

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2014

Can Christians
Wield the
Sword?

The Current
Crisis in
Assurance

"Radical"
Changes
at **IMB**?

EXAMINE YOURSELVES

*Assurance
and God's Approval
in 2 Corinthians 13:5*

PLUS: POSSESSING THE KINGDOM •
WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW? • AND MORE!

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GRACE IN FOCUS

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D.

EDITOR AND DESIGN Shawn Lazar

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Kyle Kaumeyer

PROOFING Bethany Taylor

CIRCULATION Mark "Who Dat?" Gray

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As I write I'm a bit groggy. You see, I just had a dental implant. My first. Hopefully, my last too. My dentist drilled a huge screw into my jaw. About 4 months from now I get the crown.

The Christian life is a bit like a dental procedure. Perseverance is vital. When the going gets tough in the dental chair, you have to realize you have the ability to do this. Likewise in the Christian life. And if we persevere in our walks with Christ, we will get a crown.

I just got back two days ago from the Huntsman World Senior Games (the Geezer Jock Olympics for people 50 and up) in St. George, UT. Before that I enjoyed wonderful fellowship with the saints at Upland Bible Church in Las Vegas, NV. Yes, there are believers in Las Vegas.

In St. George I came in third in two races for men 60-64: the 1500 meter racewalk and the 3000 meter racewalk. I like the competition because it motivates me to stay in shape all year round. I hope to see many of you there next year. My thanks to Dean and Pat Thompson for encouraging me to go six years ago.

The World Senior Games remind me a bit of the Bema, the Judgment Seat of Christ. I know next October I'll be judged again if I'm still here and still able to compete. How I do then will be based on my workouts for the next 12 months, one day at a time.

The Christian life is similar. The Lord could return at any moment for us. Wouldn't it be great to hear Him say, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17)? Then keep training. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). That is why the Bible is not an afterthought for us. The Bible is our food. We need it. In this magazine you will find spiritual food.

May we rejoice this season as we remember the Lord's birth (which was probably in September, but let's not be picky).

Warmly,



Dental and Other Crowns

Bob Wilkin, **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

EXAMINE YOURSELVES

*Assurance and God's Approval
in 2 Corinthians 13:5¹*

BY BOB WILKIN

Major League baseball players are wise to fear being cut. Few make it to the majors and many don't stay long. Players need to do everything they can to perform their best day in and day out.

We don't need to worry about ever being cut from God's team. Our divine Manager has promised that once we believe in the crucified and risen Lord for eternal life, we are secure forever in our relationship with God. He guarantees it. And God will never change His mind.



Like professional athletes, however, we *should* be concerned about our *service*. We should check our stats regularly to see what needs improving and then ask, “Am I really doing what God wants me to do? Am I pleasing Him?” The Apostle Paul admonished the believers at the church of Corinth to do this when he wrote:

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified (2 Cor 13:5).

Some well-meaning pastors and theologians suggest that Paul was concerned that his readers might not truly be Christians. One such pastor wrote, “Periodic doubts about one’s salvation are not necessarily wrong. Such doubts must be confronted and dealt with honestly and biblically. Scripture encourages spiritual self-examination.”² Then, after quoting 2 Cor 13:5, he commented on our need for self-examination:

That admonition is largely ignored—and often explained away—in the contemporary church.

It has become quite popular to teach professing Christians that they can enjoy assurance of salvation no matter what their lives are like. After all, some argue, if salvation is a gift to people who simply believe gospel facts, what does practical living have to do with assurance? That teaching is nothing but practical antinomianism. It encourages people living in hypocrisy, disobedience, and sin by offering them false assurance. It discourages self-examination. And that clearly violates Scripture. We are *commanded* to examine ourselves at least as often as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:28).³

The New Geneva Study Bible (p. 1844) also suggests that self-examination of our works to see if we are regenerate is appropriate:

Paul’s words help clarify the doctrine of assurance of faith. Paul asks the Corinthians to examine their own lives for evidence of salvation. Such evidence would include trust in Christ (Heb 3:6), obedience to God (Matt 7:21), growth in holiness (Heb 12:14; 1 John 3:3), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23), love for other Christians (1 John 3:14), positive influence on others (Matt 5:16), adhering to the apostolic teaching (1 John 4:2), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within them.

Such an understanding of 2 Cor 13:5 and of assurance is inconsistent with salvation by grace through faith, apart from works, and also with the immediate and broader context in Second Corinthians. I certainly agree that Christians are to examine themselves. That *is* commanded in Scripture.

However, Paul's readers already knew that they were born again. Paul had a different purpose in mind for this self-examination.

Paul Affirmed Assurance apart from Works

Paul was writing to believers, a fact he repeatedly asserted throughout both First and Second Corinthians. Nine times in these two epistles he referred to the fact that his readers had faith in Christ (1 Cor 2:5; 3:5; 15:2, 11, 14, 17; 16:13; 2 Cor 1:24; 10:15). He affirmed this in spite of the fact that the believers in Corinth were guilty of a number of significant moral failings. They had been

guarantee" (2 Cor 1:21-22). "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14). "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 8:9).

In 1 Cor 3:1-3 and 6:19-20, Paul referred to the carnal behavior of the believers at Corinth, and yet he called them "babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1) whose "body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you" (1 Cor 6:19).

Paul didn't want his readers to doubt their salvation, but to live in light of the fact that they were secure children of God. His appeals to live righteously were built upon their assurance that they were born again. To understand 2 Cor 13:5, we must

uses outside of 2 Cor 13:5, he commanded believers to "stand fast in the faith," (1 Cor 16:13), to "be sound in the faith," (Titus 1:13), and to be "established in the faith" (Col 2:7). "The faith" is the body of truth that has been delivered to us from God. Thus Paul was exhorting his spiritual charges to obey in their experience that teaching which they had received. Dave Lowery comments:

Paul's question is usually construed with regard to positional justification: were they Christians or not? But it more likely concerned practical sanctification: did they *demonstrate* that they were in the faith (cf. 1 Cor 16:13) and

"Paul didn't want his readers to doubt their salvation, but to live in light of the fact that they were secure children of God. His appeals to live righteously were built upon their assurance that they were born again."

plagued with divisions, strife, envy, drunkenness, and immorality (1 Cor 1:11; 3:1-3; 5:9-6:20; 11:21, 30). Their works certainly didn't prove they were saved. In fact, according to Paul, they were "behaving like mere men," that is, like the unsaved (1 Cor 3:3).

In addition, Paul made a number of other statements which give evidence that they were regenerate, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2). "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a

take into account that Paul did not link assurance to their works but to their faith in Christ.

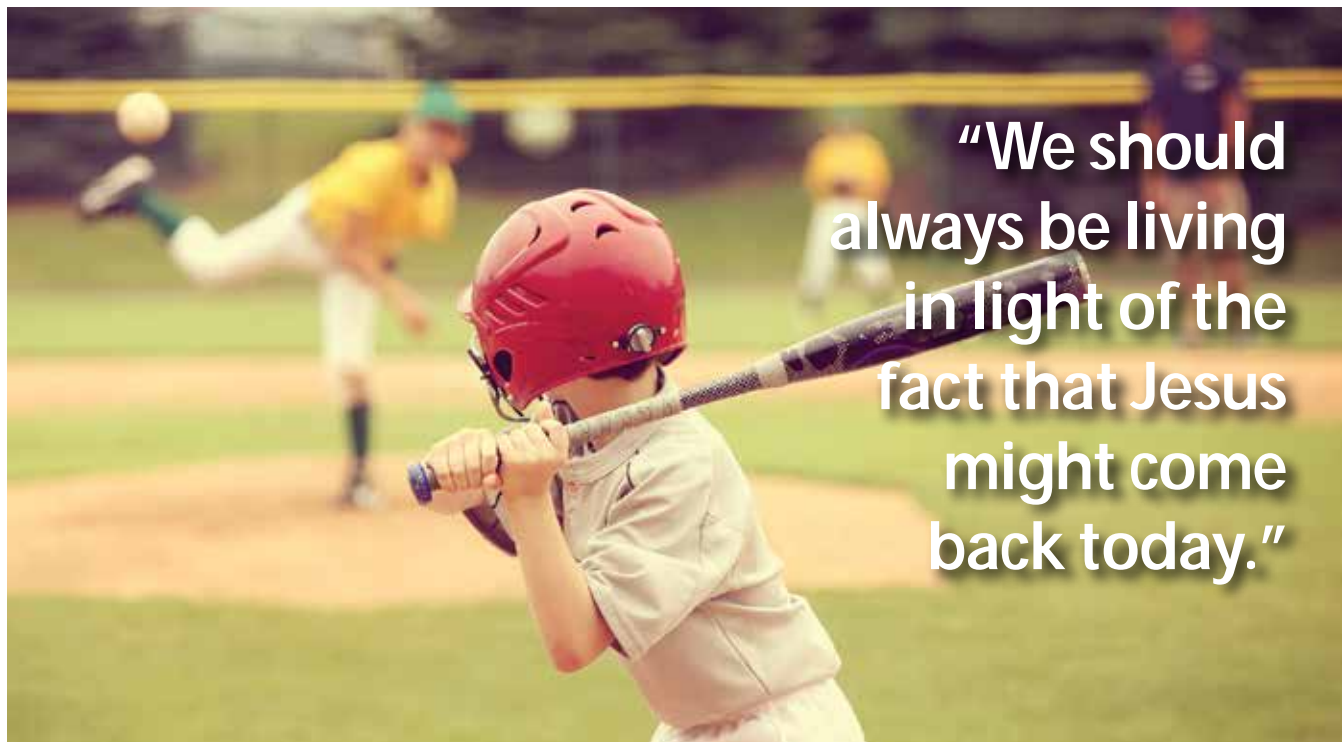
Putting the Puzzle Together

The meaning of "in the faith."
Being "in the faith" could be considered a reference to being regenerate. In answer to the question, "Are you a born again Christian?" we might say, "Yes, I'm in the faith." However, that isn't a normal way of speaking today. Nor was it a normal way to speak in the first century.

Paul used the expression *in the faith* (*en tē pistei*) four times. These all refer to the believer's experience not his position. Paul always used this expression in conjunction with imperatives. In the three

that Christ was in them by their obeying His will? To stand the test was to do what was right. To fail was to be disobedient and therefore subject to God's discipline.⁴

The meaning of "Christ in you."
This phrase could refer to salvation since Christ lives in all believers. However, "Christ in you" is associated in Scripture with progressive sanctification. For example, after saying, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3), Jesus commanded the apostles, "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John 15:4). In order for Christ to abide in the believer, the believer must abide in Christ. Christ is at home in the lives of believers only if they openly and honestly obey Him.



“We should always be living in light of the fact that Jesus might come back today.”

Paul was imploring the Corinthian believers to examine their works to see if Christ was abiding in them, in their experience.

The meaning of “disqualified.” The term “disqualified” (*adokimos*) occurs three times in vv 5 to 7. All of its other NT uses refer exclusively to believers who fail to gain Christ’s approval. *Adokimos* means “disapproved.” Its antonym, *dokimos*, occurs in 2 Tim 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself *approved* to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Approval and disapproval are terms related to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Believers whose lives have been pleasing to Christ will be approved, while the believers whose lives have displeased Christ will be disapproved. Rewards will be given to those who receive the Lord’s approval, His “Well done.”

Acceptance and approval are two different things. God accepts all believers solely on the basis of their faith in Christ. Once they

come to faith in Christ, they are forever accepted. Approval requires more than faith. It is conditioned upon spiritual maturity and is not a once-for-all event. A believer who is approved today is not guaranteed approval this time next year. Remaining in a state of Christ’s approval is contingent upon being a spiritual believer (1 Cor 2:14).

Paul used *adokimos* in only one other place in First and Second Corinthians. There he indicated his fear that *he himself* might be disapproved by Christ at His Judgment Seat, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become *disqualified* [or, *disapproved*]” (1 Cor 9:27, italics added). Paul knew that he was saved. What he feared was God’s disapproval.

In v 5 Paul challenged the believers at Corinth to examine themselves to see if they were approved or disapproved. In v 6 he reminded them that he and his fellow missionaries were not disapproved, although he

acknowledged in v 7 that they might seem disapproved to some in the Corinthian church. In other words, Paul knew that he was currently living in such a way as to merit Christ’s approval. This he could not affirm of the believers at Corinth, for there was plenty of evidence to suggest otherwise.

Examination of your works to see if you can rightfully expect Christ’s approval at His Judgment Seat is completely consistent with Paul’s teachings elsewhere in First and Second Corinthians (see 1 Cor 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10), and in his other letters as well (see Rom 14:10-13; Gal 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph 5:5-7; Phil 3:11-14; Col 1:21-23; 2 Tim 2:12, 15). We should always be living in light of the fact that Jesus might come back today. According to Paul, approval or disapproval by Christ will be based on how we live. Self-examination is an important discipline that helps us be prepared to receive Christ’s approval.

The meaning of “proof.” A related noun and verb of the just-cited term further supports this understanding. In v 3 Paul indicated that some of the Corinthians were seeking “a proof” (*dokimēn*) that Christ was speaking through *him*. Turning the tables on them in v 5, Paul challenged the congregation “to test [or to prove] yourselves” (*dokimazō*).

What was it that some of the Corinthians were questioning about Paul (v 3)? Certainly it was not his *salvation*. No, they questioned whether Christ was speaking through him. Therefore, when Paul turned the tables on them and asked them to test or prove themselves, he was questioning their experience in Christ, not their position.

Does God Approve of You?

To return to our baseball analogy, if you believe in Christ for eternal life, you are on the team and in the game. But that doesn’t mean that you will hit a home run or even get a base hit every time you’re up at the plate. Your batting average may slump. If so, you may need to examine your swing to correct the problem.

Similarly, the Scriptures challenge us as Christians to examine ourselves to determine how we are doing in our individual walks with Christ. Are we delighting Him by our lives? Does He approve of us? Or are we living for the praise and approval of others? Is our mind conformed to God’s Word or to the world?

Self-examination can help us prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ.

If we are ready, we will hear those words of approval, “Well done, good servant” (Luke 19:17).

We’re never told to examine our performance (works) to see if we are born again. That has already been settled. We’re under contract—an eternal contract. **GM**

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

1. This article has been adapted from Chapter 7 of *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works*.
2. John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, 1993, 2008), p. 213.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.
4. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, NT, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (NP: Victor Books, 1983), s.v., “2 Corinthians,” pp. 584-85.



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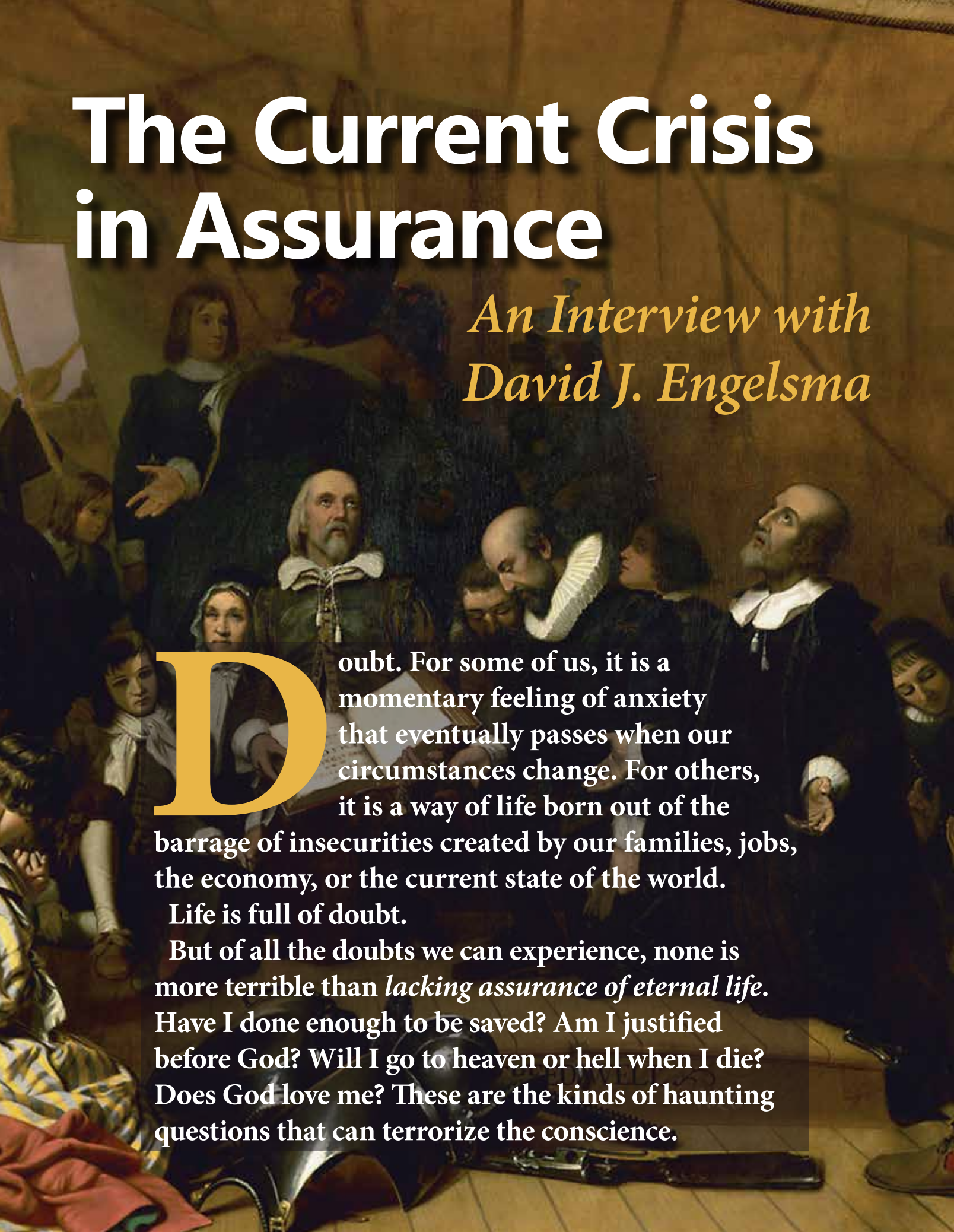
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The Current Crisis in Assurance

*An Interview with
David J. Engelsma*



Doubt. For some of us, it is a momentary feeling of anxiety that eventually passes when our circumstances change. For others, it is a way of life born out of the barrage of insecurities created by our families, jobs, the economy, or the current state of the world.

Life is full of doubt.

But of all the doubts we can experience, none is more terrible than *lacking assurance of eternal life*. Have I done enough to be saved? Am I justified before God? Will I go to heaven or hell when I die? Does God love me? These are the kinds of haunting questions that can terrorize the conscience.

*“Puritanism teaches that the way for a believer to get assurance is by a special, emotional, dramatic, datable, recognizable **feeling**.”*

Some pastors teach that lack of assurance is normal. They say doubt is a component of faith and a healthy part of the Christian life. They say that having assurance of salvation is the exception, not the norm.

Is that true? How can a life of doubt be God’s will for His children?

To get answers to these questions, I arranged to interview David J. Engelsma, emeritus professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, in Grand Rapids, MI. He wrote a booklet entitled, *The Gift of Assurance*, where he untangled the knotty theological problems that lead professing Christians to doubt their salvation.

The Current Crisis

Shawn Lazar: What motivated you to write, *The Gift of Assurance*?

David Engelsma: There were two motivations. First, assurance of salvation is fundamental, because without it, there is no enjoyment of the salvation that God has planned for us and that Jesus Christ has won for us. And second, it was also occasioned by the so-called renaissance of Puritanism in Calvinistic circles, which is winning a number of converts. It has always struck me, in my study of the Puritans, that they went seriously astray in regards to assurance.

SL: Before we address the issue of Puritanism, can you tell us what “assurance” is?

DE: Assurance is a believer’s certainty that he is chosen by God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and heir to eternal life that cannot be lost. Or to put it more briefly, assurance is the certainty of the believer that the salvation of God in Jesus Christ is his or her own.

The Puritan Purveyors of Doubt

SL: You said that the Puritans got assurance wrong. We should mention that you are a theologian in the Dutch Reformed tradition, whereas the Puritans grew out of the Reformation in England, and that there are differences between the two traditions, especially on this issue. Where did the Puritans go wrong?

DE: They went wrong by denying that assurance of salvation is of the essence of faith itself. That is the crucial issue. The question is: does assurance belong, properly and essentially to faith in Jesus Christ, or is assurance of salvation some element that is lacking in faith, and that God gives to a few believers at a later time, usually by way of answering their hard work?

I maintain in the booklet, and attempt to show from Calvin, the Reformed Confessions, and three Biblical passages, that faith consists of assurance; that it is assurance, and it is not something to either be divorced from faith or added later on.

SL: That raises the question about the nature of saving faith. One of the distinctions you draw in the booklet is between believing that Jesus justifies *people*, and believing that Jesus justified *me*, that He died *for me*. Would you say that it is the “for me” that distinguishes saving faith from other kinds of faith?

DE: That’s correct. In the Reformed tradition we call it *historical faith*. Satan knows that Jesus Christ died for sinners, but he doesn’t have saving faith. Likewise, the Puritans taught that you can have faith that Jesus Christ is the Savior, that He saved people from their sins, but that you can go for years and years (and even die) uncertain that Jesus died for oneself personally. And I react against that with a certain amount of anger, because it is a denial of the gospel.

Wicked Doubt

SL: Your anger is provoked because this isn't just a theoretical issue for you, but one of pastoral importance?

DE: Yes, it is. For example, I have a large contingent of relatives who are, in fact, believing people, and godly in their lives. Some have never missed a church service in 80 years. Nevertheless, under the influence of this Puritan theology, they have lived all their lives doubting their salvation. And because they lack assurance, they never dare to take the Lord's Supper. I have sat with them on their death beds, and watched as they died in terror, afraid of being damned. And after they were laid in the casket, their relatives



in doubt of one's salvation is abnormal, it is unhealthy, and sickly.

Sometimes that doubt is due to our own sinfulness. When we are not

According to the promise, everyone who believes on Christ has eternal life (cf. John 3:15). We receive assurance as a gift, through believing in

“I don't know what in the world, according to the Puritans, faith does give, but it doesn't give assurance.”

were in terrible distress and despair over their loved ones. I find that doubt to be wicked. So, it is not just a theological matter for me, but a very practical matter.

SL: And some teachers say that this doubt and fear *is normal*, and can even be an important motivator in the Christian life. Would you disagree and say that constant doubt is not normal, and that assurance is what truly motivates the Christian to godliness?

DE: That's correct. That's exactly correct. I acknowledge in the booklet that some believers can, for a time, be doubtful about their salvation. But that is not the normal, healthy, to-be-expected condition of the believing child of God. To be forever

living in our faith, living a holy life, or living in communion with God, doubt is the chastisement that comes upon us. But it is one thing to recognize an ailment, and quite another thing to broadcast and preach that it is normal for the majority of Christians to lack assurance.

The Return of Mysticism and Salvation by Works

SL: In fact, in *The Gift of Assurance* you say that the Puritan doctrine of assurance is a form of salvation by works. Why is that?

DE: Let me state positively what salvation by grace is, with regards to assurance. When one believes on Jesus Christ, from the heart, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, he has certainty of his own salvation.

Jesus, just as we receive all our salvation, as a gift, through believing. That is salvation by grace.

Now, the Puritan doctrine of assurance is a doctrine of salvation by works because the Puritans taught that believing in Jesus does not give you the important aspect of salvation that we call assurance. I don't know what in the world, according to the Puritans, faith does give, but it doesn't give assurance. For them, the way to get assurance is to work for many years, and to struggle, and grow, and to go through all kinds of spiritual contortions, laboring hard, until finally, you may get it. In which case, you get assurance by virtue of your own works. You get assurance by your own groaning, your own seeking, your own “questing” (to use a word that they love). I say that is no

different from the doctrine that says we save ourselves by our working.

SL: You argue that this approach to the Christian life is really a form of mysticism. You cite D. M. Lloyd-Jones's account of how several famous preachers received their assurance through feelings and spiritual experiences—like seeing a light, or being ravished by joy, or having a strange warming in their bosom—experiences that occurred apart from hearing and believing the Word of God.

DE: That's another fundamental criticism of the Puritan doctrine of assurance. The Reformed tradition rejected mysticism just as heartily as it rejected salvation by works of the law. But Puritanism teaches that the way for a believer to get assurance is by a special, emotional, dramatic, datable, recognizable *feeling*. The public defenders of Puritanism tend to whitewash this aspect of their teaching, nevertheless, Puritanism does teach that you get this assurance from a mystical experience, such as a vision, a dream, or by an extraordinary providence in your life. In which case, you base your assurance of salvation, not upon Jesus Christ and faith in His promise, but on some extraordinary feeling. The result is that a majority of believers under that kind of teaching never get assurance, because they've never had that kind of experience. And what's worse, they begin looking for weird experiences that may have happened to them, in order to give them confidence of their salvation.

SL: And the problem is, if they've had some kind of elusive mystical experience, they may also have had some negative experiences too, and can't tell which experience to believe.



Or the memory of the experience they once had will grow dull over time, and they will begin to doubt again. Instead of certainty, all they have is shifting sand.

DE: And after a day or two passes, you begin to question what was the cause of the experience? Was it merely that I wasn't digesting my food, or didn't get enough sleep, or was it actually worked by the Holy Spirit? There is no certainty in that at all.

Comforting the Afflicted

SL: As a matter of pastoral theology, what would you tell someone who lacked assurance and who lives in fear of dying and going to hell?

DE: I was a pastor for 25 years before I accepted the appointment to teach at the seminary. I have dealt with this issue with members of my congregations who professed to be believers, but who nevertheless struggled with doubts about their salvation. When I dealt with these members, I would attempt to discover if there was any cause behind their doubts, such as living in hatred of their brother, or in infidelity, or

otherwise walking in deliberate sin. In which case, it would be understandable that they would come to doubt their salvation.

Otherwise, I would exhort someone who lacked assurance in this way. I would be very patient. I would take care not to be harsh and condemnatory. I would tell them what the gospel itself says: believe on Jesus Christ, know Him as the Savior from sin, put your faith in Him for your righteousness with God, and you will have certainty of salvation. God Himself promises (and He cannot lie) that everyone who believes on Jesus Christ *is* saved, *will be* saved, and *will never be* lost, and we have no reason to doubt Him whatsoever.

Amen. 

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications at Grace Evangelical Society.

David J. Engelsma is emeritus professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament at Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. His booklet, The Gift of Assurance, is available online, and printed copies are available for free by writing to The Evangelism Committee of Crete Protestant Reformed Church, 1777 East Richton Rd, Crete, IL 60417.

FREE GRACE RESOURCES

November/December 2014

New



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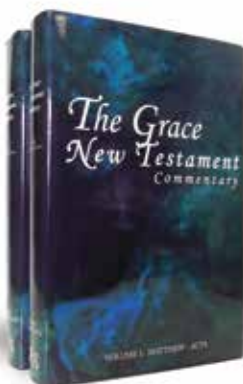
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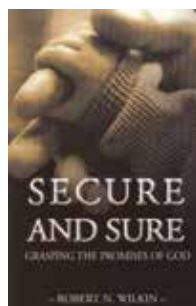
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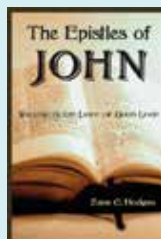
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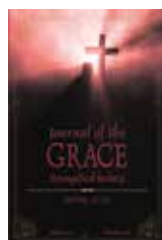
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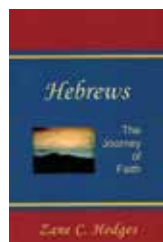
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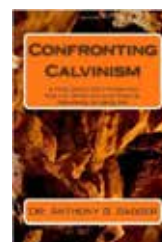
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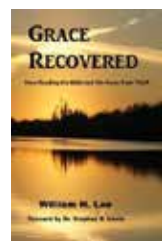
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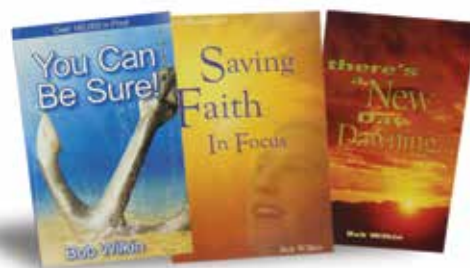
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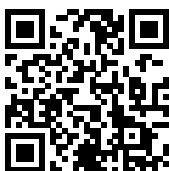


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Serving God Is Important Work

(Haggai 2:2-9)

By Ken Yates

Most people in Christendom believe there will be a final judgment at which each person will be judged by their works to determine if they will be a part of God's eternal kingdom. Some think true believers automatically perform good works and these works prove they are believers. Others believe that the good works done actually earn eternal salvation.

However, one of the emphases of Free Grace theology is that for the believer no such judgment will occur. The believer will never be judged to determine his or her eternal destiny (John 5:24). Instead, the believer will

stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Works will be judged there, but only to determine the extent of one's rewards in the kingdom.

Who Will Be Rewarded?

It has been my experience that one reaction that some people have when exposed to the doctrine of eternal rewards is that they believe that only well-known Christians, or those who are involved in full-time Christian ministry, will receive great rewards on that day. Christians who are laypeople, or who are not involved in any public ministry, will not fare as well. There often



“Like the men in Haggai’s day, we are called to work for the Lord. Work done for Him has eternal significance. Work done in obedience to His word brings glory to Him. Like the workers in Haggai’s day, we are called to believe these things.”

develops an attitude that what some Christians do does not carry as much significance as what others do.

Of course there is ample teaching in the NT that contradicts such thinking. The Lord does not judge as we do. Jesus said that on that day many who are first will be last and many that are last will be first (Matt 20:16). One only has to look at the praise the Lord gave to the unassuming widow in Mark 12:43-44 to realize His approval is not only reserved for those involved in public or more “prestigious” service.

Who’s House, Haggai?

Great significance is attached to the Christian life lived in obedience to the Lord. Even if that life

is lived “under the radar.” An OT illustration of this truth is found in Haggai 2.

The people to whom Haggai prophesied had recently returned from their captivity in Babylon. They were a small, insignificant group of people in the Persian Empire. Their neighbors were their enemies (Ezra 4:1-5). They were poor. Their recent crops produced little (Hag 1:6).

One reason they were experiencing some of their difficulties was because they had disobeyed God. He had told them to rebuild their temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. However, they had only built the foundation and then stopped the rebuilding project

in order to build their own houses (Hag 1:4, 9).

Through Haggai, God told the people that He would be pleased and glorified if they rebuilt *His house* (Hag 1:8). From a human perspective, it is easy to understand why the people did not put a high priority on building the temple. They were going through difficult times and were more interested in building their own homes (Hag 1:4). They wanted to devote their time and resources to those endeavors. Haggai’s sermon, however, did its work. They were convicted and made the decision to complete the work on God’s House (Hag 1:14).

In those discouraging times, God encouraged the people in their

work. While addressing the political and religious leaders, as well as the people themselves, three times God told them to have courage in completing their work for Him. He reminded them that He and His Spirit were with them and they should not fear (Hag 2:4-5).

Human Expectations and God's Promises

In chapter two, Haggai brings up another source of discouragement among the people. It seems to the people that their work on the temple was insignificant. Haggai knows that many of the people felt that way. In Hag 2:3, he points out that the elderly among the people remember what Solomon's Temple was like. The temple these people were building would take the place of Solomon's. But there was no comparison between the two buildings. Solomon's Temple was larger and much more glorious. Ezra 3:12 says that when those who remembered Solomon's Temple saw the foundation of this latter temple laid, they wept because of its inferiority.

When Solomon's Temple was built, the Jews had an abundance of gold and fine material (1 Kgs 6:18ff). In addition, when Solomon dedicated the Temple, the glory of the Lord filled the House in the form of a cloud. Even the priests could not enter the Temple because of the presence of God's glory (1 Kgs 8:10-11).

The builders of this new temple did not have such resources. It would be small in comparison. There was no cloud of God's glory or presence to fill this temple when it was completed. The Jews did not even have the Ark of the Covenant to place in the temple.

The elderly men and women reminded the younger workers of these facts. It would have been easy for these workers to wonder if there

was any importance to their work. The tendency would have been to ask, "What is the use?" How much significance did their obedience to the Lord have?

For this reason, the Lord told the people to be encouraged. He reminded them that He was with them. His Spirit was with them. But He gave them other encouragements as well.

**"If they had known
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work."**

In Hag 2:8, He reminded the builders that the silver and gold belonged to Him. The point here is that they should not compare their service to Him with those who built Solomon's Temple. If God wanted them to have an abundance of gold, silver, and cedar, He could certainly provide it. If God judged their obedience based upon the amount of wealth that was involved in the work, He would have given it to them.

This encouragement is straightforward enough. However, the Lord also encouraged these builders in a way that is somewhat cryptic.

Prophetic Encouragement

The Lord tells the people that He will fill the house they are building with glory and that this glory will be greater than the glory of Solomon's Temple (Hag 2:7, 9). What an amazing promise! But what does it mean?

There appears to be three possibilities. One is that the Lord is referring to the temple in the Millennial Kingdom. It will be larger and more glorious than Solomon's Temple. This seems unlikely, however. The temple these men were building would be destroyed in AD 70. They were not building the temple that will exist in the Millennium.

The second option is that the temple these men were building would be more glorious than Solomon's Temple because at a later time Herod the Great would expand it. Herod turned this temple into a building that was full of beauty and larger than Solomon's (Luke 21:5). This seems unlikely as well. The fact that this temple would one day be larger and have beautiful adornments still would not compare to the cloud of God's presence that filled Solomon's Temple.

It seems that the best solution is a third option. One day, Jesus, the Son of God, would enter, teach in, and heal diseases in this temple. John says that the Apostles saw His glory (John 1:14). This would be the temple that would witness the glory of God in His Son. This glory would exceed the glory seen in the cloud of God's presence. As the author of Hebrews says, in the OT God manifested Himself in many different ways, but Christ is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature (Heb 1:1-3).

But there is more. The Lord also told these men that in the temple they were building He would one day give peace (Hag 1:9). The first coming of our Lord, culminating in

His death and resurrection, would result in peace to all who believe in Him for eternal life (Rom 5:1). The unbeliever is at enmity with God, but with faith in Christ comes peace with God.

Just imagine if the workers of the temple in Haggai's day would have taken these words of the Lord and believed them. What significance this would have given to their work! If they had known that they were building the temple in which God Himself would minister, a ministry that would offer peace to every man and woman, what a difference it would have made in their attitudes and work. At the time they had no idea of these truths. They were called upon to believe in the words of the Lord and do the work He had given them.

The Value of Our Work

But isn't all of this an illustration of Christian work? Every believer is given a spiritual gift. These gifts are to be used to build up the Church, the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17).

We are all called to serve the Lord, but in different ways. A few have public and, it seems, more "prestigious" ministries. Most, however, serve the Lord with little fanfare. These include laymen and mothers who are called to be faithful in what God has called them to do, even if the work seems insignificant by the world's standards.

But, like the men in Haggai's day, we are called to work for the Lord. Work done for Him has eternal significance. Work done in obedience to His word brings glory to Him. Like the workers in Haggai's day, we are called to believe these things. It will only be at a future day, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, when we will see the worth of such labor.

Our encouragement, however, is not just the eternal worth of our labor. Like the workers in Haggai's day, the Lord and His Spirit are with us. The believer today has a greater experience of God's presence than they did. His Spirit permanently indwells us (Rom 8:9). His Spirit is the One who empowers us to do what God calls us to do.

His Work, Our Hands

We live in a world, it seems, that is growing more openly hostile to Christian truths. It is a world that distorts the gospel. At times, it may seem that what we do has little impact or value. However, all we need to do is look at the men building the temple in Haggai's day. Like them, we are to gain encouragement in the truth that God is with us. We are doing His work. Such work glorifies Him. Only in the future will we see the eternal worth of our labor. In His strength, let's get to work, and keep on working until Jesus comes. ■

Ken Yates is GES's East Coast Regional Speaker and Editor of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society.



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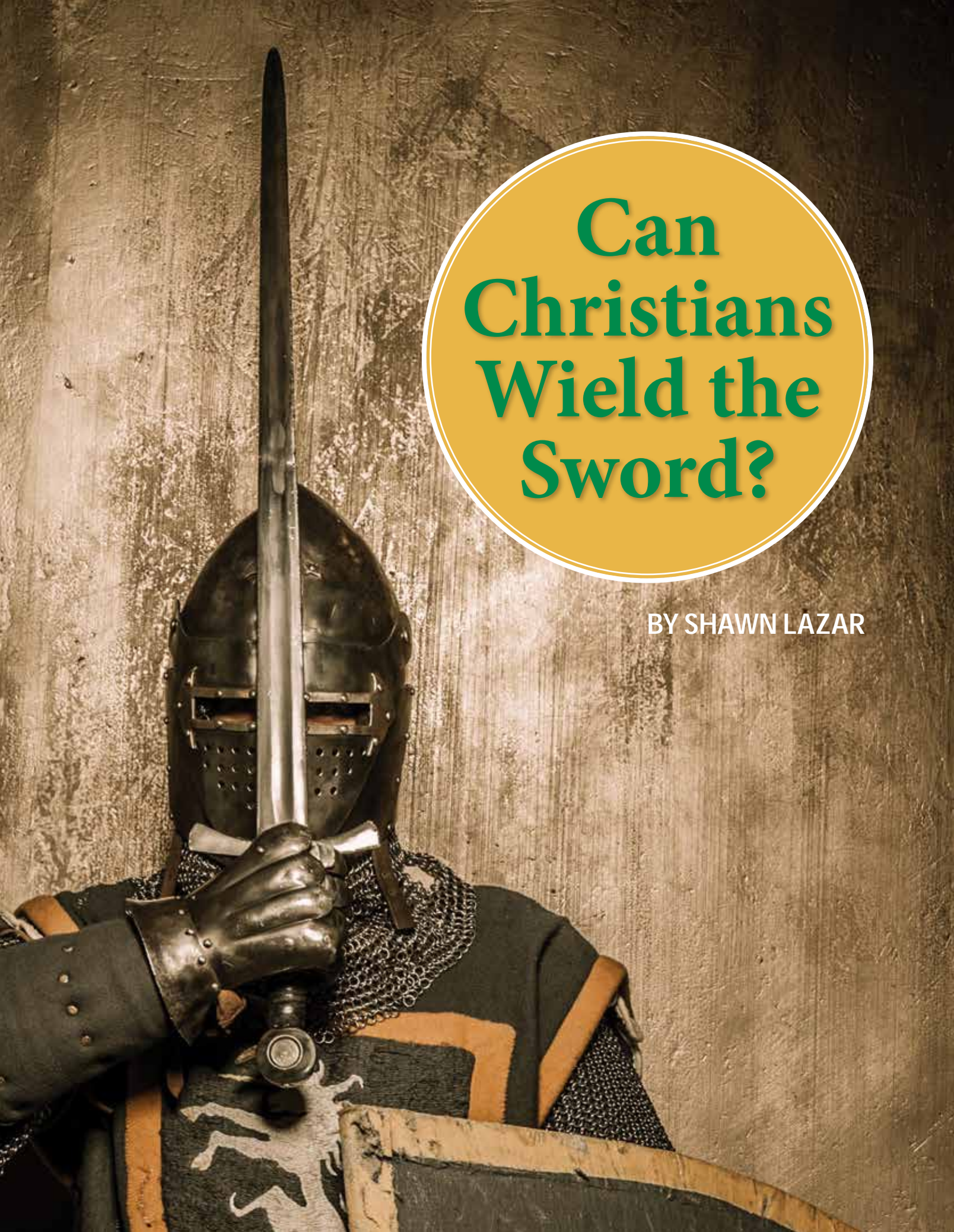
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A knight in full plate armor, including a helmet with a visor and a surcoat with a white animal emblem, holds a sword vertically. The background is a rustic wooden wall.

Can Christians Wield the Sword?

BY SHAWN LAZAR

RECENT NEWS has been dominated by stories of war. War in Israel. War in Ukraine. War in Syria. Currently there is a movement led by the Islamic State to establish a new Caliphate in Iraq, and thousands of Christians have been murdered or exiled in the process. In light of this news, a reader asked:

How can so many Dispensationalists support Israel when they are killing so many Palestinians? How is Jesus' command to "Turn the other cheek" compatible with supporting war? We shouldn't support Israel, or war, or killing. Christians should be pacifists, just like Jesus was.

Put differently, how is it possible to reconcile Christian love with wielding the sword? Let me attempt an answer.

Violence and Christian Love

There's no question that God approved the use of the sword in the OT.

For example, God punished Adam and Eve with death and exile, and threatened them with sword wielding angels, to prevent them from eating from the tree of life (Gen 3:24). After the flood, God told Noah that the death penalty was still valid (Gen 9:5-6). And Abraham—who was justified by faith just as we are—used the sword to rescue his nephew Lot (Genesis 14).

The OT's approval of the sword is even more evident in the Mosaic Law which was full of God-ordained death penalties for capital crimes (e.g., Exod 31:14; Lev 20:10-16; 21:9; Deut 13:1-11; 22:25). And remember, the law is not against love. Instead, love sums up the law (Matt 22:37-40).

As the Hebrews entered the Promised Land, God commanded Joshua and the Israelites to kill the Canaanites (Deut 20:16-18).

After Israel was established, not only did God command war (Exod 17:16), but many of its most godly heroes were military men. The humanistic slogan, "Make love, not war," is flatly contradicted by David who praises

the God of love for teaching his hands to make war (Pss 18:34; 144:1).

In sum, when we consider the OT evidence, it is essential to realize that throughout this period, God was the same Triune God of love that we worship today. God's loving character does not change. If God saw no conflict between His love and His calls to wield the sword, then neither should we. If we do, then we should question whether our concept of love is Biblical.

Peter and Paul Said that Government Was Good

Has God's will changed in the NT? Many Christian pacifists accept that violence was justified in theocratic Israel, but claim that Jesus has given us a new ethic of love that is incompatible with political violence.

I'm not convinced.

We already saw that God allowed the use of violence before Israel was established, during her establishment, and after her exile. Israel isn't the issue. On the contrary, it seems that in the NT God *expands* His approval of the use of the sword to include *all* civil government, whether Jewish or Gentile. We can see this taught explicitly by both Peter and Paul.

Peter tells us: "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good" (1 Pet 2:13-14). According to Peter, Christians ought to submit to the political authorities, because they have the God-given vocation to punish evildoers.

Paul made the same point in Romans 13:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil (Rom 13:1-4)

Note carefully what Paul says. Government is "from God" and "appointed" by Him. God does not simply *permit* government as a necessary evil, He actively *ordains* it as part of His benevolent providence. Indeed, it is "God's minister" meant "for good."

And what is the good that government is appointed to do? As Paul explains, they are to bear “the sword,” act as an avenger, and execute “wrath on him who practices evil.”

The fact that it is good to use the sword against evildoers is a point that many pacifists do not recognize. For example, Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder wrote: “The divine mandate of the state consists in using *evil means* to keep evil from getting out of hand.” For Yoder, all violence is evil. Even punishing evil-doers means using “evil means.” But Peter and Paul did not share that opinion. By contrast, they believed the lawful use of the sword is a God-ordained *good*. In fact, when faced with his own death, Paul supported the government’s authority to kill

criminals: “if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying” (Acts 25:11). Modern pacifists, however, often object to the death penalty in principle.

No wonder, then, that Paul so often called attention to soldierly virtues for living the Christian life. For example, he counselled Timothy: “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:3-4; cf. 1 Cor 9:7; Eph 6:11-2; Phil 2:25; Phlm 1:2). The comparison between being a Christian and being a soldier would have been unthinkable if Paul actually thought it was a wicked vocation.

The NT writers seemingly go out of their way to emphasize that many soldiers and government leaders believed in Christ, such as the centurion overseeing the crucifixion (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47), Cornelius (Acts 10), and the proconsul Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:12). No soldier or politician is ever told to leave their vocation because it

is incompatible with faith in Christ or love of neighbor.

John the Baptist Approved

Paul and Peter *explicitly* tell us that God has ordained government to use the sword, but the NT also contains *implicit* approval as well.

For example, when John the Baptist called people to bear fruit worthy of repentance, some soldiers asked him what they should do. He told them: “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:7-14). If John were a pacifist, or if he thought that believers should not serve in pagan armies, he would have told these soldiers to leave the military. Instead, John forbade them from *abusing* their vocation.

Being an honest soldier was a fruit worthy of repentance.

“If God saw no conflict between His love and His calls to wield the sword, then neither should we.”

A Gentile Soldier Had the Greatest Faith

Pacifists believe that being a soldier is absolutely contrary to Jesus’ moral teaching. But if that were true, Jesus could not have said this about a centurion: “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Luke 7:9). How could a centurion have the greatest faith Jesus had ever encountered, if his vocation was wicked and against Jesus’ commands of love?

The Love in War

That raises the hardest question of all: how do we reconcile the use of the sword with the Christian command to love?

The answer isn’t immediately obvious. I’m sure many would agree with Martin Luther’s knee-jerk response: “when I think of a soldier fulfilling his office by punishing the wicked, killing the wicked, and creating so much misery, it seems an un-Christian work



completely contrary to Christian love.”²

What could be more unloving then killing an enemy? Aren't we commanded to love them, not kill them?

War seems to have very little to do with love *until you think about the evils it can prevent*. Luther went on to say this: “When I think of how [war] protects the good and keeps and preserves wife and child, house and farm, property, and honor and peace, then I see how precious and godly this work is...”³

That's the key.

In order to see how using the sword can be an act of love, we must look at how it fits into a larger picture. War is terrible, *but the evils war prevents are even worse*. That's why Luther said God authorized the use of the sword:

...we must, in thinking about a soldier's office, not concentrate on the killing, burning, striking, hitting, seizing, etc. This is what children with their limited and restricted vision see when they regard a doctor as a sawbones who amputates, but do not see that he does this only to save the whole body. So, too, we must look at the office of the soldier, or the sword, with the eyes of an adult and see why this office slays and acts so cruelly. Then it will prove itself to be an office which, in itself, is godly and as needful and useful to the world as eating and drinking or any other work.⁴

Earlier, I quoted John Howard Yoder writing that the sword is an “evil means.” Yoder's assumption was that all violence is morally equivalent. But the Bible does not take that view at all. Executing a murderer is not itself murder, but justice. Killing an aggressor in defense of a neighbor is not evil, it is good.

The Christian's Two Roles

Then how should we understand Jesus' commands that seem to condone pacifism, such as the commands to turn the other cheek (Luke 6:29) and to love our enemies (Matt 5:44)?

These commands need to be understood in light of the difference between acting in our own interest, and acting in the interest of a neighbor.

When *our own* interests are in view, then Jesus' commands apply. Some people have called this a “martyr ethic.” When we are persecuted for the faith, we should turn the other cheek, not take vengeance (Rom 12:19), and otherwise love our enemies. An example of this would be David who suffered at the hands of Saul, even though he had both the motive and opportunity to retaliate. As Luther said, “In what concerns you and yours, you govern yourself by the gospel and suffer injustice towards yourself as a true Christian.”⁵ We do it as a testimony to our faith in Christ.

However, when it comes to *our neighbors*, love requires their protection. We can't simply stand by and allow our neighbors to be violated. Jesus commanded us to turn the other cheek. But if we come across a woman or child who is being raped, it would be a moral obscenity to think that the proper application of Jesus' teaching is to stand by and do nothing. In those cases, Christian love demands that we act to stop the injustice, and to protect our neighbors. That is why, immediately after telling the Roman Christians to bless their persecutors, feed their enemies, and overcome evil with good, Paul explained how God ordained the sword for our good, in order to punish and overcome evil (Rom 12:14-21; 13:4).

In sum, in our private lives, we can defend ourselves, but we cannot take revenge or become vigilantes. Using the sword is the government's job, not ours. As private citizens in private vocations, we seek to love our neighbors, even our enemies. But Christians who serve as policemen or soldiers have the God-appointed duty to use the sword for the public good. Christian love is equally expressed, albeit differently, in both types of vocations.

The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste illustrate this two-perspective approach. According to legend, they were a group of Roman soldiers. When the Emperor Licinus began persecuting Christians, instead of fighting back (as they easily could have) they accepted martyrdom. As soldiers, their vocation was to use the sword to protect their neighbors, but as Christians, they refused to use the sword to defend themselves, and chose instead to suffer for their faith. They were sentenced to be frozen to death in AD 320.

Abusing Our Vocations

Although the Bible authorizes the political use of the sword, there are limits to what the government is supposed to do. As John the Baptist suggested, soldiers can *abuse* their vocations (by stealing from the people). So can governments in general.

The government's divine vocation is to protect the innocent and be a terror to evildoers. However, it's entirely possible for it to overstep its bounds and become a terror to the good. In which case, the Christian is called to civil disobedience.

To be clear, Paul tells us that the Christian is not allowed to rebel: “Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment

on themselves” (Rom 13:2, NIV). Christians are not allowed to raise up arms against their own governments.

For example, when Moses confronted Pharaoh about releasing the Hebrew slaves, he did not lead the Hebrews in a violent rebellion, even though there were more than enough slaves to make that possible.

Or after God rejected Saul, and chose David to be king in his place (1 Sam 16:1-13), David did not lead a rebellion against Saul or try to assassinate him.

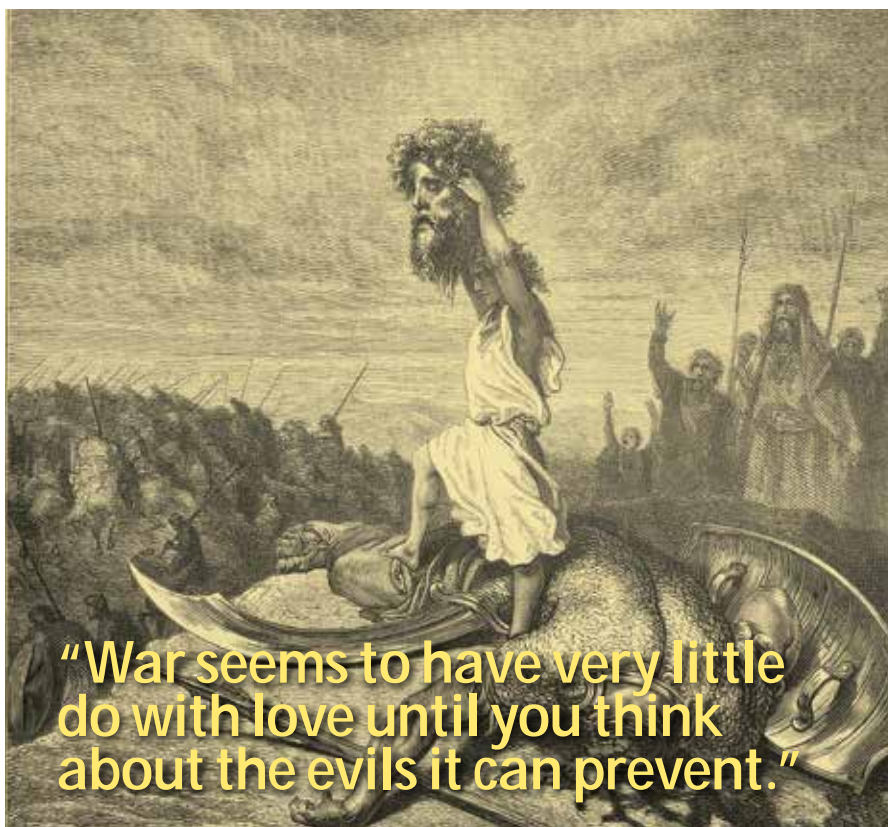
Or when Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were required to worship idols, they did not incite a rebellion against the Babylonians, even though they had the political power to do so (Daniel 3, 6, 11).

Instead, they all practiced civil disobedience. They made a public profession of their faith in defiance of the authorities, and were willing to become martyrs, but not revolutionaries.

Similarly, when the government forbade the apostles from preaching the gospel, they did not take up arms against the Romans, but they did openly defy the authorities and continued to preach, saying they “ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Christians are not allowed to violently rebel against God-ordained authority, even when that authority is being unjust. That includes Christians in vocations that wield the sword. Such Christians may be faced with hard choices and may have to be civilly disobedient too.

For instance, if a Christian soldier was given the order to murder innocent civilians, to steal, or to worship idols, he would have to refuse, and risk losing his job or worse.



“War seems to have very little do with love until you think about the evils it can prevent.”

Someone will ask: if Christians can’t rebel against tyrants, then who will bring them to justice?

Even though Paul forbids us from violent rebellion, God has other means of punishing the people and nations who abuse their divine vocations. This usually involves using one nation to attack and destroy another, such as when the Lord used the Babylonians and later the Romans to take rebellious Israel into exile.

Israel and Hamas

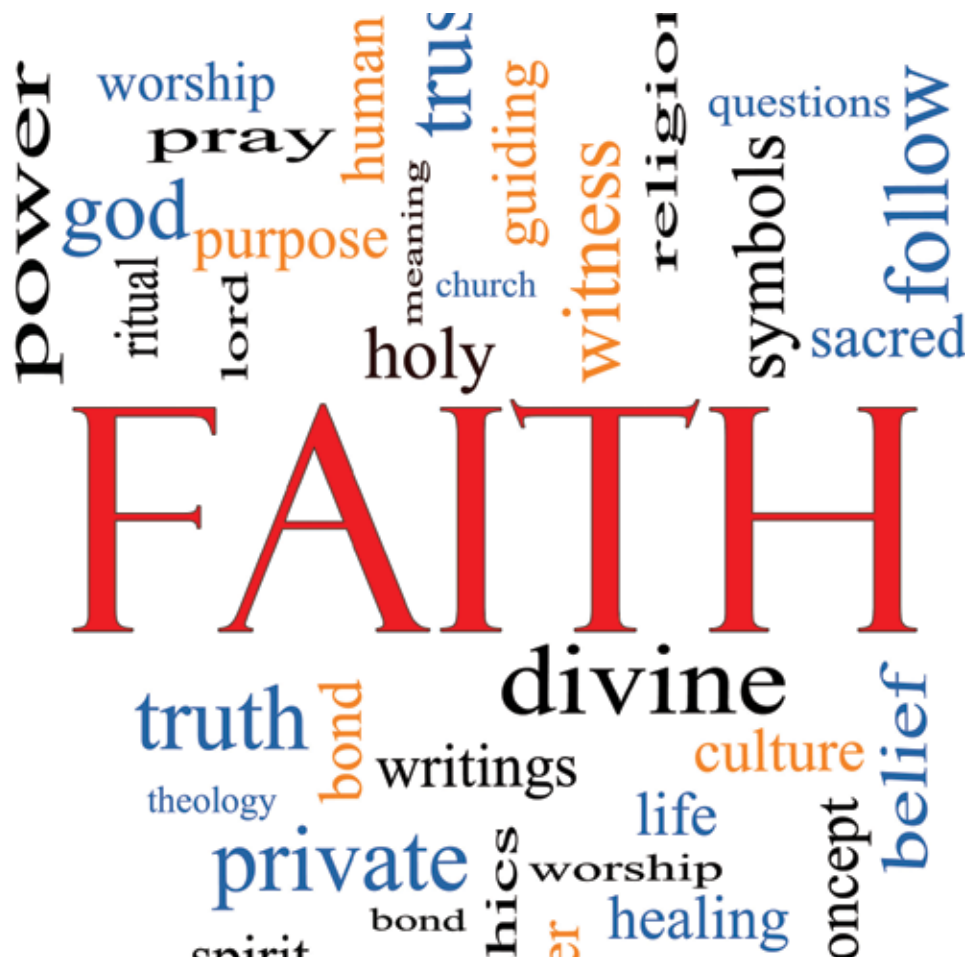
Coming to the second question: why do most Dispensationalists support Israel over Hamas (or over Iran, or ISIS, or Syria)?

Every government has the responsibility of protecting its citizens against threats to their persons and property. That is true for both Israel and Hamas. So which one of those governments is fulfilling its God-given vocation?

I suspect that most Dispensationalists support Israel (in part) because they believe it is defending its citizens against Hamas’s unjust attacks. They would agree with Benjamin Netanyahu’s judgment that, “If the Arabs were to put down their arms there would be no more war. If Israel were to put down its arms there would be no more Israel.” **GLE**

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications at Grace Evangelical Society.

1. John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 18.
2. Martin Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved,” in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther 1523-1526*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 436-37.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extend It Should Be Obeyed,” in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther 1520-1523*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 286.



Repentance and Faith in the New Testament

By Bill Fiess

It is a bit surprising, in light of how often people say that repentance and faith go hand in hand, to discover that they are only found together four times in the NT.

The words *believe* (*pisteuō*) and *faith* (*pistis*) occur 266 and 299 times respectively in the NT. That is over 560 uses. Yet the words *repent* (*metanoēō*) and *repentance* (*metanoia*) occur only 55 times.

It is obvious that faith/believing is much more important as a theme than is repentance, occurring over ten times more often.

If these two ideas were either identical or two sides of the same coin you would expect them to occur together all the time. But they rarely do.

Four Uses

Here are the four places in which they occur together:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent*, and *believe* in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).

Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of *repentance*, saying to the people that they should *believe* on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:4).

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the

Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, *repentance* toward God and *faith* toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:18-21).

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of *repentance* from dead works and of *faith* toward God... (Heb 6:1).

Are These Contexts Evangelistic?

Another thing that hit me about these four passages is that all are in a Jewish context.

In Mark 1:15—the only use of these words together in the Gospels—the Lord Jesus called for His people, the Jews, to repent of their sins and to believe in the good news that the kingdom of God was near (Mark 1:14). If that generation of Jews had repented and believed in Jesus, then the kingdom would have come by A.D. 40. (i.e., seven years after Jesus' resurrection).

In Acts 19, Paul met a group of believers who had never heard of the Holy Spirit and had only been baptized into John's baptism (Acts 19:1-3). Paul then explained that John's baptism of repentance was meant to lead the Jewish people to believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:4).

The third occurrence together is in Acts 20:21. Paul was speaking to the elders from Ephesus in Miletus while he was on his way to Jerusalem. Paul recounts to them the ministry he had among them. He preached to Jews and Gentiles repentance toward God (the Father) and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ (the Son). Of the four uses, this is the only one which is not strictly a Jewish context.

The final time these two words occur together is in the letter to the Hebrews. In Heb 6:1 the author speaks of "the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God."

Clearly Heb 6:1 and Acts 19:4 are not evangelistic contexts.

Acts 20:21 isn't either, but Paul may be recounting his ministry of evangelism in Ephesus. However, it's more likely that he is recounting his *entire* ministry in Ephesus, a ministry of both evangelism (calling

people to faith in Christ) and discipleship (calling people to repentance toward God).


Mark 1:14-15 is a national call to repentance and to faith, but not faith in Christ *per se*, but in the fact that the kingdom was near. The issue there is whether the kingdom would come for that generation of Jews.

Conclusions

Let me suggest two conclusions.

First, it should be noted that repentance and faith are not used synonymously in any of the four times they are found together. Although many people assume otherwise, repentance and faith *do not mean the same thing*.

Second, repentance and faith are not inseparable concepts. Repenting from sins is one thing. Faith in God's promises is another. You can call someone to faith, without also calling them to repent, and vice versa.

As we seek to understand the true nature of faith and repentance, let's repent of our unbiblical assumptions and believe the evidence of God's Word. 

Bill Fiess is a mathematics professor.

QUOTABLE

"Padding the rolls with the 'baptized lost' has finally caught up with us. That sad state is reflected with attitudes, actions, and the decline of responsible church membership. Much of the decline is one of the healthiest developments on the horizon. Like Gideon, we had too many to function as a spiritual army. **I suspect we need to lose a million more.**"

~ Paige Patterson,

President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Read more: www.patheos.com/blogs/philosophicalfragments/2014/06/05/why-southern-baptists-declined-and-what-to-do/#ixzz3F0N8ZMAC

Possessing the Kingdom

(Matthew 5:3)*

By Zane C. Hodges

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3).

With these words the King opens His famous Sermon on the Mount. He has been proclaiming a message that declared: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). So He opens the Sermon with a reference to those who will possess that kingdom.

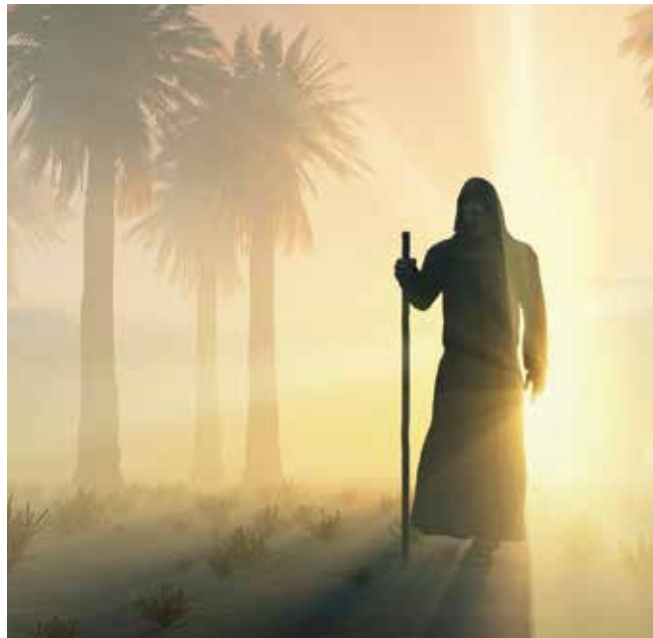
The audience is described by Matthew like this:

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying... (Matt 5:1-2)

We might compare this scene to a university lecture hall. The professor has his regular students before him, but his lecture is open to the public. Although he is primarily addressing his class, the professor will not forget that others are present as well.

The Sermon on the Mount was primarily for the “pupils” of Jesus. (The Greek word for “disciple” means “pupil”!) But our Lord does not lose sight of the larger audience. Among other things, He warns them to “start out right” by entering through “the narrow gate” (Matt 7:13). In light of the rest of the New Testament, this can only refer to man’s narrow and restricted way to God, which is by faith alone in Christ alone.

Discipleship, of course, can be begun before true saving faith occurs. Many unsaved people attend good Bible-teaching churches and are “students” of God’s Word before they trust Christ as their sole hope of heaven, totally apart from all works. But if the narrow gate of salvation is not entered first, such discipleship can fail miserably. It did so with Judas and other unbelieving disciples mentioned in John 6:64-66.




But it is vital to keep in mind that the Sermon on the Mount is basically a “lecture” to disciples. No doubt it was read exactly that way by the first readers of Matthew’s Gospel. And it should be read that way by us.

In this light, then, the opening words of the Sermon do not tell us how to “enter” the kingdom of heaven. They say *nothing at all* about “entering.” Instead they tell us how that kingdom can be *possessed*—how it can be *ours*!

The kingdom, Jesus informs us, will belong to those who are “poor in spirit.” That is to say, it will belong to His disciples who have learned true humility and submission of heart toward God. It is such people who will *possess* the kingdom. But it is *kings* who receive and possess kingdoms (see Luke 19:15; Dan 7:18 compared with 7:14). So, humble disciples will possess the kingdom in the sense that they will *co-reign* over it with the King of kings. Jesus taught this elsewhere as well:

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne (Rev 3:21).

Through God’s grace Christians are called to be victorious over pride and self-will in their own hearts. By pronouncement of the King Himself, His kingdom is the special possession of the “poor in spirit”! 

Zane C. Hodges taught NT Greek and Exegesis at Dallas Seminary for 27 years, and was a founding Board member of Grace Evangelical Society.

*This article appeared in *Grace in Focus* in May of 1991.



What do you
need to know?

By Staff

How Do Our Sins Affect Our Rewards?

Q We all sin and we all sin every day. We are not going to stop sinning as long as we are in these bodies. We practice some sins more than others. As I understand it, sin is sin to God, whether it's a little one (humanly speaking) or a big one; it's all the same to God.

My question is how does that figure into our rewards? Didn't David and Solomon commit major sins near the end of their lives? And if sin is not conquered (since we sin everyday) how does that figure into rewards or no rewards?

~BP, email

A Good points.
Yes, I believe that the Bible does teach that some sins are worse than others.

Yes, we all sin daily, even hourly.

How do our sins work into rewards? Tough question. Here is my short answer.

Sins can lessen our eternal rewards because sins can lessen our lifespan and hence our time of service; they can lessen our effectiveness if we sin and do not confess them; and they may lead others to be less open to us and our ministry.

Our evaluation at the Bema will be based on what we have done, "whether good and bad" (2 Cor 5:10). While

sins will not be judged as sins, our deeds will be judged. Bad deeds will have some impact on our overall judgment, although the Lord does not clarify this. We do know, however, that we reap what we sow (Gal 6:7ff).

If we persevere in our confession of Christ, then we will rule with Christ in the life to come (2 Tim 2:12) even though we are still sinners at the time of the rapture or death (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Of course, this assumes we are not walking in rebellion at that time. In that case,

we would not rule (1 Cor 6:9-11; 2 Cor 5:19-21).

How much we will rule is determined by how well we did with our time, talent, and treasure. My guess, and it is just that, is that bad works will in some way detract from the value of some of our good works. We know from Luke 19:16-26 that some will rule over 10

cities, some over 5, and some not at all. From that we can extrapolate the idea that rulership will range from being over one tiny rural city to many major cities.

It is not healthy to focus on our sins. We are to focus on Christ (2 Cor 3:18) and His beauty. We are to confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and focus on Him and His soon return.

I hope that helps.

~Bob

**"It is not healthy to focus
on our sins. We are to
focus on Christ and His
beauty."**

Is Water Baptism for Today?

Q A friend who identifies as a Mid-Acts Dispensationalist argued that water baptism is a Jewish ceremony that is not for the Body of Christ. He pointed me to where Paul says, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor 1:17a). He said that means water baptism is not for Christians. And when Paul says there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5), he claimed the “one baptism” is baptism by the Spirit into Christ to the exclusion of water baptism. Otherwise, if we had both water baptism and spirit baptism, that would equal two baptisms, not one. How do I answer him?

~GG, email

A I’ve learned a lot from Mid-Acts Dispensationalists like Cornelius Stam and Charles F. Baker and Harry Bultema. But I think they’re wrong on the water baptism issue.

First, what did Paul mean when he said he was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel (1 Cor 1:17a)? There are two options.

You can take the Mid-Acts position and say that Paul meant that water baptism is not for the Body of Christ.

But here’s another option. If the Body of Christ began with Paul (as Mid-Acts people say), isn’t it significant that he was baptized with water and with the Spirit (Acts 9:17, 18)? And isn’t it significant that in his ministry establishing the Body of Christ he baptized people with water (1 Cor 1:14-16)?

In light of these facts, Mid-Acts folk reason that Paul must have received further revelation clarifying that water baptism was no longer for the Church, so he changed his earlier practice and stopped baptizing people with water.

I think the real explanation is much simpler. It’s more likely that Paul simply meant that water baptism was not the primary duty of his evangelistic and missionary commission.

The other apostles had this same debate about running the day to day affairs of the local churches. They were spending too much time serving food to widows and not enough time preaching. So they said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2, NIV), and they appointed deacons to do it instead. That doesn’t mean the apostles never helped the poor. It just means that wasn’t their primary job.

Paul is making the same point about baptism and his commission. Water baptism is the primary job of the

local assembly, not of itinerant evangelists and apostles like himself. He came to preach, not to baptize.

Second, does the fact that we have “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5) obviously mean there is one Spirit baptism to the exclusion of water baptism? I don’t think so.

We know that the “one baptism” that Paul mentions includes water baptism because when Paul was baptized with the Spirit he was also baptized with water (Acts 9:17, 18). And later, when Paul told the Corinthians that “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13), we know from Acts that they were also baptized with water (Acts 18:8). So the Biblical evidence strongly suggests Spirit baptism and water baptism go together.

Mid-Acts brethren protest that this would mean we have two baptisms (water + Spirit), not one. But that would be like arguing that since Jesus had human and divine natures we have two Lords, not one. Nonsense. Water baptism is the outward sign of being baptized into Christ by the Spirit. They aren’t two different baptisms, but two aspects of one baptism.

~Shawn

The OT and Everlasting Life

Q My understanding is that the OT is silent on everlasting life.

Is it your view that, as God’s chosen people, all pre-Messiah Jews are in the kingdom age as well as the new heaven and new earth?

What is your view regarding OT non-Jews that died pre-Messiah?

~MDY, email

A First, the OT is not silent on everlasting life as John 5:39-40 shows: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” The Lord’s audience did not object. They didn’t say, “Wait one minute. We don’t know what you mean by eternal life. Where is eternal life in the Scriptures?”

In the OT the promise is that the one who believes in the coming Messiah will live forever in a glorified body in the kingdom (cf. Gen 5:21-24; 12:3; 15:6; Job 19:25-27; Jude 14-15). That is the OT equivalent of everlasting life in the future. For the OT equivalent of everlasting life now, see the expression *knowing the Lord* in the OT (e.g., Judg 2:10; 1 Sam 2:12; 3:7; Isa 19:21; Jer 31:34).


Second, I’m not sure what you mean by “all pre-Messiah Jews.” In my view the message of life has not changed since Adam and Eve. The way to be born again

has always been by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life. Works have never been a condition. Ethnicity has never been a condition. Now before Jesus' baptism, where John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit identified Him publicly as Messiah, people had to believe in the coming Messiah for everlasting life. They likely did not know His name is Jesus. But they knew that it was by faith in Him that they had everlasting life. That is why Paul twice cites Abraham and Gen 15:6 to prove that justification and regeneration are by faith alone in Christ alone (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6, 7, 8, 9, 10-14). The Lord Jesus cited Abraham too as one who believed in Him (John 8:56).

Third, Gentiles before the Church Age were born again in the same way as Jews, by faith alone in Christ alone. No one ever has or ever will be born again by animal sacrifices, worship, acts of obedience, humility, etc.

So who will be in the Millennium and the new earth from the OT era? All who believed in the Messiah for everlasting life will be there. All who did not won't.

I hope that helps.

~Bob 

Send your questions to bethany@faithalone.org or message us on Facebook.



"RADICAL" CHANGES AT IMB?

David Platt, author of *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*, has been appointed the President of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board.

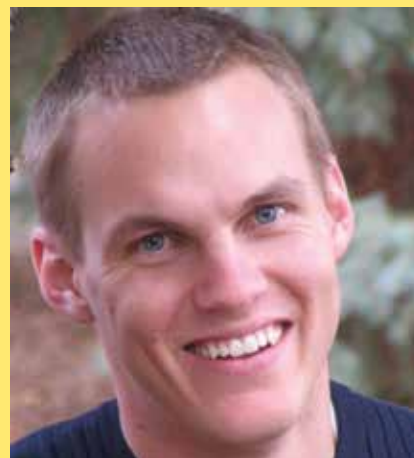
Platt will lead the SBC's mission to take the gospel to the lost. The question is, what "gospel" will he preach?

In the first chapter of his book, *Follow Me*, Platt related a conversation he had with a Muslim woman who asked, "How do I become a Christian?" According to Platt, he had two options. First, he could have told her to: "simply assent to certain truths and repeat a particular prayer" (p. 2). Or second, he could have told her what he considers to be the "truth," namely, that "in the gospel, God is calling her to die." This includes "literally" dying to her family, friends, and future (p. 2).

It is disturbing that Platt told the woman she had to "die" (i.e., do works) to be saved, instead of telling her that Jesus died in her place, so that if she believes in Him for everlasting life she will have it and will never perish (John 3:16).

In fact, in an extremely troubling part of his book, Platt explains John 3:16 and similar passages this way:

Based on these passages, you might conclude that believing in Jesus is all that's involved in becoming or being a Christian. This is absolutely true, but we must consider context in order




to understand what the Bible means by belief. When Jesus calls Nicodemus to believe in him, he is calling Nicodemus to be born again—to **begin an entirely new life devoted to following him** (Platt, *Follow Me*, 15, emphasis added).

So, for Platt, *belief* actually means a life of *works*. So much for Paul's arguments that we are justified by faith apart from works.

Unfortunately, Platt doesn't seem to recognize the difference between *salvation* and *discipleship*. He takes all the verses that describe how a born-again person should live, and turns them into conditions for being born-again. He puts the cart before the horse. This serious confusion leads Platt to teach a gospel of salvation by works, a fact that has been noted by others (see Philip Cary, "Stay Put and Build," *Christianity Today*, Oct 2014, p. 68).

Please pray that Platt will learn to distinguish between salvation and discipleship and that the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board will endorse a clear gospel message, so that the next time someone asks a Southern Baptist missionary how to become a Christian, they will point them to Christ's promise of eternal life and not to their own "radical" efforts.

~Grace in Focus 

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