation via our words.

Zane Hodges writes:

James dismisses the *religion* of any Christian person who places no restraint on the use of his tongue. Sanctimonious prayers in public or private were worth little if the person who offered them had lips filled with slander, deceit, and cursing when he talked to other people (see 3:9-10) (Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing*, 46).

Notice that James doesn't question the salvation of the person who fails to control his tongue. He does, however, reject the usefulness of their religion. What good are puffed-up prayers when we don't use loving words toward others? This is a verse about the practicality of using loving words, not a litmus test of a person's regeneration. Many believers fail to bridle their tongues. Refraining from cursing and unwholesome speech, while good, does not prove a person is a Christian.

## Conclusion

Combining Jas 1:26, Isaiah 6, and Isaiah 19 in order to prove that true Christians control their tongues and use godly speech is an exercise in futility. James warns Christians about being hypocritical in their speech. Isaiah 6 deals with the confession of sin that a believer engages in. Isaiah 19 describes people's use of the literal Hebrew language in the kingdom to come. People will learn this new language just as people today learn new languages. This has nothing to do with their spiritual salvation. If we read these texts in their contexts and stick to the plain meaning of each, we will avoid misunderstanding them.

Unfortunately, some Calvinists read their theology into these passages and attempt to argue that eternal salvation requires a cleansing of our lips through confession of sins and that a true Christian is known by his pure speech. Neither proposition is true. Eternal salvation is by faith alone, not confession. Furthermore, as James makes abundantly clear, Christians often do not speak in a godly manner. ■



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FOCUSED

FREE GRACE

(VERSUS)

FLEXIBLE

FREE GRACE

CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER? PART 1

BY MIKE LII



## Introduction

**F**ree Grace theology is unified around the concepts that (a) salvation is by faith in some truth about Jesus and (b) this salvation, when received, can never be lost (eternal security). However, Free Grace theologians do not all agree upon (1) the truth about Jesus that must be believed necessary in order to be saved and (2) whether this truth includes the concept of eternal security.

This article describes two different systems of Free Grace theology. These two systems differ on whether eternal life is an essential part of the saving message and whether one is 100% assured of eternal life by believing the saving message.

While in the Bible the term *gospel* simply means “good news,” this article will use the term to refer specifically to the good news of the saving message of Jesus.

This article will define the terms *eternal life* and *everlasting life* with the Biblical definition of “a guaranteed life with Jesus forever that can never be lost.” In other words, the terms *eternal life* and *everlasting life* include the concept of eternal security.

## What Are Focused Free Grace and Flexible Free Grace?

We find two essentially divergent positions under the banner of Free Grace theology. This article will distinguish between these two positions with the terms *Focused Free Grace* and *Flexible Free Grace*.

### A. FOCUSED FREE GRACE AND FLEXIBLE FREE GRACE DEFINED

The difference between these two positions comes down to the answers to two questions regarding the content of the gospel and assurance:

1. Content: What must I believe to be saved?
2. Assurance: Am I assured of eternal life when I believe the saving message?

For Focused Free Grace, the answer to the first question is: You must believe in Jesus’ promise of everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it. The answer to the second question is: Yes, there is always assurance of eternal life when believing the saving message. Because of the content of the promise that is believed, one who is currently believing this promise currently knows for sure that he has everlasting life. Otherwise, one is not believing. In other words, assurance of eternal life is of the essence of saving faith.

Flexible Free Grace answers the first question as follows: You must believe in Jesus, but you do not need to believe in Jesus for eternal life. For Flexible Free Grace, there is flexibility as to whether to include everlasting life in the saving message.

Flexible Free Grace answers the second question this way: Assurance of eternal life is not always present when believing in Jesus, because of the flexibility in whether to include eternal life as part of the gospel. Under Flexible Free Grace, there can be people who are currently believing in Jesus—which results in eternal life—but who are currently unsure of whether they have eternal life. In other words, assurance of eternal life is optional for saving faith.

Therefore, we find two essentially different views within Free Grace theology. Focused Free Gracers consider everlasting life an essential part of the gospel, and assurance of everlasting life as the essence of believing the gospel. Flexible Free Gracers view the issues of eternal life and assurance of eternal life as optional in both presenting and believing the gospel, resulting in flexibility regarding the gospel message.

## Essential Difference in Whether Eternal Life Must Be Included in the Saving Message

### A. FOCUSED FREE GRACE: TWO NON-NEGOTIABLES OF THE SAVING MESSAGE

At the GES National Conference in 2000, foreshadowing the issues this article raises, Zane Hodges made the following remarks on the non-negotiable content of the gospel:

There are two non-negotiables here.

Number one, no salvation anywhere for anybody apart from the name of Jesus. Now by that, we're talking about the **Jesus of the New Testament. Not Jesus Espinoza**, who lives in the barrio in Los Angeles. We're certainly not talking about Mr. X, in whom we have believed, and oh, we discover later that it's Jesus. No, in this age you have to believe in Jesus, the Jesus of the New Testament. That's one non-negotiable.

The other non-negotiable is that you must believe that He **guarantees eternal salvation** or that He gives everlasting life. Dr. Charles Ryrie used to say, "If you could lose everlasting life, it has the wrong name. It's not everlasting."

So the two non-negotiables are very simple: Number one, the **Jesus of the New Testament must be the focus**

**of a person's faith, and the person is believing that the Jesus of the New Testament provides and guarantees his eternal destiny**"<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added).

Hodges describes two non-negotiables as the content of the saving message:

1. Believe in Jesus of the New Testament
2. for the free gift of everlasting life (in other words a life that can never be lost).

These two non-negotiables are the focus or "bullseye"<sup>3</sup> of the Focused Free Grace gospel and are consistent with Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well:

If you knew the gift of God [non-negotiable #2] and who [non-negotiable #1] it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (John 4:10).

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she needs to know two things. First, she needs to know who it is who is speaking to her: Jesus, the Giver. Second, she needs to know the gift of God: eternal life. The saving message, which may be summarized as, "Believe in Jesus for eternal life," is taught throughout the Gospel of John using these two non-negotiables (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27).

### B. FLEXIBLE FREE GRACE OMITS THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE SAVING MESSAGE

In Hodges' 2000 GES conference message, he was aware of an early form of Flexible Free Grace and warned about it:

Subsection number one is, "Believe that Jesus died on the cross."

In recent years, I have become aware of a way of presenting the gospel invita-

tion that kind of bothers me. I believe I have heard it from my earliest years, and I admit it really didn't bother me for a long time. Now it does. I have heard people say this, "In order to be saved, you must believe that Jesus died on the cross."

In the context of this discussion today, I mean that this is their **summary** of the requirement of faith. This is **not just one item**, okay?

You say, "How does a person get saved?"

They say, "Believe that Jesus died on the cross." Whenever I hear that nowadays, I get *extremely uncomfortable*<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added).

Why was Hodges *extremely uncomfortable* with this presentation? Believing that Jesus died on the cross as the only essential element of the gospel leaves out non-negotiable #2, the gift of everlasting life.

For Flexible Free Gracers, believing in Jesus does not mean believing that He guarantees eternal life to all who believe in Him for it. Instead, for Flexible Free Gracers, believing in Jesus can mean believing some other truth about Him. By dropping the gift of eternal life from the gospel message, the result is a message insufficient to save, even when believed. Flexible Free Gracers view eternal life as an automatic by-product, rather than an essential part, of believing in Jesus. They therefore see flexibility in whether or not to include eternal life as part of evangelizing.

This is, at heart, the difference between the Focused Free Grace and Flexible Free Grace positions. For Focused Free Gracers, everlasting life must be part of the saving message. For Flexible Free Gracers, everlasting life may be an unnecessary addition to the gospel.

This essential difference directly impacts not only whether one is assured of everlasting life when believing, but many other areas of the

doctrine of salvation as well. It also determines who needs to be evangelized. Since those who believe in Lordship Salvation or works salvation believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins and rose again, Flexible Free Grace proponents see no need to evangelize them. Focused Free Grace people witness to anyone who is unsure of whether, simply by faith in Jesus, he has everlasting life that cannot be lost.

## Essential Difference in Whether One Is Assured of Eternal Life When Believing the Saving Message

### A. FOCUSED FREE GRACE: ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE IS OF THE ESSENCE OF SAVING FAITH

If you are not assured of eternal life, then you are not believing what Jesus has promised. Recall Jesus' famous promise to Martha:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26, NKJV)

If someone is currently believing what Jesus says here, then that person has to be sure that he has eternal life. Such a person believes that when he dies, he shall live. Further, if one believes, there is a sense in which he will never die. Assurance of eternal life is part and parcel of believing this promise. If someone is unsure, then they are currently doubting what Jesus has promised.

Due to the content of Jesus' saving message, assurance of eternal life will always be present when one is believing the saving message. Therefore, for Focused Free Grace:



Assurance of eternal life is of the essence of saving faith.

## B. FLEXIBLE FREE GRACE: ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE IS OPTIONAL FOR SAVING FAITH

When there is flexibility regarding whether eternal life needs to be included in the gospel, then assurance of eternal life becomes optional for saving faith. For Flexible Free Gracers, assurance is not always present when one believes in Jesus.

Flexible Free Gracers' gospels do not have to include eternal life, so their gospels do not need to provide 100% assurance when believed. If one does not need to be assured of an eternal salvation, then one need not be assured that Jesus has done anything at all for oneself.

For Flexible Free Gracers, John 3:16 may be misunderstood as follows:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him ~~should not perish but have~~ **does not need to know that he has** everlasting life **in order to have it** (original text struck through and added text in bold).

Flexible Free Gracers believe there are people who currently believe in Jesus and, as a result, have eternal life without being either aware or sure of it. They offer two explanations for this:

1. One can believe in Jesus without being sure of having eternal life, since *believing* means an act of the will or a decision.
2. *Believing in Jesus* means believing some other Biblical truth about Jesus rather than believing in Him for eternal life.

For many Flexible Free Gracers, the saving message may be summed up as:

Believe that Jesus is God and the Savior who died on the cross for sins and rose again.

There is no need to mention or have any understanding of eternal life.

If Jesus' deity, death, and resurrection are the bullseye or summary of the saving message, then the purpose statement in John 20:30-31 may be misunderstood as follows:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is ~~God the Christ, the Son of God and that He died on the cross for sins and rose again~~, and that believing you may have life in His name (original text struck through and added text in bold).

[Article continues in the next issue of *Grace in Focus* as we examine some of the consequences of omitting from the gospel the issues of everlasting life and the assurance thereof.] ■



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- 1 This is an abridged version of an article that is available in *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 2024.
- 2 Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ - Part 2," Filmed [2000]. YouTube Video, 10:20. Posted 2009. See <https://youtu.be/MRX9Q6xrnLg>, 6:55-8:15. Accessed April 18, 2022.
- 3 The author wishes to credit Diane Boring for the term bullseye in reference to the essential elements of the Focused Free Grace gospel.
- 4 Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ - Part 2," Filmed [2000]. YouTube Video, 10:20. Posted 2009. See <https://youtu.be/MRX9Q6xrnLg>, 8:35-9:30. Accessed April 18, 2022.

# Who Are You?

By Zane Hodges

On one occasion, described in John 1:19-27, John the Baptist was visited by an important official delegation from the religious leadership of Jerusalem. Speculation had mounted that this Elijah-like prophet might be the Messiah Himself (cf. Luke 3:15). If ever there was a golden opportunity for John to “blow his own horn,” this was it.

But John doesn’t. His responses to the delegations’ questions clearly indicate that he is not anxious to talk about himself. Indeed, each response is briefer than the previous one (see vv 19-21). When asked, “Who are you?” he replies with the words, “I am not the Christ.” And to the query, “Are you Elijah?” he says simply, “I am not” (three syllables both in English and Greek). But to the final question in this series, “Are you the Prophet?” (probably a reference to Deut 18:15-19), his answer is reduced to “No” (one syllable in English and Greek).

And that’s where he would have left them—with no self-identification at all!—had they not followed up with a further question: “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say *about yourself*?” (v 22, italics added). But John doesn’t like talking *about himself*, so he simply quotes a passage of Scripture where he is prophetically described as “a voice of one crying: In the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord” (v 23; our translation follows the punctuation in the Hebrew and in the Majority Text).

One may humorously imagine the delegation returning to the Jerusalem leaders, who enquire: “Well, what did you find out? Who does this John the Baptist claim to be?”

The delegation answers, “We found out that he does not claim to be the Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet.”

“All right,” the leaders reply, “but just who *does* he claim to be?”

There is an awkward moment of silence, then the delegation leader clears his throat. “Uh, well, that is to say, he claims to be a voice crying out...”

“Yes, yes” say the leaders. “But what *else* does he say about himself? What personal identity does he claim *for himself*?”

“That’s it,” says the delegation “The rest was about his message and someone who is supposed to come after him. He wouldn’t say another word about who he was!”

Of course, we can’t be sure precisely what the exchange was between the returning delegation and the Jewish leaders. However, one thing is certain. At the very pinnacle of his ministry’s success, John the Baptist is not at all preoccupied with his own personal importance or self-interest—even when facing a prestigious delegation like this one. Instead, he is busy preparing—not *his own* way—but the way of *the Lord* (vv 23-27).

And that in itself qualifies as a spiritual miracle, even though John did no miracle in the strict sense of the term (cf. John 10:41). But how rare indeed is the preacher or teacher who will not speak about himself almost “at the drop of a hat”! How easily even we who proclaim the truth that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone can get sidetracked from our focus on the gracious Savior into a preoccupation with appearing “to be somebody” before men.

This is not to say that it is always wrong to talk about ourselves or our ministries. Paul and Barnabas did that for a good reason (Acts 15:12). But we must always try to ask ourselves, when we are inclined to do this, a very searching question: “If I say these things about myself, who will get the glory? Will it be Christ? Or will it be me?”

Pride may be expected in those who think that their own works contribute to or even verify their eternal salvation. But pride is an ugly anomaly in those who understand their total dependence on the saving grace of God. If the magnificent and totally free gift of life through Christ has not yet humbled us, we need to go back to the Cross and bow our hearts meekly before it. We should be able to say with the hymn writer:

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.”

Who are *we*? Let us be merely “voices crying out” to people to put their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ■



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 was published in the November-December 1992 issue of *Grace in Focus*. It is available online at [faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org).

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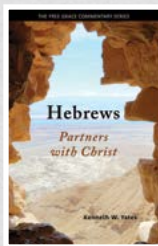


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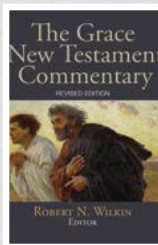


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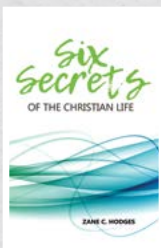


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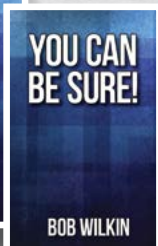
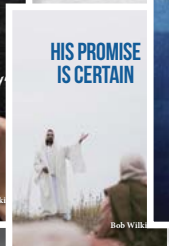
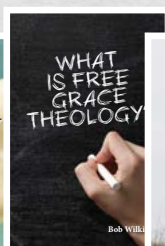
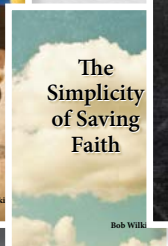
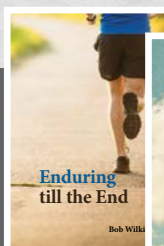


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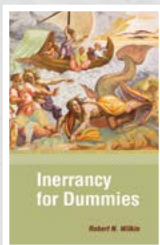


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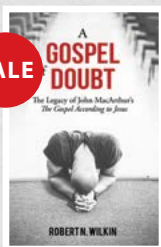
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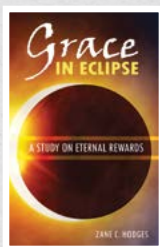


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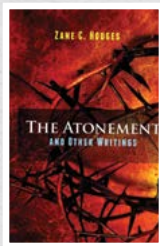


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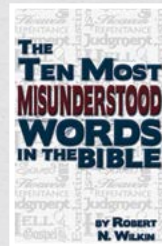


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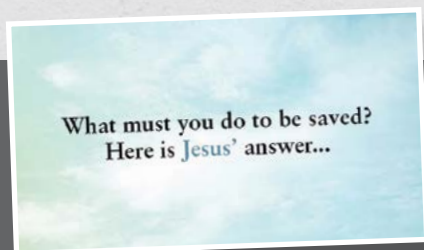


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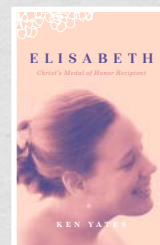


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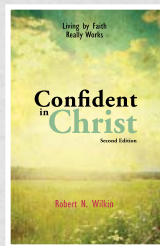


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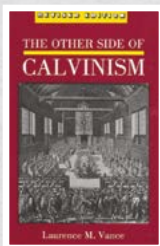


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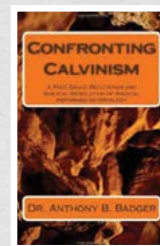


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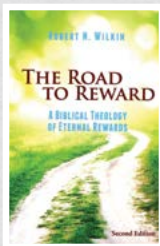


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## CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

### MONDAY

**Ken Yates**, *Preaching the Gospel Without a Word* (1 Pet 3:1-7)  
**J. B. Bond**, *What to Do While We Wait for Jesus* (1 Pet 4:7-11)  
**Steve Thurman**, *Shepherding the Flock, Submitting, and Being Humble* (1 Pet 5)  
**Ken and Bob**, *Answering your Bible, theology, and practical questions*

### TUESDAY

**Bob Bryant**, *A Birdseye View of 1 Peter*.  
**David Janssen**, *Preparing for a Grand Kingdom* (2 Pet 1:1-12)  
**John Claey**s, *At the End of the Day* (2 Pet 3:10-12)  
**Bob and Ken**, *Dispensationalism and Free Grace*

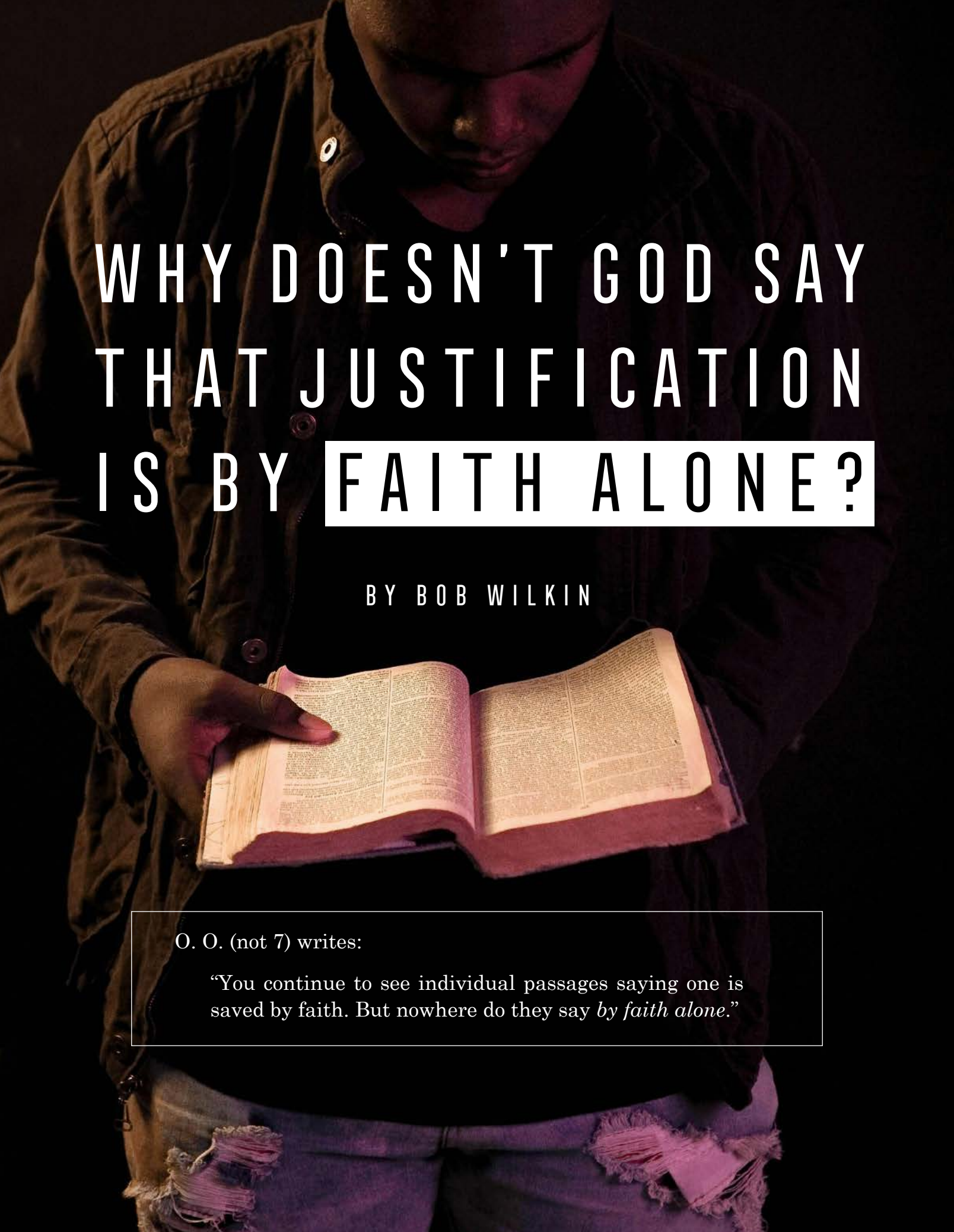
### WEDNESDAY

**Bob Vacendak**, *Noah, Baptism, and a Good Conscience* (1 Pet 3:15-22)  
**Paul Carpenter**, *His Promised Return Is Certain* (2 Pet 3:1-9)  
**Philippe Sterling**, *Salvation of the Soul: Make Your Life Count Forever* (1 Pet 1:3-9)  
**Bob Wilkin**, *How to Long for the Pure Milk of the Word* (1 Pet 2:1-3)

### THURSDAY

**John Niemela**, *The Collection Model for Canonicity* (2 Pet 3:16)

*Plus, twenty-one parallel messages Tuesday-Thursday!*

A person with dark skin is shown from the chest up, looking down at an open Bible they are holding with both hands. They are wearing a brown jacket over a dark shirt and blue jeans with frayed hems. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the person and the Bible. The title of the article is overlaid in large white text.

# WHY DOESN'T GOD SAY THAT JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE?

BY BOB WILKIN

O. O. (not 7) writes:

“You continue to see individual passages saying one is saved by faith. But nowhere do they say *by faith alone*.”

In January of 1996, I debated a Church of Christ evangelist on justification by faith alone. One of his points was that the only place in the Bible that speaks of justification by faith *alone* says it is *not by faith alone* (Jas 2:24).<sup>1</sup>

In fact, even that verse does not speak of justification by faith alone. It should be translated, “You see then that a man is justified by works and not only by faith.” The word *monon* is an adverb modifying *justified*, not an adjective modifying *faith*. Some English translations do get this right and translate *monon* as *only* (KJV, NKJV, MEV): *and not by faith only*. James says there is one justification by faith, before God, and a separate justification by works, before men. Compare Rom 4:1-2.

John 3:16 clearly states that whoever believes in Jesus will never perish but has everlasting life. The Lord did not need to list all of the things not required. He did not need to add the word *alone*.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says that regeneration (compare 2:5) is by faith *apart from works*. Paul is clearly saying that faith is the only condition.

Over a hundred times in the Bible, faith in Christ is the only condition for regeneration and justification. Since there is no other condition, it is not inaccurate to say that justification and regeneration are by faith *alone*.

The issue is not that the Lord and His apostles need clarification. The issue is that people disagree with what they clearly stated. The Church of Christ evangelist’s objection is one of many arguments people use to reject justification by faith alone.

Here are three other ways people oppose justification by faith alone:

1. Defining faith as *turning from sins, commitment, and perseverance in obedience*.
2. Saying that faith alone results in *initial salvation*, but that perseverance in obedience is required to gain *final salvation*.<sup>2</sup>
3. Teaching that faith alone results in probationary salvation, but that to keep it, one must persevere in good works.

I found an article at The Gospel Coalition website by a leading NT scholar, Tom Schreiner, that illustrates the first of those three additional ways to contradict justification by faith alone. It is entitled “Do Paul and James Disagree on Justification by Faith Alone?”<sup>3</sup> Schreiner began his article with an excellent defense of justification by faith alone. He cited Rom 3:28, Rom 4:5, Gal 3:6-9, and Eph 2:8-9 to prove that justification is by faith alone.

But then he turned around and said that James shows that “intellectual belief doesn’t save” and that “Faith alone justifies, but only the kind of faith that inevitably produces good works.” He clarified, “James teaches that there is an organic relationship between genuine faith and works. If we truly trust Christ, that trust shows up in how we live. Works evidence our faith.”

Many have been conditioned to read statements like that and see nothing wrong with them. Justification is by faith alone, apart from works, and justification is by faith plus works. Both are true. The fact that makes no sense is lost because of tradition.

The Scriptures are clear. Whoever believes in Jesus for everlasting life is eternally secure. The sole condition is faith in Christ. Justification truly is by faith alone. That most people reject that—even people who profess to be Christians—bothers me.

Does it bother you? ■



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

- 1 Some English translations have “not by faith only” (KJV, NKJV, MEV). Most have “not by faith alone” (NIV, NET, NASB, HCSB, RSV, LEB, ESV, GNT).
- 2 Tom Schreiner and Ardel Caneday teach this in their book *The Race Set Before Us*, pp. 38-45. See especially the chart on p. 40.
- 3 See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/do-paul-james-disagree-on-justification-by-faith-alone/>.



# Myrmecology

## Lessons from an Ant

(Proverbs 6:6-8 and 30:25)

Philippe R. Sterling

**H**ave you ever heard of a myrmecologist? No...it's not a person who studies murmuring! Myrmecology is the study of ants.

*Myrmecology* (from Greek: *myrmēx*, ant and *logos*, study) is a branch of entomology (the study of all insects) that focuses on the scientific study of ants. Some early myrmecologists, considering ant society to be the ideal form of society, sought to find solutions to human problems by studying ants. Because of their complex and varied forms of eusociality (social organization), ants continue to be a model of choice for studying questions regarding social systems. Recently, researchers have studied ant colonies for their relevance in machine learning, complex interactive networks, parallel computing, and other computing fields.

I don't know about devoting one's whole life to studying the little things, but I do know that the Bible says to consider the ways of ants. And when we do take a look at them, we find that they are amazing creatures and that we can gain much wisdom from

watching them.

The industrious ant has been the subject of proverbs, fables, songs, cartoons, and movies.

"The Ant and the Grasshopper" is one of *Aesop's Fables*:

In a field one summer's day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. An Ant passed by, bearing along with great toil an ear of corn he was taking to the nest.

"Why not come and chat with me," said the Grasshopper, "instead of toiling and moiling in that way?"

"I am helping to lay up food for the winter," said the Ant, "and recommend you to do the same."

"Why bother about winter?" said the Grasshopper; "we have got plenty of food at present." But the Ant went on its way and continued its toil.



When the winter came the Grasshopper had no food, and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing, every day, corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer.

Then the Grasshopper knew:

*"It is best to prepare for the days of necessity."*<sup>1</sup>

I've sung the song "The Ants Go Marching One by One, Hurrah, Hurrah" with my grandchildren. I watched the cartoon "Atom Ant" as a child. You may have seen the movies *A Bug's Life*, *Antz*, and *Ant Man*.

"Go to the ant,  
you sluggard!  
Consider her  
ways and be wise,  
which, having  
no captain, overseer  
or ruler, provides  
her supplies in the  
summer, and gathers  
her food in the  
harvest."

(Prov 6:6-8)

At times, God sends us to the animals to learn certain lessons.

To cure our ingratitude, God sends us to the ox and the donkey: "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider" (Isa 1:3).

To cure our insensibility to the times, God sends us to the stork and other birds: "Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord" (Jer 8:7).

To cure our lack of trust, Jesus sends us to the ravens: "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?" (Luke 12:24).

To shake us from our lethargy, God sends us to the ant: "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest" (Prov 6:6-8). Also: "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer" (Prov 30:25). Let us take note of the learner, the teacher, the instruction, the lessons to be learned, and the overall application of the appeal.

## The Learner

The learner is the sluggard, who is averse to duty—both in temporal and spiritual matters—and thus sins against both God and his own interests. God does not intend us to be idle. The sluggard is the shame of creation; all nature is a witness against him to condemn his sloth. But here God sends the sluggard specifically to the ant in order to learn to labor and make provision for the future.

## The Teacher

The teacher is the ant, a diligent and wise creature. Scientists marvel at ants—at what skill they show in building their nests; what

**“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (2 Tim 4:6-8). This was Paul’s confidence...**

order and discipline they have among themselves; what diligence they use to get provisions by day or by night; how they manage to adapt and survive in most land environments.

## **The Instruction**

The instruction consists of three things: Go; Consider her ways; Be wise.

“Go” is used here in the sense of one’s going to a prophet. First Samuel 9:9 says, “Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he spoke thus: ‘Come, let us go to the seer’; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.” To shame the sluggard, God instructs him to go to the ant as he would go to a prophet. When he arrives, what must he do?

“Consider her ways.” This prophet speaks not by words but by example. The sluggard is not to hear, but to see and consider the ant’s ways; that is, to see and reflect on the diligence and foresight of the ant.

“Be wise.” Be not only a spectator, but a doer; not more knowledgeable, but wiser; not indolent, but diligent (cf. James 1:22-25).

## **The Lessons**

The lessons to be learned are industry, foresight, and self-motivation.

Ants are busy. Their industry is a pattern for us.

Ants prepare for the future. They work in the summer and in the harvest. We are also to redeem the season. The Apostle Paul exhorts us: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:15-16).

The amplification of the ant’s industry and foresight—“which, having no captain, overseer or ruler”—enforces the lesson. The ant does her duty by instinct, not compelled by any who have power to check and control her. Entomologists analogically tell us that while bees are a monarchy directed by the queen, ants are a democracy in which each one’s natural industry prompts him to seek his own good and the good of the whole.

The text cites three titles that are not pertinent to ants. The ant has no “captain” to go before her and show her what to do; no “overseer” to observe whether she does it or not; and no “ruler” to punish her for idleness. Nevertheless, she labors.

There are no timecards in the anthill. No ant mothers nag their babies to get out of bed. Ants are self-motivated creatures and need no captain to carry a whip behind them ensuring the work gets done. As believers, maturity means that we no longer need someone standing behind us to ensure that our work gets done, that our moral purity is not compromised, or that we continue to assemble with the saints.

## **Application of the Overall Appeal**

The appeal’s argument is from the lesser to the greater. It is constructed this way in order to shame us. If creatures that lack reason make preparation for the future with such diligence, we who are en-

dowed with reason, who can foresee the end, and who can choose the means to provide for the future are without excuse.

This is binding upon us regarding this life and the life to come. We must make provision for both.

We are to provide for our welfare in this life. Some live without a profession or trade and have no way to support themselves. They are not only worse than the ant, which by labor lays up for the time of want; they are also worse than the grasshopper, because they have little joy in their present life. Those who are busy in an honest calling can supply for their own needs as well as giving to others in need. Ephesians 4:28 exhorts: "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

We need to be wise in setting aside funds for lean times. The wise who store up for those times are ready, while those who simply spend all that they get are unprepared for such times. Joseph, in God's wisdom, prepared during the seven years of plenty so that that entire region of the world would be spared from starvation and devastation during the seven lean years that followed.

The lesson of the ant is also useful to us in our preparation for the life to come. If diligence and foresight are needed for this life, surely they are needed for the life to come. This life is our opportunity—our summer and harvest—to provide for the world to come. Therefore, "Go to the ant, you sluggard!" Careless believer, consider the manner and course of the ant's life—how she is vigilant and diligent regarding the time to come—and likewise do something for the life to come.

The opportunity of doing this work is confined to this life; when that is at an end, opportunity ceases. There is no mending of errors in the world to come.

We have a Captain, Overseer, and Ruler to whom we must render an account of what we do; this is not accorded to the ant. Second Corinthians 5:10 informs us, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

This life is our opportunity, and when that is over, we receive the reward for our work. We receive the benefit of it after death. Revelation 14:13 says of the martyrs of the Tribulation period, "their works follow them." There will be rewards for their works.

Consider how satisfying it will be when we depart this life knowing that we have made preparation, known our season, done the things which God has given us to do, thought of the hour and made provision for it before it comes upon us. Jesus said in John 17:4, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." This was Paul's confidence expressed in 2 Tim 4:6-8. He knew he had fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. As a result, he knew that a crown would be awarded to him by the Lord Jesus, "the righteous Judge...on that Day [the Judgment Seat of Christ]." In fact, He will give a crown "to all who have loved His appearing."

Peter presses us to diligence in 2 Pet 1:5-10, telling us to add key character qualities to our faith (diligence, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love). He promises that if we do so, then a rich entrance into Jesus' kingdom awaits us.

To overcome indolence, consider how great our reward could be. Paul concluded his great resurrection chapter with these words, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58).

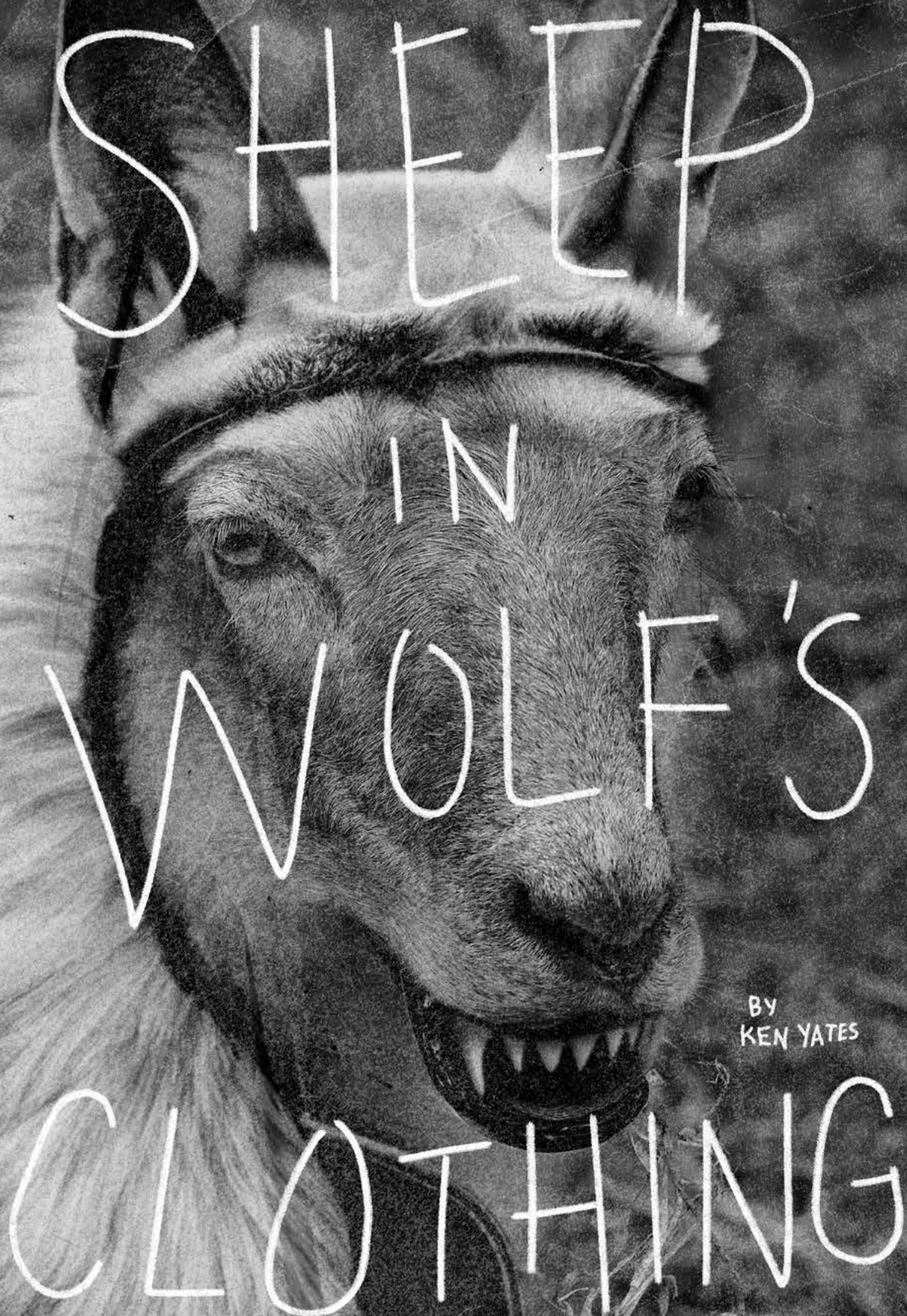
Ants are a nuisance we all deal with at times. Yet there's a lot we can learn from the little ant. ■



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

1 See <https://www.umass.edu/aesop/content.php?n=0&i=1>.





# SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

BY  
KEN YATES

MATTHEW 7:15



In Matt 7:15, the Lord warns us about false prophets. They can come to us in sheep's clothing but are wolves. In other words, sometimes people can look good when, in fact, they are evil. People who teach evil things can appear to be godly. Wolves can look like sheep.

It is not difficult to find examples of this. A man can claim to be an orthodox Bible teacher. He can dress in a suit. He can have a large following. He can pray. He can have a wall full of degrees from theological seminaries. He can have a lovely wife and family. Everything on the outside looks good. But if he teaches false doctrine, he's a wolf.

Even though it is not stated in the Bible, I am sure the reverse is true. A person can look like a wolf when he is actually a sheep. A Bible teacher may not look good on the outside but teach the truth. If that is the case, the Lord's point in Matt 7:15 is the same: Appearances can be deceiving. A wolf might look like a sheep, and a sheep might look like a wolf. We cannot look at outward things when we evaluate the truth of what a Bible teacher teaches. We must listen to what he says.

Even though it did not deal with teaching the Bible, I recently saw an illustration of a sheep who looked like a wolf. In fact, the incident involved me.

## Picking Up My Grandson

My youngest grandson attends a preschool. I am familiar with the place since his older brothers also went there. Their nickname for me is “Poppy.” Many of the kids at the school know me. Sometimes, I join them in their games when I pick my grandson up. Some of them also refer to me as Poppy.

I often take my grandsons to lunch. Other kids will ask if they can come with us when I do. I told them I couldn’t because their mommies and daddies must say it’s okay. One little girl asked so often that her parents permitted me to take her. The child’s mother is a good friend of my daughter and had met me. My grandson, his friend, and I had a great lunch together.

As has happened many times before, I was recently responsible for picking up my grandson. For security reasons, an electronic key is needed to open the door. My daughter had forgotten to give it to me, so I had to wait at the front until somebody came to the door to let me in.

As I describe what happened next, I must relate some embarrassing information.

## I Look Like a Bum

When left to my own devices, I dress like a homeless person. For me, comfort is the guiding principle when it comes to fashion. I love sweatpants and hoodies. I can put them on quickly. I don’t have to worry if I spill something on them. There are no buttons. The

My wife and daughters regularly point out that I look like a slob. Their most common way of describing how I dress is to say that I look like the Unabomber if he had been homeless.

hoodie keeps my rather large ears warm. I almost always wear it in the up position over my head. This has caused some problems with my family members. My wife and daughters regularly point out that I look like a slob. Their most common way of describing how I dress is to say that I look like the Unabomber if he had been homeless. They know that if we are going somewhere where I need to be presentable, such as church, they have to lay out my clothes for me. In those situations, I cannot choose appropriate clothing for myself.

Picking up my grandson is not one of those situations. On the day of the incident I’m recounting, I had on my customary sweatpants and hoodie. As usual, my ears were cold, so the hoodie was up.

Another factor impacted how I looked that day. I had an allergy attack with a bad headache. I felt terrible. I looked sick.

As I stood at the door of that preschool, waiting for somebody to let me in, I looked like a homeless Unabomber who was strung out on drugs. That didn’t bother me. However, it bothered the person who came to the door.

## A Wolf at the Door

The person who came to the door was the mother of one of the children. I had never seen this woman before, but I was grateful to see her coming now because when she opened the door to go out, I could go in. However, just as she was about to open the door, she looked through the glass and saw me. She stopped dead in her tracks.

I asked her to let me in. She shook her head, turned around quickly, and went back into the school. I found out later that she went to the school's manager and told her there was a strange man at the door who wanted to come in. There was no way she was going to let him in, and the manager needed to investigate. I feel confident that she thought I had a bomb under my hoodie and that the manager would need to call the police. The children at the school were surely in imminent danger.

Obviously, that was not the case. But that concerned mother saw a wolf through the door's glass. She did the right thing. No mother in her shoes would have let me in. Based on outward appearances, she had no way of knowing that I was the fluffiest sheep in the world when it came to the kids in that school.

Her words rightly concerned the school's manager. She would have to face the danger at the door. Fortunately, she was a long-time friend of my daughter. She also knew me well.

## That Is Not a Serial Murderer!

At the time, I was unaware of what the mother said to the manager. I only saw the manager's expression when she looked through the glass. She laughed out loud and exclaimed, "That's Poppy!" The mother was

still keeping her distance. I didn't realize what was going on and that the manager was letting her know that I was not the Unabomber.

I heard the manager reassure the mom that I was harmless. I could come into the school whenever I wanted and stay for however long I needed. I may have looked like a wolf, but I was a sheep.

I am unsure whether the mother immediately believed what the manager told her. That is the power of outward appearances. I was able, however, to spend a little time with her, and I hope I convinced her that the manager was right. I was not a wolf at the door.

## Heeding the Lord's Words

Even though it was understandable, the mother at that preschool judged me because of my appearance. She misjudged me. The Lord says we can do the same when it comes to those claiming to be servants of the Lord. We can mistakenly think that we're looking at a sheep when we are actually face to face with a wolf.

But we can also be like the mom who looked at me through the glass. We might look at a teacher and think we're looking at a wolf when he's really a sheep.

My sweatpants and hoodie find parallels with other areas. I have heard people reject the teachings of Bible teachers because they smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. I grew up in Southern Baptist churches and have listened to some members of these churches express the view that no true preacher of the Lord would dare preach without wearing a suit and tie. Many of us are aware of churches that say

they would never allow a person to teach in their pulpit if they had tattoos.

Others reject the teachings of certain men because of where they went to school. They think the diploma on the wall tells us whether we are dealing with a sheep or a wolf.

I think there is another way people can mistakenly conclude, based on outward appearances, that a teacher is a wolf. If you are known as a person who belongs to a Free Grace organization such as GES, some automatically label you a wolf. You are seen as belonging to a group so in the minority that it must be heretical and harmful. They are unwilling to listen to what you have to say and consider whether or not it is Biblical.

## Conclusion

The Lord tells us that we can't tell whether a person is a sound teacher by looking at the outside. The modern way of putting that is that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. Outward impressions, especially first ones, can be misleading. They can lead us to mistake a wolf for a sheep or a sheep for a wolf. It is something about which we all need to be careful. Our backgrounds and culture often drive us to judge a person by their appearance.

A wolf—a bad teacher—can wear a suit, be a teetotaler, and be tattoo-free. He can have attend-

ed the most conservative Evangelical seminary in the world and belong to only the most respected and popular theological societies.

A sheep—a sound teacher—might wear sweatpants and a hoodie, drink and smoke, and have tattoos all over his body. He might not even have a seminary degree. He might be a card-carrying member of GES. He might even look like I did outside my grandson's preschool.

Fortunately, we can change our minds. I am pretty sure that if the mom at the school gave me a chance, I could convince her that I am not a threat to her child. She might even let me take him to lunch with my grandson. Maybe that will happen in the future!

The same thing is true when it comes to Bible teachers. How do we know a sound teacher? How do we know whether he's a sheep? By what he says. We might be surprised as we listen to what he has to say. A tattooed, Unabomber-looking individual might divide God's Word accurately. ■



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.

How do we know whether he's a sheep? By what he says. ... A tattooed, Unabomber-looking individual might divide God's Word accurately.



More of

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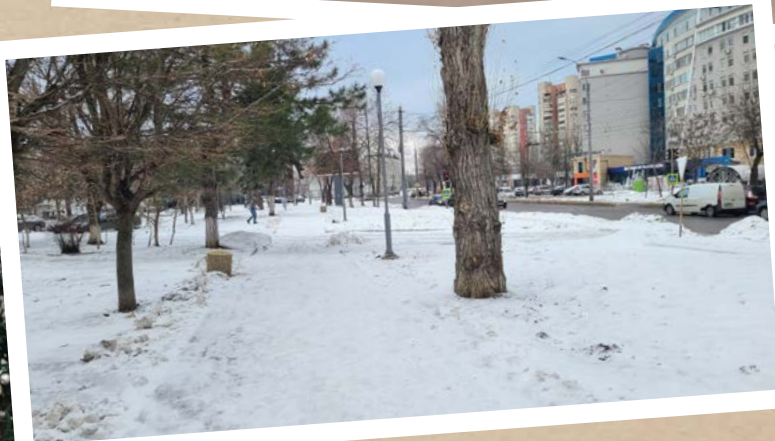


*Ken answers questions at the Moldova Conference*



*Some of the attendees of the Moldova Conference*

*Letitia, Mike, Ken, Lile, Costya,  
Costya's mom, and Kathryn*



*A beautiful, crisp morning in Moldova*

# Are You a Saint or an Ain't?

By Art Farstad

Many well-meaning Christians are not well taught on this supremely important and practical subject. A common phrase heard in Christendom (and sadly even by supposedly evangelical Christians) is, “I’m a *Christian*, but I’m no *saint*.” The idea is that while we can expect a person to go to church, give money, and keep away from the grosser sins, don’t expect too much more.

Actually, if you’re not a *saint*, you’re not *saved*! Don’t misunderstand this: we are *not* saying that if you’re not very *saintly* you’re not saved.

First Corinthians is addressed to the church “at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor 1:2). Yet just read the epistle! The Corinthians were proud, divisive, litigious, careless, and selfish at the Lord’s Supper and *agape* (love feast), and permissive of gross sin (incest) in one of the believers.<sup>2</sup>

Why would Paul call the Corinthians “saints” if they were so unsaintly? The answer lies in the different usages of the root words that are used for *sanctification* in both Testaments.

English, unfortunately for us, used Anglo-Saxon-based words (holy, holiness) and Latin-based (*sanctify*, *sanctification*, *saint*, *saintly*) to translate the same cluster of words in the original. In the OT the words are from the Semitic root *qdash*. In the NT they translate words with the *hagi* root.<sup>3</sup>

The basic meaning of all these words is the same: “to set apart for a special use.” In contexts of “sanctification,” this will be for a good use, and one for God’s will and pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

Sanctification involves a believer’s conduct and character. It is both *negative* and *positive*. Too many conservative Christians accentuate the negative, as in the somewhat light-hearted (but often accurate) summary of some people’s idea of sancti-

fication: “I don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t chew, or run with those who do.”

To be sure, there is a strong negative side to the doctrine. We *are* to be separated or set apart from evil. First Thessalonians 4:3 speaks of progressive sanctification as having to do with turning away from immorality—so rampant in today’s culture, as it was in the days when the NT was written.

However, we should not merely become set apart *from evil* but we should be positively set apart and dedicated *to God*. In OT times a person could sanctify his house (Lev 27:14), part of his field (Lev 27:16), or his firstborn (Num 8:17). If OT believers could do so, surely, we NT believers should be able to set apart our homes, cars, and possessions, for God’s use! We can dedicate our children through prayer and a consistent example. In the final analysis, though, they will have to consecrate their *own* lives to Christ’s holy service. ■



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 was published in the May-June 1993 issue of *Grace in Focus*. It is available online at [faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org).
- 2 There is no suggestion that the incestuous man was unsaved, but rather that he might be removed in death if he didn’t change his ways.
- 3 As in our English derivative, hagiography (a biography of a saint). This double set of root words needlessly complicates things, although giving a richer vocabulary than possessed by any other tongue.
- 4 That the word doesn’t always mean “make saintly” is clear from the fact that the Hebrew root *qdash* is used for those set aside to be cult prostitutes!



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