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Wake Up and Get to Work

REVELATION 3:14-22

by

Bob Wilkin

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Letter from the Editor

Most of the articles in this issue are drawn from our annual conference which was held April 22-25 in Fort Worth, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). The conference went well and I believe you'll really enjoy these articles.

In this issue we have an outstanding article from Dr. Elliott Johnson, one of my seminary professors, on transformation by seeing the glory of the Lord Jesus in Scripture.

There is an article by Dr. John Niemelä on a famous problem text, John 8:30-32. He shows that the grammar does not support the idea that the believers in John 8:30-32 were somehow not *true* believers.

Revelation 3:14-22 is the seventh of the seven letters in Revelation 2-3. It is a powerful call to wake up and get to work.

Diane Boring reflects upon one of the clearest passages of Scripture on the condition for receiving everlasting life.

Shawn Lazar presents a timely article in light of all of the tornadoes that have recently hit Oklahoma. Does God still judge sin? Free Grace theology is not antinomian and is not soft on sin.

There are also some pictures of the conference. If you missed this year, we hope to see you next year (April 21-24, again at SWBTS). The theme will be Paul's Letter to the Romans and speakers will include experts on Romans such as Drs. René López and John Niemelä.

Enjoy.




Bob speaking at the 2013 Conference

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Does God Still Punish Sin?

By Shawn Lazar

After the heartbreaking devastation in Moore, OK, David P. Scaer,¹ released a short message entitled, “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People.”² In it, he made a startling claim:

Tragedies, even massive ones caused by tornadoes, are not signs of God’s displeasure over sin...Evangelical preachers who even suggest that God is carrying out vengeance on sin do not hold that Christ made atonement for all sin.

If Scaer had said that we shouldn’t rush to judge whether God intended to destroy Moore, or that it is difficult to make a one-to-one correspondence between a particular tragedy and a particular sin, or that our suffering is not a clear reflection of God’s will for us, I would have been sympathetic. But Scaer is saying something much stronger.

He is claiming that tragedies are *never* signs of God’s displeasure, that after the cross God no longer punishes sin, and anyone who teaches otherwise denies the atonement.

Is it true that God doesn’t carry out vengeance on sin? What is Scaer’s Biblical evidence?



SIN AND DESTRUCTION (LUKE 13:1-5)

Scaer appeals to Luke 13:4. This is the famous passage about the Tower of Siloam. After paraphrasing it (by applying it to the residents of Moore), Scaer makes the claim that, “Tragedies...are not signs of God’s displeasure over sin...”

Before we accept what Scaer says, let’s look at the whole passage and decide whether his conclusion is warranted by the text.

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Scaer concludes from this passage that tragedies are not signs of God’s displeasure. Where does he get that idea?

Here, Jesus was told about a tragedy involving **Galileans** who had gone up to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple, and were put to death by **Pilate**. Consequently, their blood was **mingled with their**

sacrifices, suggesting a particularly gruesome end.

And what was Jesus’ response to this news? Did He deny a connection between their sins and their fate? Not at all. He took the Galileans’ sinfulness for granted, and warned the Jerusalemites, that unless they repented, they would **likewise perish**. In other words, unless they turned from their sins, they would die too.

The Lord then presented another tragic example involving **eighteen** people being crushed under **the tower in Siloam**, in south Jerusalem. Again, He implied they were sinners, no worse **than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem**, and proceeded to repeat His warning, that unless the Jerusalemites repented of their sins, they should expect to **perish**.

It is puzzling that Scaer would ever think to use this text to *deny* that God still punishes sin, and to conclude that even *suggesting* “that God is carrying out vengeance on sin” is wrong. His conclusion is starkly contradicted by Jesus’ own warning to the people living in Jerusalem that their sins (and especially their rejection of Jesus) would lead to disaster and death.

SIN AND INTROSPECTION (1 COR 11:27-32)

Scaer believes his understanding of God’s role in natural disasters has some practical pastoral applications. He writes,

For a moment let’s think about a popular view that misfortune, especially serious illnesses,

continued on p. 4

should be viewed as God's punishment for sin. So consequently, the afflicted person is asked to search his/her soul to discover the sin that brought about such evil. This spiritual exercise, if we dare call it this, is that the afflicted person is asked to repent. *Such an approach is dreadfully wrong*, especially in pastoral care, not only because it is a blatant denial of the central Christian teaching of vicarious atonement that Christ has suffered the guilt and consequences of both original sin and all actual sins, but the afflicted person may come to believe that he or she has committed an unforgivable sin (italics added).

Since Scaer denies that God punishes sin after the cross, it is only natural that he would also deny it is pastorally sound to ask people to search their own lives, to see if their suffering is connected with personal sin. Scaer thinks such an approach "is dreadfully wrong" and "a blatant denial of... vicarious atonement." Is there any Biblical evidence for these conclusions? He offers none. Indeed, Scaer's claim is contradicted by clear Biblical teaching.

Let's turn to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where he discusses the celebration of the Lord's Supper,

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world (1 Cor 11:27-32).

Here we find that the Corinthians were mishandling (even abusing) the Lord's Supper. They were divided into factions (1 Cor 11:19). They were eating ahead of each other (v 21). Some were even getting drunk (v 21b). Most of all, they were not discerning the Lord's body (v 29). So Paul warned them that whoever partook of the bread and wine **in an unworthy manner** would be **guilty of the body and blood of the**

Lord, and would thereby drink **judgment to himself**.

And what were the consequences of their actions? Paul explained the result was that many of the Corinthians were **weak and sick**, and some even died because of it (i.e., **many sleep**).

In other words, in Paul's mind there was a clear causal connection between sinning and being punished with sickness and death. And it is precisely because of this connection that he admonished the Corinthians to **examine** themselves to see if they approached the Supper in a respectful or sinful manner.

It is important to **judge ourselves**, Paul explains, so as to avoid God's temporal judgment. If we do not judge ourselves,

“Hebrews clearly says that believers are chastened, rebuked, and even scourged by God. And this is for our good, because we are loved as sons.”

then God will judge us. If we do not repent of our own accord, we can expect to be **chastened by the Lord**, precisely so that we will not be **condemned with the world**.

Paul is not here referring to eternal condemnation. Believers have everlasting life, and the promise they will never perish, so they need not fear God's *eternal* wrath. Rather, the condemnation Paul has in mind is the *temporal* afflictions of weakness, sickness, and death that was evident among the Corinthians. God condemns the world with that kind of temporal punishment, but believers need not be a part of it. Believers are disciplined, like children. This is not contrary to His love, but part of it.

The author of Hebrews had this to say about the relationship between God's love and His chastisement:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (Heb 12:4-7)

Hebrews clearly says that believers are chastened, rebuked, and even scourged by God. And this is for our good, because we are loved as sons.

Still, it is better to examine ourselves for personal sin, and repent, to avoid such chastisement.

Scaer may think that is dreadfully wrong, but God's Word says otherwise.

FEAR OF LOSING ONE'S SALVATION

One of the reasons why Scaer says we should not counsel people to examine their own sins in the midst of tragedy is because “the afflicted person may come to believe that he or she has committed an unforgivable sin.”

It is not quite clear what Scaer means by that kind of fear. Since Lutherans teach that eternal salvation can be lost, maybe Scaer is concerned that people will take their suffering as evidence that they have committed an unforgivable sin that either causes them to lose their salvation or that proves they were never truly saved to begin with.

In that case, the solution is not to deny the Biblical connection between sin and tragedy, but to stop preaching a false gospel. Instead, we should preach the true message of free grace, i.e., that all who believe in Jesus will have everlasting life and will *never* eternally perish (John 3:16). Believers can thereby know that they are eternally secure. And so, there is no sin or judgment they can undergo that will call their eternal destiny into question. Believers can know that they will be with God forever, despite the personal tragedies they may undergo in the here and now.

But the solution must also include the explanation that sin still has dire consequences in this life. Believers cannot perish eternally, but they can and will perish temporally. And in the life to come they can

experience the loss of rewards (1 Cor 3:12-15). I would urge Lutherans like Scaer to study the Biblical distinctions between eternal life and eternal rewards, eternal perishing and temporal perishing, and between eternal judgment and temporal judgment.

CONCLUSION

Let me emphasize that I am not passing judgement on the people of Moore, OK. Nor am I saying that every illness

or personal tragedy is a punishment for sin. I am strictly replying to the claim that God no longer punishes sin, and it is wrong to suggest that He does.

Although we should not be too quick to judge whether a particular affliction or tragedy is due to God's judgment on personal sin, we cannot dogmatically rule out that possibility. There is not a shred of Biblical evidence to support the idea that God no longer punishes sin.

The sobering truth is, God does punish sin with tragedy, including sickness and

death, out of love for believers. And as Paul taught the Corinthians, the way to avoid God's chastisement is to examine ourselves and repent of the sins we find, lest we be condemned with the world.

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications at GES.

1. Professor of Systematic Theology and New Testament at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN.
2. It can be found here: <http://www.ctsfi.edu/document.doc?id=1022>.

After Just One Drink

By Diane Boring

Our Ladies' Bible Study is going through the Gospel of John, and right now we're in John 4—the encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well.

I've come to see that this is one of the greatest passages in the Bible. Over the course of a simple conversation, it makes very clear what God's gift to the woman is, and how she can have it.

THE FATEFUL MEETING

Jesus had just left Judea to go to Galilee but needed to go through Samaria on his way there. While passing through Samaria with his disciples he became tired and sat down by Jacob's well. The disciples left Him to go into town to buy food. As Jesus sat there, a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink" (John 4:7). The woman



from Samaria was shocked to hear Jesus (a Jew) ask her (a Samaritan) for a drink. She said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (v 9). Jews didn't usually speak to Samaritans. They did not consider them to be Jews because they had intermarried with foreigners and adopted their idolatrous religion.

Notice the sequence in their conversation.

First Jesus asked her for a drink. Then when she responds by asking Him why He would do that (her being a Samaritan and Him being a Jew), He answers her by turning the question around on her. He tells her that if she knew who it was who said to her, "Give Me a drink," she would have asked Him and He would have given her living water (v 10).

What does He mean?

THE REAL NEED

Jesus knows what this woman needs, and He is evangelizing her.

As you read on you will notice that the Samaritan woman is still thinking in

physical terms (physical water). Jesus is going to help her see that the water that He gives is not physical. Nor is it temporary, where you have to keep coming back to drink again and again to quench your thirst. Notice what Jesus says in John 4:13-14, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst, but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

One drink and you'll never thirst again! This is what all of mankind needs to see.

Jesus is offering her a gift that is permanent. In order for her to have it, she needs to know what He's offering and believe Him for it. He's making it clear that the water from Jacob's well will not quench her thirst permanently. But He's telling her that the water He has for her will quench her thirst forever by just taking one drink. She hears what He says and understands that it's permanent, but she's still thinking in terms of physical water. She wonders how

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this can be true. Jesus is going to help her understand.

Jesus told her to go call her husband, but she told Him that she had no husband. Jesus already knew that, but He was showing her that He knew all about her. He said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” (v 18). Shocked to hear this Jewish stranger tell her intimate details about herself, things He could not have known, she said, “I perceive that You are a Prophet” (v 19).

Notice what the woman said in v 25, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

Jesus had gotten her attention. She knew the Messiah was coming but hadn’t yet believed in Him for His gift of eternal life. At this point Jesus answers her.

“I who speak to you am He” (v 26).

THE DRINK OF FAITH

I believe that at this point the woman took that one drink from the fountain that springs up into everlasting life. She believed in Jesus as the Christ. She believed in

Him for what He was offering her as a free gift. That’s what it means to believe in Jesus as the Christ in John’s writings (John 11:25-27; 20:30-31). She believed the message that He was telling her.

The reason for thinking she believed at this point is because that’s the end of

“Jesus is going to help her see that the water that He gives is not physical. Nor is it temporary, where you have to keep coming back to drink again and again to quench your thirst.”

the conversation between Jesus and the woman. At that point the disciples come back and the woman leaves her water pot and runs back to the city to tell the others

what just happened. She says, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (v 29). The KJV says it this way, “Is not this the Christ?”

One might wonder why she said it as a question. This is not surprising since she did not have a good reputation among the men of the city. She said it in a way that caused them to go check it out for themselves. The men immediately went to check out Jesus for themselves because of what the woman said. Then in John 4:42 we read that they came back to the woman and said, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

John 4:39 says, “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’”

Just one drink. That is all it took. That is all it takes. That is all it will ever take. Once we believe in Him, we have everlasting life that can never be lost. He guarantees it.

Diane Boring attended Calvary Bible College back in the sixties, is a grandmother, and regularly disciples a group of young moms from her church.

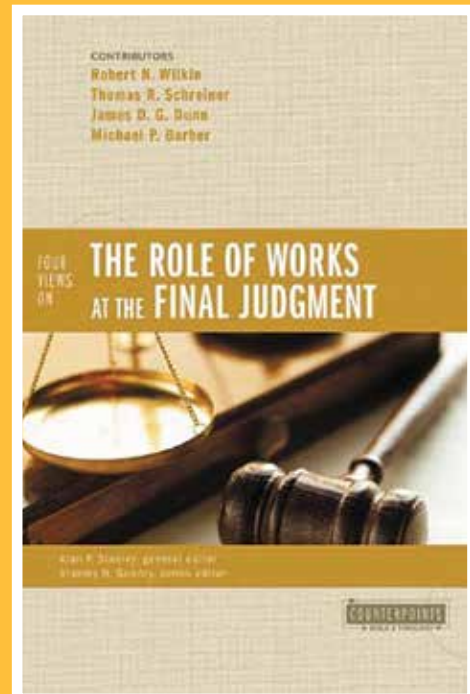
COMING IN JULY FROM ZONDERVAN!

Bob was invited to contribute a chapter to *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*. The book also includes chapters by world renowned New Testament scholars James D. G. Dunn and Thomas Schreiner. And, boy, do the sparks fly! Here’s an excerpt from the publisher’s description:

Through a discussion of Biblical texts, this book presents four perspectives on the role of works at the final judgment including: Robert N. Wilkin: Works will determine rewards but not salvation... Thomas R. Schreiner: Works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved... James D. G. Dunn: Works will provide the criterion by which Christ will determine the eternal destiny of his people... Michael P. Barber: Works will merit eternal life.

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Transformation from Glory to Glory

By Elliott Johnson

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Zane Hodges left an imprint on me as a student, and later on as a colleague, in a continuing discussion about interpretations of Biblical texts.

It is with seriousness that I address the subject of *sanctification*. More often than we want to admit, some who cherish a gospel of grace have taken advantage of grace to their own peril in personal sin.

That was not true of Zane Hodges. Yet it is more common than we want to acknowledge.

My first encounter with Zane came in 1960. It was my first year and I had enrolled in baby Greek. I went on to major in Greek Literature and New Testament Exegesis. I went to seminary to study the Bible. And almost immediately, I was drawn to Zane. In my study of the Greek language, it was his simple and heartfelt exegesis of texts in the Gospel of John that first impressed me.

Was he perfect? No, and he gave no impression of that. Did we always agree? No, but I always came away from our discussions with the impression that he appreciated my efforts, even as I respected and appreciated his mentoring of me. He would listen to me, ask probing questions, and frequently pose thoughtful alternative ways to consider the issue.

In one such discussion about the new covenant, the subject of *sanctification* came up. We both appreciated Lewis Sperry Chafer's *He That Is Spiritual* which focused its conclusions on Eph 5:18. In addition, he offered 2 Cor 3:18 as a related focus in the consideration of the doctrine. So in 2004, when *Six Secrets of the Christian Life* was offered for sale, I was pleased to find it

included a popular exposition of 2 Cor 3:18 in the context of Paul's discussion of a New Covenant ministry.

In the *first* secret of the *Six Secrets of the Christian Life*, Zane answered the question: How does a Christian live the Christian life? The answer is in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not in our efforts. That's the point of Eph 5:18.

Then the *second* secret is found in 2 Cor 3:18. It answers the question: How does the Holy Spirit bring power to bear upon the Christian life? Second Corinthians 3:18 reveals that process of spiritual transformation. I'd like to highlight three aspects of that process.

AS IN A MIRROR

First, look into the mirror (God's Word). What the Christian looks at is *the glory of the Lord* and one does so *as in a mirror*. To illustrate, he used the fable of the wicked witch and Snow White. The witch had always asked her magic mirror, "who is most fair?" The mirror responded, "you are." Then one day, it answered that Snow White was the fairest of them all.

In a similar fashion, Paul posits that the mirror is the Scriptures. When the Scripture is asked, who is most glorious?, it answers that it is Jesus Christ. On earth, he revealed Himself to be none other than the very glory of God. Yet in Jesus' generation, the Jews failed to see his glory as they read the Scripture. Jesus explained that they searched the Scriptures looking for themselves, thinking that it revealed how they could gain eternal life, following what it said about what must be done. "You pour over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me" (John 5:39).



So if they read the story of Jacob in the Torah, they saw his story as their story. He was their ancestor. They were his heirs. Yet, what Jacob had failed to gain because of his duplicity and deceit, they would gain from inheritance. They would keep the law. In their own effort, they would gain the blessing promised to Abraham.

BELIEVE

Second, look with a believing heart. Paul then explained what Jesus had described among the Jewish readers of Scripture. It went back to Moses who talked to God face to face. When Moses returned to the people of Israel, his face shone with God's glory. The people were afraid. So Moses veiled his face so they would not see God's glory. Then Paul transitioned to his own day and posited that the Jews still had a veil over their eyes when they read the Scriptures.

As a result, when they read the story of Jacob, the Jews failed to see what Jacob came to see. In the story, they saw themselves but without the deceitful and deceptive heart. So they failed to discover what Jacob discovered when he wrestled with the Lord all night: Blessing can't be wrestled from God in one's own power. Jacob, in exhaustion, finally realized that blessings came from *believing* the LORD's word of promise. A veil lay over the Jews' heart as it had over Jacob's heart as Paul said (2 Cor 3:15). As

continued on p. 8

Jacob's heart turned to the LORD in pleading for a blessing, the veil was taken away (2 Cor 3:16). And what he received was a new name – no longer would he be *Jacob* (usurper), but in God's promise he would be *Israel* (he wrestled with man and with God and would overcome). By *faith* Jacob would ultimately overcome in the promised Seed – Jesus Christ. Glory appeared in the hope of overcoming through the Seed. It is that Glory which the mirror reveals when read in faith.

Faith is the precondition for *beholding... the glory of the Lord*. Zane summarized the point of *sanctification*: "It takes only a moment of faith to believe in Christ and be eternally saved. But we need to *continue to believe* in Him to experience the process of change and growth." So the Holy Spirit's power comes to bear upon the believer as they read and meditate, by faith, upon Scripture. And in the Scripture they see Christ's Glory.

FROM GLORY TO GLORY

Third, realize that the process of transformation is from glory to glory. What was taking place in my life was God's work of *sanctification*. Second Corinthians 3:18 explained that process in more detail in terms of three transformation principles.

The first principle is that Christian transformation doesn't take place all at once. As I came to spend more time in the Scriptures, I also came to recognize Scripture's role more clearly. It wasn't so much my agenda of change, but as I read Scripture, a sense of conviction would come over me concerning different issues. Rather than focusing on what I could do, I focused on the Spirit, as I turned in prayer to Christ about the issue. I believed that He could change me, even though there were struggles with selfishness or subtle pride. And, in time, I realized changes were taking place.

The second and related transformation principle is that Christian involvement with the mirror of God's Word is life-long.

Yes, I miss Zane and our conversations about the interpretation of the meaning of different texts, but the essential ingredients remain—the Spirit and the Scripture.

FULL OF GRACE & TRUTH

The third transformation principle is that the goal of the process is an increasing conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ

and to His glory. And at that moment, I remembered that first class in baby Greek. Not only did we study the declensions of nouns and the parsing of verbs, but I remember those early expositions. In particular I remembered John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we *beheld His glory, the glory* as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (italics added)." In other words, *to be like Christ is to be full of grace and truth*.

To be gracious, in our politically correct world, there is no truth. Tolerance and truth are often seen as mutually exclusive.

“Rather than focusing
on what I could do, I
focused on the Spirit,
as I turned in prayer to
Christ about the issue.”

So when my wife asks me—do you like my dress?—how should I answer? I can lose if I say no. I can also lose if I say yes and her friends don't agree. The white lie becomes the servant of compassion and unity.

But, in the world of Scripture, without *truth*, a believer would see no need for *grace*. And without *grace*, I would never be able to accept the *truth* of who I am.

Zane proposed that these twin, balancing virtues appear and reappear in John's account of Jesus' ministry. The most striking was in his exposition of John 7:59–8:11. It was also unexpected because most of our translations doubt the authenticity of this textual tradition. The claim was that this text was not in the original text located at this place.

However, when Zane introduced the textual evidence, it appeared to be plausible to include it here. Then when he showed how the pericope fit in the argument of John 7 and 8, I was persuaded. And the message of the passage showed the glory of Jesus, full of grace and truth before the sinners of His day.

The religious leaders in Jerusalem posed a dilemma for Jesus that was intended to discredit him before the crowds gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles. The strategy followed those in the crowd who entertained the conclusion that Jesus was indeed

the Messiah (John 7:40-52). A woman, caught in the very act of adultery, was thrust in the midst of the people before Jesus. The dilemma concerned the verdict Jesus would issue concerning her guilt or innocence. If Jesus would condemn her, as her behavior warranted, the people would ask why the man was not included. Justice demanded that both be condemned. But the religious leaders were using the woman to serve their agenda. That also was sin. However, if Jesus were to disregard her sin and overlook her guilt, Jesus would put himself in conflict with Moses. That was the dilemma.

But Jesus turned their testing into a trap exposing their evil. In *truth*, He challenged the leaders according to the law to cast the first stone. Their agenda in using the woman for their own purposes was sin and discredited their witness. So He challenged that the one without sin should throw the first stone. Yet in *grace*, Jesus allowed the guilty Jewish leaders to leave without facing judgment before the crowd.

In a similar fashion, He acted in *grace* toward the woman. She deserved to be condemned for her sin, but He chose not to exercise judgment at that time. In *truth*, however, He firmly challenged her to sin no more. And in the challenge, Jesus was available in *grace* to help her deal with her sin. As far as the text is concerned, we don't know whether the woman took advantage of Jesus' grace.

I conclude that *sanctification* is the work of God in which we are daily *confronted* with the mirror of *truth*, and *find grace* as we approach our Lord's throne in a believing and repentant spirit.

Dr. Elliott E. Johnson is Senior Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. This article is a slightly edited version of a message he gave at the 2013 GES Annual Conference.

Wake Up and Get to Work: Revelation 3:14-22

by Bob Wilkin

September 11, 2001 was a wake up call for America. Even though there were warnings, we weren't prepared for what happened. We didn't heed the wake up calls that had come to us.

Complacent believers need wake up calls too.

This is especially true when believers have an inflated view of their walk with the Lord.

It is possible for believers to be spiritually lazy and yet at the same time think they are serving the Lord well. That was the problem with the Church at Laodicea. The Lord gave them a wake up call, as well as to all believers who are listening. It is found in Rev 3:14-22.

This is the last of seven letters. All seven letters concentrate on works, not faith. The statement "I know your works" appears in all seven letters. There is no call to faith in any of the letters since all are addressed to genuine believers.

The seventh letter divides nicely in three parts. Part 1 of the letter is the prologue (v 14). Part 2 of the letter is the wake up call (vv 15-21). The problem being addressed is in verses 15-17. The solution the Lord offers is found in verses 17-20. The possible rewards are stated in verse 21. Part 3 of the letter is the epilogue (v 22).



PROLOGUE: THE ONE CALLING DESERVES TO BE HEARD

Jesus is the one calling upon this church to wake up. Who is Jesus? John says three things about Him. First, He is "the Amen." That means that He is true and right. Second, He is a perfect witness, one that is faithful and true. Third, He is the Creator. He was not the first created being. But He is uncreated, eternal. The point of v 14 is clear: the one calling deserves to be heard.

THE PROBLEM: SPIRITUAL POVERTY, BLINDNESS, NAKEDNESS (vv 15-17)

Very simply the problem is this: *the works* of the Laodicean believers nauseated the Lord.

Many people wrongly think that hot water is good and cold water is bad. Thus they think that we should be hot in our service for Christ, not cold.

Yet if that were true, these verses make no sense. Why would Jesus *prefer* believers to be *cold* in their service for Him over them being *lukewarm* in their service for Him? Obviously if *hot is good* and *cold is bad*, then lukewarm is better than cold.

But both hot and cold are good here. Hot water is good to drink. So, too, is cold water. However, lukewarm water is not.

The Laodicean believers were like lukewarm water. That is, they were not pleasing to the Lord. Their works displeased Him.

Believers whose works are displeasing to the Lord face the possibility of divine discipline. Just as one might spit lukewarm water out of his mouth, so the Lord warns that He is about to judge the Laodicean believers.

Thus the Lord is saying that if the Laodicean believers don't wake up right away and change their behavior, He is going to discipline them, possibly to the point that He will take them home prematurely and remove the witness of this church.

The problem is even worse because not only are their works bad, but in addition, the Laodicean believers don't even realize they have a problem. They think they have it all together both materially and spiritually.

Note what the believers in Laodicea say in verse 17. They say that they are rich and have become wealthy.

They are saying that they have need of nothing. Yet the truth is they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

Many wrongly think that these adjectives can't refer to believers. But that is precisely who they are directed toward!

continued on p. 10



The issue here is not the *position* of the readers. The issue is the *experience* of the readers.

Christians who are morally asleep, whose works are displeasing to God, are spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, even if they might be wealthy, well clothed, living in fine homes, driving nice cars, and have 20-20 vision. *Physical* prosperity and health are not necessarily a true indication of *spiritual* prosperity and health.

Actually the believers in Laodicea were wealthy in a physical sense. They were also well-clothed. And they were known for an eye salve that they produced. So they thought since they were physically sound, they were spiritually sound too.

The first part of the wake up call states the problem: Wake up! Your works are bad! Your attitude is bad!

THE SOLUTION: REPENT AND BE ZEALOUS (vv 17-19)

Part of the solution, according to v 17, is to *recognize that we have a problem.*

If you are not actively serving Christ, the first step to the solution is to admit your works are not right and that you need to change.

Even if you are walking closely with the Lord, you need to be reminded that the

**“We are to seek first
the kingdom of God.”**

Lord is concerned about your works. He knows your works and He cares how you live. Past good works do not give us a right to coast now. We must keep on doing good if we wish to continue to please the Lord (cf. Gal 6:9).

Admission of the need to change should be followed by an actual change in behavior. This is brought out in vv 18-20.

Verses 18 and 20 paint word pictures to illustrate the point.

Verses 19 removes the figures of speech and says clearly what needs to be done.

Let's look first at v 19 since if we understand it clearly it will make understanding vv 18 and 20 much easier.

The Lord gives two commands, “Be zealous and repent” (v 19). They needed to be zealous *for good works*. They needed to repent *of bad works, wrong motives, and spiritual lethargy*.

The words “I rebuke and chasten” are words for believers only. The word *chasten* is a child-training word (*paideuō*). It is never used of unbelievers in the NT.

The solution stated without any word pictures is simple: “Be zealous and repent.” Repentance is not found even once in John's Gospel. That is because it is an evangelistic book and turning from sins is not a condition of everlasting life. However, in the Book of Revelation repentance is found twelve times since both believers (here) and unbelievers (e.g., Rev 9:20-21; 16: 9, 11) need to turn from their sins to escape temporal judgment.

Believers should strive to be people who are known as those who have zeal to do what is right.

What are you zealous for? A nice lawn? A pretty car? A well-kept house? A nice retirement egg?

There is nothing wrong, per se, with any of these things. However, our number-one aim in life should be to please the Lord in all we say and do. We are to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33).

Repentance is turning from one's sins in order to get right with God. The Laodicean believers needed to turn from their complacency and be zealous to do good works that pleased the Lord.

The point is whatever we are doing that is not pleasing to the Lord, we should admit that it is wrong, stop doing it, and get to work doing what God wants us to do. He has given us the power to do what is right with His indwelling Holy Spirit. The question is, will we listen and obey?

Back to v 18 of Revelation 3. Here the Lord counsels the believers at Laodicea, and all of us as well, regarding what to do to solve their problem.

They are to *buy* some things: refined gold, white garments, and eye salve. Note that these things are not free. The recipient must buy them.

It would be odd if this referred to eternal life because within the Book of Revelation (as well as the Gospel of John and the rest of the NT) eternal life is absolutely free. Revelation 22:17 says, “whoever desires, let

him take the water of life freely.” Eternal life is free. The gold, white garments, and eye salve are not free. A similar statement is found one chapter earlier, in Rev 21:6, “I will give the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.” See also John 4:10, 13-14 and Eph 2:8-9.

The gold, clothes, and eye salve are clearly not meant to be taken literally. *They represent what prodigal believers need.*

The refined gold represents eternal treasure, eternal rewards, the true spiritual riches the readers lack. The white garments represent looking good spiritually. To be clothed well spiritually, we need the Lord’s approval. See Rev 3:4-5.

The eye salve represents the ability to see spiritual reality clearly. Believers who deny their sin problem do not see well spiritually. We cannot expect to make much progress in understanding the Bible unless we are walking in fellowship with Christ. He only grants insight to those who are seeking Him.

Verse 18 does not state the price the Laodiceans are to pay. That is stated in the following verse, v 19, which we have already seen. To purchase these things, believers must be zealous and repent.

That means that in order to lay up treasure in heaven, slothful believers must be zealous for good deeds and turn from our sins of omission. To be well-clothed spiritually, and to see God’s Word clearly, we must be zealous for good deeds and turn from our sins.

The believer who is not walking with Christ will not be able to interpret God’s Word well because understanding God’s Word is more than mere mechanics. It isn’t simply about doing word studies, grammatical studies, and asking the right questions. There is a spiritual component to exegesis. God only opens His Word to those who are ready to apply it. See John 2:23-25.

The phone is ringing. The alarm is going off. It’s time to wake up and get to work!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OPEN THE DOOR? (v 20)

We now turn to one of the most famous, and most misinterpreted and misapplied verses in the entire Bible, Rev 3:20.

Revelation 3:20 is not an evangelistic verse. Many think the Lord Jesus is telling unbelievers that they can have eternal life if they open the door of their lives to Him by inviting Him in.

In the first place, this is foreign to the preceding context. Believers are being addressed, not unbelievers. The issue is works, not faith.

In the second place, as we shall now see, v 20 itself shows that evangelism is not



in view. Verse 20 completes the thought by using another word picture. There are famous paintings showing Christ standing at a door knocking. I love the paintings. However, I find they can be misleading.

Four Scenes are present in v 20. Scene one: Christ is at the door knocking. Scene two: An individual is opening the door. Scene three: Christ comes inside the house up to the individual who opened the door. Scene four: Christ and the individual are sitting at a table enjoying a meal together in joyful fellowship.

Clearly this is not a literal door and it is not opened by turning a knob or by inviting the Lord in. It is opened by doing what the Lord is commanding, by being zealous and repenting.

John’s Gospel is clear that faith in Christ, not inviting Him into your heart, not being zealous and repenting, is the sole condition of having everlasting life that can never be lost.

Countless people have been terribly confused, and many of those remain unregenerate in part because of faulty teaching on Rev 3:20.

What is promised is a shared meal together, not eternal life. Dining is a figure of speech which symbolizes fellowship. In the culture of that day, and this is still true today throughout the world, sharing a meal together is one of the highest forms of fellowship and joy.

This is clearly not a salvation verse. The entire context is dealing with works and the need for believers to produce good works.

The point of v 20 is that if we wake up and get to work then the Lord will be pleased with us and we will be in fellowship with Him. If we wish to be in fellowship with Christ, then we must obey Him. As He said to His disciples in the upper room, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Additionally, other verses show that opening a door is not the method of gaining eternal life. Compare John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; and Eph 2:8-9. Faith is the sole condition of eternal life. Since in this context one opens the door by repenting and being zealous for good works (v 19), this is not a call to faith and it is not evangelism.

Finally, experience shows that this is not an evangelism verse.

While we don’t base theology on experience, if some interpretation is clearly contradicted by experience, then we should rethink the interpretation.

Early in my Christian life I told a fellow college student that she needed to invite Jesus into her heart so she could be born again. “Really,” she said. “Why is that? I take communion every week and the Lord literally comes into me. Are you saying that because I don’t say the words ‘Jesus, come into my life,’ that He hasn’t come in yet?” The girl who said that to me was Roman Catholic and I had no good answer for her.

I once had a young man, who I later found out was Ba’hai, who prayed with me to invite Jesus into his heart. When I later found out he did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah or the second member of the Trinity, I asked him why he had invited Jesus into his heart. He said it was because he wanted all the prophets in his life.

There was the missionary kid who invited Jesus in hundreds of times, never knowing if he did it right. He was always looking for a feeling. Then one day finally he was delivered when a preacher showed from the Bible that the condition of eternal life is faith in Christ.

Taking this as an evangelism verse not only garbles the promise of everlasting life, it also removes the power of the passage to wake up believers so that they get to work.

The first part of the wake up call to the complacent believer is a statement of the problem: your works and attitude are bad. Part two of the call is the solution: be zealous for good works and turn from your many sins of omission.

THE POSSIBLE REWARD (v 21)

The Greek word for overcome is *nikaō*. The noun form is *nikē*. It means *victory* or *winning a victory*.

That's where Nike shoes got their name. They are the shoes of winners.

Well, Jesus wants us to be Nike kind of Christians. He wants us to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil by being zealous for good deeds.

If we are overcomers, then He promises us a wonderful reward. Overcomers will sit with Him on His throne. That is, Nike Christians will rule with Christ forever (cf. Rev 2:26-27, "power over the nations"; Luke

19:16-26, ruling over ten or five or no cities; 2 Tim 2:12, "if we endure, we will reign with Him").

Note that verse 21 refers to what I call the end of contest reward. There are two types of eternal rewards mentioned in Scripture, instant winners (Matt 6:19-21; Matt 10:42) and end of contest winners (Gal 6:7-9; 2 Tim 2:12). The latter prizes cannot be won until this life ends (via Rapture or death).

**“Even if you haven’t
been doing well in your
service for Christ thus
far, you can start now.”**

Note that even if you haven’t been doing well in your service for Christ thus far, you can start now. The Laodiceans were not doing well, yet the Lord holds out the possibility that they might rule with Him if they wake up and get to work now, and continue doing well until He returns.

The same thing is found in 1 Corinthians 9. The Corinthian believers were not spiritual men and women, yet Paul held out the possibility in I Cor 9:24-27 that they still might gain the end of contest reward.

Verse 21 is saying wake up and get to work. Payday is just around the corner.

THE EPILOGUE: LISTEN UP (v 22)

This statement occurs in all seven letters and is a fitting conclusion to all seven. The Lord wants us to listen. The epilogue and the prologue are like bookends. Pay attention. Do what He says.

Believer, are your ears open?

Pleasing God and gaining His approval is not automatic. It takes effort. We have to read His word, fellowship with other Christians, and get to work.

To gain eternal life: believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life. It is as simple as that.

To please the Lord and lay up eternal treasure: do works that are pleasing to the Lord. Endure in your service for Him.

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. This article is a slightly edited version of a message he gave at the 2013 GES Annual Conference.

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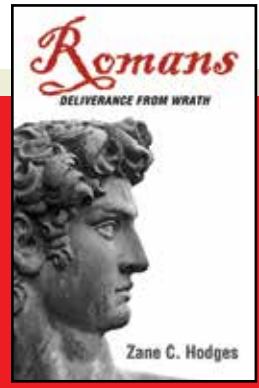


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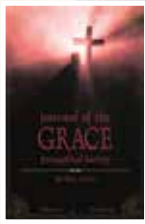
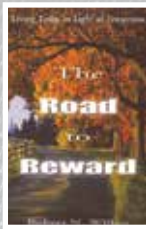


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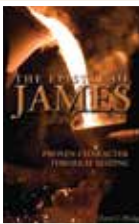
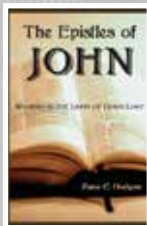
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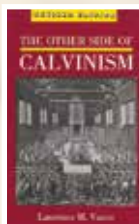
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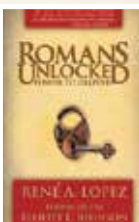
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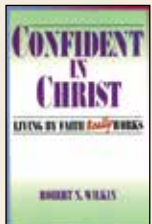
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Who Spoke? John: 8:30-33

by John H. Niemelä

INTRODUCTION

It's clear that in John 8, Jesus is speaking to a hostile audience. But then in vv 30-32, we find that some of the Jews believed in Him. Jesus speaks to them about abiding in Him. And then the tone changes once again. Beginning with the words "They said..." in v 33, we find hostility expressed. It seems as though the believers suddenly turn on Jesus. So questions are raised about whether the believers were true or false. But the more fundamental question is, who are "they"?

THREE VIEWS OF JOHN 8:30-33

There are three interpretations of the identity of the speakers in John 8:33.

One view is that the persons who are said to have believed in Jesus in vv 30-32 are the same people who then object to Him in v 33, and so are not true believers and hence are not born again.

A second view is that the new believers have *started believing*, but they need to persevere in their faith in order to obtain final salvation.

The third view is that the new believers mentioned in vv 30-32 are born again, and that it is actually the hostile crowd who speaks in v 33.

Here I would like to defend the third view.



JOHN 8:30-33 IS NOT CONTINUOUS

By *not continuous* I mean that the comment made in v 33 is not by the new believers mentioned in vv 30-32. The third person plural pronoun *they* in v 33 refers to the last people who spoke in John 8 (cf. John 8:22), the unbelieving larger crowd (as opposed to a small group that came to faith).

John first mentions these new believers in v30f. Thus, if they spoke in v 33, it would be their first speech in John. Note well: they would be *new speakers*, not *old ones*. So we must ask, does John introduce new speakers differently than old ones or non-speakers?

In fact, John's Gospel definitely prefers explicit *noun* designations for speakers (over implicit ones). For example, the seven times the Samaritan woman speaks (4:9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 25, and 28), *woman* is the subject. Not once does John have *she* as the subject. John strongly prefers noun subjects for speaking verbs (*especially* when introducing new speakers). Hence, his style of

introducing speakers disproves the claim that John 8:30-33ff refers to a single group.

The fact that *apokrihēsan* (*they replied*) in John 8:33 lacks an explicit subject-word is significant. John introduces/re-introduces speakers 353 times. Only 79 of those lack an explicit subject-word. Virtually always, John uses this construction for re-introducing prior speakers. This stylistic issue alone would point to those who have heckled Jesus throughout the chapter as the speakers of 8:33.

In sum, this is an open and shut case. The new believers in v 30 are not identical to the hostile speakers in v 33.

Dr. John H. Niemelä is Professor of New Testament at Rocky Mountain Seminary, Englewood, CO. This article is excerpted from a message he gave at the 2013 GES Annual Conference.

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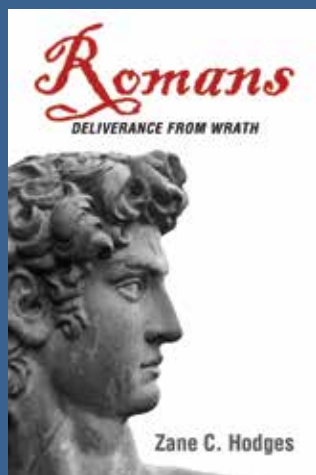
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