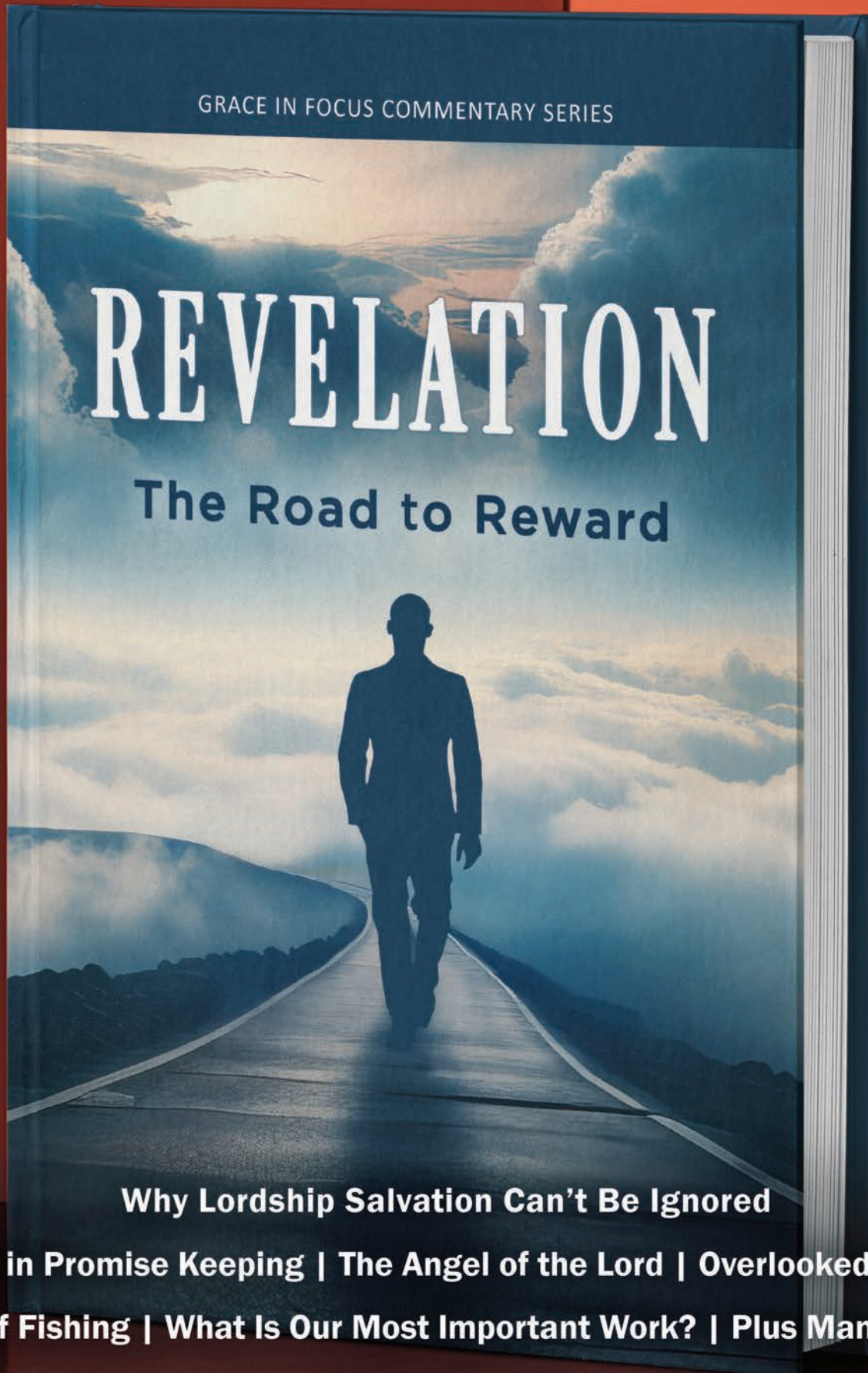


GRACE IN FOCUS



Why Lordship Salvation Can't Be Ignored

Partners in Promise Keeping | The Angel of the Lord | Overlooked Examples

Fear of Fishing | What Is Our Most Important Work? | Plus Many More!

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Editor: Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D. Typesetting and Design: Debbie Payne.
Executive Assistant: Bethany Taylor. Order Fulfillment: Sam Marr. Administrative Assistant: Colin Jackson, Director of GES Missions: Ken Yates. GES Missions Coordinator: Kathryn Wright.

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Letter from the Editor

May 19-22, we had our annual conference at Camp Copass in Denton, TX. We had a great time of teaching and fellowship.

At the conference we released a new 526-page commentary on the book of Revelation by GES board member John Claeys. The cover and lead article in this issue of the magazine is by John Claeys. It is entitled, "Revelation: The Road to Reward." I believe you will find his article (and book) very edifying and enjoyable. The commentary is now available in both hardback and paperback. See the Bookstore and Booklist for more information and to order.


Our online seminary is offering two four-week seminars in July, preparing students for first- and second-year Greek.

In August our seminary will now be offering all three years of our fall classes. To register and learn more, go to faithalone.org/seminary.

Our YouTube channel is approaching 15,000 subscribers. We recently went over 14,600.



Thank you for your prayers and partnership in this ministry. Together, we are making a difference for the cause of Christ.

Keep grace in focus! 

Robert N. Wilkin

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

Revelation: The Road to Reward

By John Claeys

The apostle John, who penned the only evangelistic book of the Bible—the Gospel of John—also wrote another wonderfully unique book, Revelation. Unlike the Gospel of John, Revelation was written for believers.

Revelation's unique character is apparent from the outset. Revelation is the only book of the Bible that begins with a promised blessing to those who heed its teaching and apply it to their lives: "Blessed is he who readsⁱ and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written in it" (1:3).ⁱⁱ Likewise, it is the only book of the Bible that concludes with a promised blessing—in fact, two promised blessings—to those who obey its message: "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:7); and "Blessed are those who do His commandments" (22:14). In other words, this one-of-a-kind work begins and ends by pledging blessing to those who take its content seriously and obey its message.ⁱⁱⁱ

This announced *blessing* at the beginning and end of the book communicates two things. First, it clearly shows that God wants us to give serious attention to this book. Second, it indicates that

Revelation is about kingdom reward from beginning to end.

The promised *blessing* at the beginning and end of the book forms an *inclusio*. An *inclusio* alerts the reader to a particularly important theme by bracketing material that supports that theme. This word *blessed* (*makarios*) is often used in the New Testament regarding reward for obedience. Examples of this in the book of Revelation include 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14. Thus, the *inclusio* of *blessing* in Revelation highlights the eternal reward promised to those who faithfully obey the message of this book.

Every well-written document or book has a purpose for being written, and Revelation is no exception. The *inclusio* of blessing for obedience to the book's message indicates its purpose which, according to this writer, is: *To challenge believers to remain faithful to Jesus through tribulation in order to experience glorious, eternal reward*. Thus, it would follow that the message of Revelation is: *Believers who faithfully endure will experience glorious, eternal reward*.

This message is woven throughout the book. An example is found in 2:26, where

The message of the book of Revelation is that *believers who faithfully endure will experience glorious, eternal reward.*



Jesus offers an incredible reward to the believer who fulfills the condition of His offer:

“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron ...’ —as I also have received from My Father ...” (Rev 2:26-27).

According to this proposal, the one *who overcomes* is the one who obediently endures for Jesus (*keeps My works until the end*). This means that the overcomer finishes his life faithfully for the Lord, which is what *the end* indicates.

This message is also expressed in Rev 3:21 (among other verses in Revelation): “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.” Notice that the overcomer is one who follows the example of the ultimate Overcomer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He overcame by enduring faithfully in obedience to the Father to the very end of His life. As a result, He was granted the amazing honor of sitting with the *Father on His throne*. Consequently, Jesus offers to the believer who endures faithfully to the end of his life the glorious reward of sitting with Jesus to co-rule with Him. This reward indicates both intimacy with Jesus (*sit with Me*) and honored rule with Him. And since His rule is eternal, so will be the reward He is offering to the faithful believer.

As mentioned, the message of the book of Revelation is that *believers who faithfully endure will experience glorious, eternal reward*. In Revelation, as in life, enduring faithfully means remaining faithful to Jesus through trials and tribulations. Most of Revelation occurs during the Great Tribulation, the final three and a half years before

Jesus returns. Jesus describes this period as that of the most widespread persecution in the history of mankind (Matt 24:21).

During this era, there will be many believers who, in publicly identifying with the Lord Jesus, willingly follow Jesus to their deaths (cf. 6:9; 12:11; 14:13; 20:4). Their examples are given to encourage and inspire us. If *they* can endure faithfully for Jesus during that intense period

of tribulation, then believers today certainly have no excuse. We can endure faithfully through our trials and tribulations, which pale in comparison.

The message of Revelation shows that it will be worth it to faithfully follow Jesus, for, in some of the last words of the book, Jesus reveals: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev 22:12).^{iv} In other words, *believers who faithfully endure will experience glorious, eternal reward*. ■

Revelation is the only book of the Bible that begins with a promised blessing to those who heed its teaching and apply it to their lives.



John Claeys holds degrees from the University of Northern Iowa (BA in English) and Dallas Theological Seminary (ThM in New Testament Greek) and has pursued doctoral work at Phoenix Seminary. He is also the author of *The Impending Apocalypse, A New World Coming*, and *Unveiling Eternity*, a three-part series on eschatology. He and his wife, Connie, have been married 40 years and have two sons.

ⁱ The singular *he* (*he who reads*) refers to the one who read Scripture to the congregation due to the fact that there was only one copy of the book when it was first written.


ⁱⁱ *Hear* and *keep* have only one article for the two substantive participles. This indicates that *hear* and *keep* are bound together. To be *blessed*, one must *hear* and *keep*—that is, one must obey the things written in this book.

ⁱⁱⁱ BDAG assigns a meaning of *fulfill* to this Greek word (*tēreō*) for *keep* (815) which indicates obedience. This is the primary meaning of this term in Revelation (cf. 2:26; 3:3 [*hold fast* translates *tēreō*], 8, 10; 12:17; 14:12; 22:7, 9).

^{iv} *I am coming quickly* can also be translated *I am coming without delay*. Because the Rapture, which begins Jesus' return to the earth, is imminent, there will be no delay in His return.

A Tale of Two Brothers: **Judah** and **Joseph**

By Bob Wilkin



Genesis 38 and 39 contrast two brothers,
Judah and **Joseph**.

They each faced sexual temptation.
One handled it carnally. The other spiritually.

"It is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:2).

Genesis 37-38 shows that Judah was a carnal believer at that time. He nearly had his brother Joseph killed. He agreed to sell Joseph into slavery. He married a Canaanite woman. His two oldest sons were evil, and God killed them. He refused to give his daughter-in-law, Tamar, to his youngest son. Judah's wife died. One tragedy after another occurred due to Judah's carnality. Then, after mourning, Judah thought he was hiring a harlot when he had relations with Tamar. Only when he discovered that he was the guilty party did he do the right thing. He confessed his sin and acknowledged that she was more righteous than he.

One tragedy after another occurred due to Judah's carnality.

Yet despite his being carnally-minded, God chose to bless him. He was the brother chosen to be in the line of Messiah:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be
the obedience of the people (Gen 49:10).

Ross comments:

In this oracle Jacob predicted a fierce lionlike dominance of **Judah** over his **enemies** and over his **brothers** who would praise him. A wordplay was made here on the name Judah which means "praise" (cf. 29:35, NIV marg.). The

oracle pivots on the word **until** (49:10b). When the Promised One who will rule the nations appears, the scene will become an earthly paradise. These verses anticipate the kingship in Judah culminating in the reign of Messiah (cf. the tribe of Judah, Rev. 5:5), in which **nations** will obey Him ("Genesis" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 98).

The three oldest sons were passed over for the blessing because of major moral failures (Gen 49:3-7). While Judah was still a baby believer and had his own moral failures, his confession of his sin and acknowledgment of Tamar's righteousness suggest that he was not rebelling against God. Israel said, "You are he whom your brothers shall praise" (Gen 49:8a). He was immature in his faith. See 1 Cor 3:1-3 and the rest of that letter for examples of other baby believers.

Hamilton comments on how Judah and David were alike in both carnal behavior and ultimate confession and repentance¹:

In many ways the development of this story is similar to the David-Bathsheba liaison (2 Sam 11). Both focus on an illicit sexual relationship from which a child is born. Both have a period of quietness (3 months here, an unspecified time in 2 Sam 11) in which the man involved doubtless hopes that the incident is forgotten (Judah) or covered up (David). Both men express righteous indignation when informed of the misconduct of another: Take her out and let her be burned; "the man who has done this deserves to die" (2 Sam 12:5). Both Judah and David are trapped into admitting their culpability. Finally, when confronted with the truth, both

men made public acknowledgments: She is in the right, not I (v. 25); “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam 12:13) (*Genesis 18-50*, p. 448).

Genesis 37 to 50 tells the story of Joseph. Why, then, did Moses insert a chapter about Judah? First, it helps explain how his tribe could be chosen. Second, Judah’s story is a wonderful contrast to Joseph’s early years in Egypt.

Joseph had received two dreams from God, telling him that he would become the head of the family. Yet he found himself a slave in the house of Potiphar. A partial indication of the dreams’ truth is found in God blessing Joseph and making him ruler of Potiphar’s house. God was using calamity to prepare Joseph for future rule—just as He does for us today. As Dr. Radmacher loved to say, “This life is training time for reigning time.”

Whereas Judah sought out relations with what he thought was a harlot, Joseph was seduced by Potiphar’s wife. Not just once, but day after day, she seduced him. Unlike his brother, he did not give in to carnal lusts. He fled youthful lusts (2 Tim 2:22). His reward? He was cast into a dungeon prison!

Did Joseph lose faith in God’s promise of future rulership when he was a slave and then a prisoner in a dungeon? Genesis 39 does not hint at it. While in prison, Yahweh was with him, and he rose to rule the prison.

Hamilton observes:

Of the seven uses of the tetragrammaton [YHWH] in chapter 39 (vv. 2, 3 [twice], 5 [twice], 21, 23), four of them occur in the phrase “Yahweh was with Joseph” (vv. 2, 3, 21, 23). The presence of Yahweh uniquely in chapter 39 is not to be explained by appeal to the presence

of variant literary traditions. Rather, the name Yahweh occurs here at what is the most uncertain moment in the life of Joseph. His future hangs in the balance. He is alone in Egypt, separated from family, vulnerable, with a cloud over his future. Or is he alone? Only the narrator, never any of the characters, uses the

name Yahweh. Thus, it is the narrator who tells us, no less than five times, that in a very precarious situation, Joseph is not really alone. Yahweh is with him (*Genesis 18-50*, p. 459).

We all face tests: cancer, inflation, job loss, death of loved ones, and conflicts with family and friends. We may not be sold into slavery

and sent to prison for something we did not do. But we face hardships. And God is with us as well if we are walking in fellowship with Him.ⁱⁱ

“If we endure, we shall reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12). Everlasting life is a free gift received when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for it (John 3:16). Eternal rewards are earned by faithfulness. “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2).

Keep grace in focus. ■■



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

ⁱ While Moses wrote over 400 years before David, the Holy Spirit intended this connection between the accounts of Judah and David. Here, we see how the Divine author intended more than the human author.

ⁱⁱ The expression “Yahweh was with Joseph” referred to God continuing to prosper and bless him, in spite of the evil circumstances. While God is with all believers in the sense of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, He is with us in the sense of blessing only when we, like Joseph, are walking in fellowship with Him. See the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-24.



Overlooked Examples

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

Whether we realize it or not, we all look for examples to follow. This is more obvious when we are young. If we played baseball, we might have watched how a famous major league player played the game and tried to imitate him. Good examples motivate us. We can look at them, and they can cause us to want to be better. We can become more like them.

Sometimes, good examples are obvious. If a young person wants to be a better basketball player, he can listen to how Michael Jordan or Larry

Bird practiced or watch current professional players play.

But sometimes, great examples are hard to spot. We might not notice them for different reasons. A short, unathletic old man might be an excellent basketball coach. He might help an aspiring player improve more than watching Jordan dunk a basketball.

I clearly remember when some great examples walked around, and most people did not notice them.

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb 13:7).

TEACHING AT THE INFANTRY SCHOOL

The US Army Infantry School is located at Ft. Benning, GA. It is a large building where current and future army leaders are trained. Of all the branches in the army, the infantry is the most physically challenging. As you might expect, students at the infantry school are young and physically fit. They come to learn the art of warfare, especially as it is fought in the trenches. It is a place full of testosterone.

There are also plenty of prominent examples to emulate. Young, fit captains are often the instructors. They have often just returned from combat and have led soldiers in difficult and dangerous missions. Many have been wounded. They are destined to be future military leaders.

New lieutenants rightfully look up to them. They joined the military to be like these leaders. They can see themselves being just like them in five or ten years. They listen in class to gain the mental knowledge they desire and then work out in the gym to meet the physical demands that will be placed upon them. These young officers have plenty of examples to follow.

I taught ethics at this school for three years. (I was not an infantry officer!) I watched as the students looked up to their infantry instructors. We had many visitors to the school. They also were impressed by the quality of these teachers. Anybody could look at them and conclude that the army was in good hands. If these visitors were thinking of joining the army, these men might be the final reason for doing so. For a long time, the army motto was, “Be all you can be.” A high school student who wanted to serve his country in the infantry would see what he could be in these men.

But in that big building, with all its classrooms, there were two outstanding examples for an infantry officer to follow who often went unnoticed. I doubt if a single visitor ever realized it. The same was true for many of the lieutenants. But they could have learned more from them than the captains they idolized.

RALPH AND GORDON

These two examples were named Ralph and Gordon. Their names don’t conjure up images of heroic examples to follow, nor did their appearance.

When I was there, Ralph was approaching 80 years of age. He was a former soldier who would come by the office on occasion, and we would have some coffee or eat breakfast. I am sure being around infantry officers brought him many fond memories. Since my office was on the fourth floor, he took the elevator. He was a small man from southern Georgia. He was certainly not going to win any weightlifting contests among the students and instructors at the school.

Gordon was younger than Ralph but still in his 50s—that is old in the infantry world. We worked in the same office. He was the oldest and the smallest of the 50 or so soldiers who worked on the fourth floor. I spent a great deal of time with Gordon. Our desks were right next to each other. We walked together through that large building on many occasions. I don’t think a single visitor ever noticed him, and neither did most of the students.

The same was true for Ralph. Gordon at least wore his military uniform. Ralph was always in civilian clothes and would not stand out in that place. I don’t ever remember a student saying anything to him. Many probably thought he was lost.

Little did all those who passed them in those hallways know that they were the greatest examples any infantry officer could follow.

INFANTRY OFFICERS EXTRAORDINAIRE

Very few people who first saw Ralph or Gordon in the Infantry School realized these two men were the greatest infantry officers in the building. If somebody were looking for examples of heroic leaders, they would be at the top of the list. In the Korean War, Ralph had led a group of infantry soldiers on a hilltop. The Chinese army sent wave after wave of men to take that hill. Ralph, as the leader, turned the tide of the battle. He was wounded numerous times in the process.

Gordon did a similar thing in the Vietnam War. Many men and their descendants alive today owe their lives to Ralph and Gordon. A search of these men online will explain why President Nixon gave Gordon our nation's highest honor and why President Biden did the same for Ralph. Just look up Gordon Roberts and Ralph Puckett.

Recently, Ralph died. Even though hundreds passed him in the halls of the Infantry School and did not appreciate his valor, the magnitude of what he did was evident. The body of Ralph, a boy from southern Georgia, lay in state in the US Capitol Rotunda.

The message? If you are looking for a soldier to emulate, look at Ralph. I wonder how many missed the opportunity.

A LESSON FOR BELIEVERS

The author of Hebrews tells us to imitate the spiritual heroes among us. He writes, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct" (Heb 13:7). He tells his readers that there are examples for them to follow

in their midst. These examples are the older believers who have led them in the past.

One of the reasons he points to these men is that they might be easy to overlook. In our culture, youth is celebrated. Those we should be looking up to might not be as exciting as up-and-coming leaders. Maybe they don't move as quickly as they used to, or they don't understand the younger generation. They are not tech-savvy. They seem out of touch.

But we should look at their lives and listen to their words. If they have lived like Christ and accurately know His Word, follow their example. We can learn a lot from them.

We can also be that kind of example. We don't have to fight on a hill in Korea or the jungles of Vietnam. Any be-

liever can be a hero of the faith. We can ask the Lord to make us the believer others can look up to.

Such believers are valuable to the church. Let us look around and ask who those kinds of believers are in our lives. Let's not pass them in the hall and not realize how important they are.

The President of the United States honored Ralph when he died. Think of the honor faithful believers will receive from the King when they see Him. It will be better than a funeral in the Rotunda. Let's give them some of that honor now. ■

We all look for
examples to follow.
Sometimes, great
examples are hard
to spot.



Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Mark: Lessons in Discipleship*, is a wonderful explanation of Christ's call to discipleship. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Bob and Philippe recording podcasts on Christ in the OT



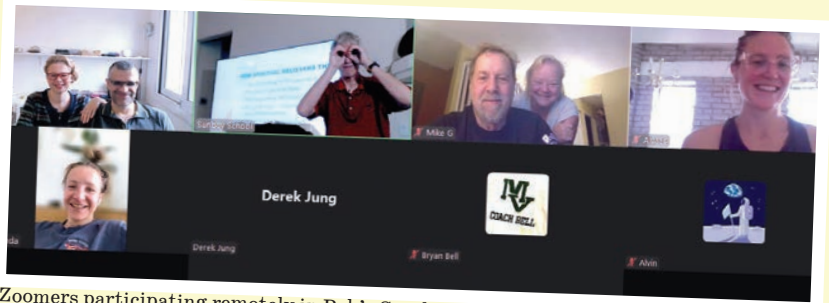
Italia, Steve, Trudi, John, Kathryn, and Ken after the Sunday service at FBC Portland



Ken and Kathryn at the cold Oregon coast. After the pic, they ran to the car.



Ken speaking at the Portland regional conference



Zoomers participating remotely in Bob's Sunday School class as he focuses on grace



Ken speaking on key words in Romans at the Portland conference

Steve Elkins stopped by the office to drop off some of his books that we carry in our bookstore and to visit with Bob and Sam.



Fear of Fishing?

By Marcia Hornok

Have we not all identified with Jesus' disciple Peter at times? Impulsive, impetuous, independent-minded—and often, fearless. Yet, in Luke 5:10, Jesus told him not to be afraid. What occasioned that?

Peter had worked all night and caught nothing. In his career as a fisherman, that was devastating. No doubt Peter was discouraged and drained. He had cleaned his nets and clocked out. Then Jesus—the newbie in town—told him to go back and do it again.

Like Peter, we are not worthy to be in Christ's presence, but He still wants us to forsake everything and follow Him (Luke 5:11).

What might have made Peter afraid?

1. Fear of failure. He would exhaust himself and still catch nothing and look the fool.



2. Fear of difficulty. Jesus told him to go to the deep. That meant lots of rowing.

3. Fear of submitting. Making oneself vulnerable is a scary prospect. Why should he, a professional, surrender to a non-fisherman, anyhow?

4. Fear of change. Something different might happen, outside Peter's control.

Peter reacted by informing Jesus of the facts! "Master, I've been fishing all night, and believe me, there's nothing out there." I imagine Jesus' kind eyes holding Peter's gaze until Peter added the desired response: "Nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5).

The result was a miracle catch—two boats so loaded with fish that they started to sink. Probably enough to support them for a long time as they followed Jesus.

As always, Jesus disciplined His men. This time, His lesson was: "Don't be afraid; from now on, you



will fish for people.” Eventually, Peter became quite successful in that mission.

LET’S GO FISHING

Jesus disciples us through various means. He wants us to “let down our nets” and catch people we can help. Is it scary? For most of us, yes. Recently, two LDS missionary gals rang my doorbell. Surprisingly, they let me do most of the talking. However, when I tried to direct them to certain truths of Scripture, they said that the Bible may not be translated correctly. I invited them back to talk about the passages they had in mind.


On their second visit, I asked them why they had joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. That allowed me, in turn, to give my testimony. Then, as we conversed, I sent up constant prayers. *Give me the right words. Control my attitude. Will I offend them if I say...? How should I answer that?* It may not have been fear, but I was definitely insecure. I also feel that way every time

Have we not all identified with Jesus’ disciple Peter at times? Impulsive, impetuous, independent-minded—and often, fearless.

I approach a room to teach an evangelistic Bible lesson. I am not good at fishing.

However, I do not have to be good at fishing, and feeling uncomfortable may even be healthy. I need to learn fishing skills, but my sufficiency is Christ. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves...but our sufficiency is from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5). Depending on that, not myself, I can row into the deep, feeling nervous, but not afraid of what someone will think of me.

Peter’s first fishing lesson resulted in humility and amazement. “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken” (Luke 5:8-9).

Like Peter, we are not worthy to be in Christ’s presence, but He still wants us to forsake everything and follow Him (Luke 5:11). The fishing results are His doing. Our goal for those who land in our nets is that they be astonished at Jesus, not at us. 



Marcia is Ken’s grateful wife, serving with him in Utah where he pastored for 39 years where they raised six children. Now they enjoy 13 grandkids. Her latest work is a guilt-free Bible study of Proverbs 31.

Partners in Promise Keeping

Radical Guidance in Numbers 30

By Ken Pierce



Both partners in promise-keeping can look forward to hearing the Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

From the opening verses of the Torah, the Bible emphasizes the power and importance of the spoken word (Gen 1:3ff). In the NT, John drew on imagery from Genesis to frame the prologue to his “Promise of Life” message, in which He emphasized Jesus’ identity as the *Logos*—the Word who was in the beginning with God, who indeed was God, and through whom all things were made (John 1:1-5; cf. Col 1:16-17; Rev 4:11).

Considering the importance God places on the spoken word (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4), it should come

He underscored the accountability to which He held Israelite men as spiritual heads of their households.

as no surprise that He directed His choice nation Israel to keep and honor their word. As He charged them with representing His image to the nations around them, God wanted them to be known as a people who kept their vows and oaths, distancing themselves from falsehood and deception (cf. Ps 4:2; 7:14; Prov 6:17; 21:6; Isa 28:15; John 8:44; 1 John 1:8, 10; 2 John 7).

As the nation prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes (Num 30:1), revealing a commandment he received from the LORD concerning vows and oaths. Several Tanakh passages speak to the importance God attached to keeping vows and oaths (e.g., Gen 14:22; Exod 13:19; 22:10-11; Lev 5:1, 4; 7:16; 27:1-7; Deut 23:21-23; 29:10-13; 32:4; Josh 9:19-21; Pss 66:13-15; 144:8; Eccl 5:4-5; Dan 12:7). *Particularly interesting in the instructions recorded in Numbers 30, however, is the LORD'S promulgation of requirements for Israelite men not only to keep their own word, but to pay attention to the vows and oaths of their wives and daughters as well.* Indeed, Numbers 30 contains just one verse on the need for men to keep their vows and oaths (v 2). *The remainder of the chapter focuses on the importance God ascribed to the vows and oaths of Israelite women.*

It bears noting that Yahweh's guidance in Numbers 30 constituted a radical departure from the contemporary norms and standards of that day. In effect, He imposed unheard-of restraints on Israelite masculine authority: He prohibited fathers and husbands from ignoring and/or trivializing women's oaths and vows. This was in sharp contrast to the customs of the nations around them. Israelite fathers would have to listen when an unmarried daughter contemplated taking a vow, because if "her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall

stand" (v 4). In other words, God would hold a father accountable to support, encourage, and enable his daughter to fulfill her vow. Should he simply ignore her or disregard her words—or worse yet, actively seek to impede fulfillment of her vow—he would answer to God. It would be difficult to overstate how radically this provision was skewed from contemporary societal norms.

A similar concept of accountability applied to husbands regarding the oaths and vows their wives might wish to make. Men were at least equally capable of making "a rash utterance" (v 6), so this provision had nothing to do with insulting a woman's ability to reason. Rather, the text emphasized the importance of a woman's word, and her husband's accountability before Yahweh to support her—as though he were still standing by his bride under the *chuppah*—the wedding canopy—promising to listen to her, care for her, and protect her. God indeed wanted husbands to listen, to pay attention, and to take account of what their wives were contemplating, long after memories of the wedding celebration faded. Acceding to her vow or oath bound a husband to support, empower, and encourage her. In God's view, a husband should serve as his wife's greatest counselor, champion, and cheerleader, mindful that Yahweh would hold him accountable to do so. Again, the radical nature of this divine injunction should not be missed.

In the special case of a widowed or divorced woman who returns to her father's home, any obligation incurred under her husband's authority did not transfer to her father's account (v 9). Implicit in this provision, however, was God's expectation that her male relatives would extend support and encouragement that the newly single woman might otherwise have expected from her husband—though such assistance was not mandatory (v 10).

With those provisions in place, it is also noteworthy that God imposed a time limit on a man's

opportunity to object to (and thereby nullify) his wife's or daughter's oath or vow. Once time ran out on "the day that he hears" (vv 5, 8, 12, 14), concurrence was locked in. This provision rather ingeniously incentivized men to pay more attention than they might otherwise have been inclined to. They would need to listen attentively when their wives or daughters said they were thinking of taking an oath or vow. If the man later realized that his burden to support, empower, and encourage exceeded original expectations, this would not entitle him to nullify her vow after the fact. The man would be bound before God to actively support her in its fulfillment.

A husband and wife could not later annul their obligation if they discovered, to their dismay, that fulfilling an oath or vow would prove more painful and/or costly than originally estimated. This principle prevails in parenting as well. Unlike the nations around them, Israelites were prohibited from inventing formulaic spells to break the force of an oath or vow, or from making counteracting offers (bribes) to competing pseudo-deities to annul it.

By imposing such ordinances on Israel, the LORD advanced several aims. First, He reinforced the point that Israel was to be holy (i.e., set apart), distinct from the nations around them, because the God they served is holy (Lev 19:2; 20:26). Second, He underscored the accountability to which He held Israelite men as spiritual heads of their households (v 16). Simply wielding power was not the point in God's view, but incentivizing Israelite men to listen, protect, counsel, empower, and encourage the women He entrusted to their care was. Third, He elevated the concerns and intentions of Israelite women to a standard unheard-of in their day. The words of an Israelite woman—her vows and oaths—mattered greatly in Yahweh's sight (a point that may have taken some

time to register fully). Unlike the nations around them, Israelite men would trivialize a woman's oath or vow at their own risk. Their God not only paid attention when a woman made an oath or a vow; He


From the opening verses of the Torah, the Bible emphasizes the power and importance of the spoken word (Gen 1:3ff).

cared about whether they kept their word, just as He did with Israelite men. Finally, regardless of how the nations around them behaved, God expected Israelite men to protect and support their women, and to encourage and empower them to keep their word. Such expectation was fully consonant with the heart of God, who brought forth a woman as His crowning gift to Adam (Gen 2:21-23; Prov 12:4a), an act of grace that He never performed for any angel.

God's views on the importance of keeping one's word have not changed through the centuries. Though church age believers are not under the Torah (Rom 3:19; 6:15; Gal 5:18), God nevertheless expects His people to keep their word (Matt 5:37; Jas 5:12). Husbands walking in the light are commanded to "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph 5:25, 28-29; cf. Col 3:19). A believing husband who is walking in the Spirit (Eph 5:18b; Col 3:16; Gal 5:16, 25) does well to encourage and champion his wife as she keeps her word. Likewise, a believing wife who is walking in the light does well to honor the King of Glory by seeking her husband's counsel, concurrence, and support—particularly in a culture fervently opposed to any expression of feminine humility. In so doing, both partners in promise-keeping can look forward to hearing the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17). ■



Ken Pierce is a retired Navy intelligence officer. Ken studied Biblical Hebrew and Archaeology at the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies. He is writing several commentaries for the forthcoming GES OT commentary. He and his wife Ana Maria recently celebrated thirty-eight years of marriage.



What Is Our Most Important Work?

By Kathryn Wright

The saints' true masterpieces will be found only in humble acts of service done by those who walk with the Master Himself.

INTRODUCTION

In a video, historian Alexander Bevilacqua answers questions about the Renaissance period (*YouTube*, “Historian Answers Renaissance Questions,” 1968). In the video, Bevilacqua discusses the noted Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci. A true Renaissance man, da Vinci was blessed with many skills, but he is best known for his paint-

ings, such as *The Last Supper* and *The Mona Lisa*. Today, da Vinci is considered among the greatest artists of all time.

In addition to many other talents, Leonardo was an inventor. During the video, Bevilacqua discusses a letter, like a resume, that Leonardo wrote to one of the leaders of Milan, Italy, in hopes of securing a job that would involve creating war machinery. In the letter, he listed ten skills in which he was proficient. Nine of the ten skills were clearly applicable to inventing war machines. However, for the tenth item on his list, Leonardo casually added that he could paint.

Historians have noted that of all his skills, da Vinci often considered painting of lesser importance. Yet his art is known worldwide and has brought joy and beauty to subsequent generations. It is estimated that his masterpiece, the *Mona Lisa*, measuring only thirty by twenty-one inches, is viewed by ten million visitors a year. Despite da Vinci's valuation of his own skills, it was not his

Leonardo da Vinci suffered from an all-too-common human failing. To put it simply, he failed to value his most important work.

war machines but his paintings that became his legacy. Like most of us, Leonardo da Vinci suffered from an all-too-common human failing. To put it simply, he failed to value his most important work.

MAKING A LIST OF OUR OWN

One of the key teachings that GES strives to highlight is the doctrine of rewards. This doctrine teaches that every church-age believer will stand before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ and give an account of what he has done (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10; Luke 19:11-27). This judgment is for believers only and has nothing to do with their eternal standing since they already possess eternal life by faith alone. While this judgment doesn't determine believers' salvation from the lake of fire, it will determine what kind of work they produced and whether their work has lasting value. Good works that believers have done for the Lord will be rewarded. These rewards will be eternal.

As believers contemplate this coming judgment and the works they have done, perhaps some make mental lists. How might it look if, like Leonardo, believers were to list all their accomplishments? What would they consider to be most important at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

Perhaps a believer would list donating money to church, participating in missions' trips, attending church faithfully, teaching Sunday school, and evangelizing friends and loved ones.

Changing diapers, washing dishes, maintaining the yard, providing for your family, making meals for the sick, and spending time in prayer might be deemed less important and added almost as an afterthought. Like Leonardo's ability to paint, they would be tacked on at the end as filler. The person making the list would think such things are OK, but probably unimportant to the Lord.

KING SOLOMON'S LIST

In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon makes a list of his many deeds. As the old king considers his life's work, he discusses his many accomplishments. He ruled the nation of Israel and ushered in a golden age. He commissioned and oversaw many incredible architectural structures, the most important being the temple of God. His many agricultural achievements included vineyards, orchards, and gardens (Eccl 2:4-5). He was the wisest man who ever lived, making just judgments during his reign and impressing world leaders such as the Queen of Sheba with his vast knowledge. He even wrote inspired books that became part of the Bible.

As Solomon looked at his accomplishments, he gave an evaluation:

So, I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem (Eccl 2:9).

His list of accomplishments is impressive. And yet, Solomon famously states in the book that all his toil was vanity (Eccl 1:14; 2:11). As we consider some of Solomon's outstanding achievements, we see that his evaluation of his list was accurate. For example, the Babylonians would destroy the glorious temple he built, along with his vineyards. The nation he had previously ruled so gloriously would be subjected to captivity.

At first glance, this is a rather depressing look at Solomon's life and accomplishments. But he does not end his book with a defeatist attitude. Instead, in his conclusion, the wise king states:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:



Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Eccl 12:13-14).

Reminiscent of the apostle Paul's words in 2 Cor 5:10, the wise king acknowledged that our works matter and will be judged to determine whether they were "good or evil." Solomon spoke as an OT believer and understood that his works did not determine his eternal destiny. He also understood that, like all believers, he would give an account of his works to determine his rewards in the kingdom of God.

Solomon wanted to help others avoid making the same mistake he made—the mistake like da Vinci's. Solomon learned that the deeds with eternal value are often not outwardly impressive works such as constructing grand buildings or making war machines, but those done in humble fear of the Lord and simple obedience. As the Lord

said, a simple cup of water given in His name will not lose its reward (Matt 10:42).

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, there will be many surprises at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Therefore, as we think upon that day and consider our works, may we not be fooled by the world's definition of greatness. Often, our most significant works will not be found in the grand halls of libraries or cathedrals. Instead, the saints' true masterpieces will be found only in humble acts of service done by those who walk with the Master Himself. ■



Kathryn Wright and her husband, Dewey, live in Columbia, SC. She is the GES missions coordinator, women's conference speaker, writer, and Zoom teacher.

The Angel of the Lord

By Philippe R. Sterling

TITLED APPEARANCES OF THE ANGEL OF THE LORD	
Genesis 16:7-13	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Hagar.
Genesis 22:11-18	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Abraham.
Exodus 3:1-9	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses.
Numbers 22:22-35	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Balaam.
Judges 2:1-5	The Angel of the LORD appeared to the Israelites.
Judges 6:11-24	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon.
Judges 13:1-23	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Samson's parents.
1 Chronicles 21:14-27	The Angel of the LORD appeared to David.
1 Kings 19:1-8	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Elijah.
Zechariah 1:7-17	The Angel of the LORD appeared to Zechariah.

Paul told the Corinthians that the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness was Christ (1 Cor 10:4).

The Old Testament uses the title *the Angel of the LORD*—literally, *the Messenger of Yahweh*—in recording ten appearances of an enigmatic figure.¹ A survey of the ten titled appearances helps in revealing the identity of the Angel of the LORD.

The Angel of the LORD appears to be both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh (cf. John 1:1). He is sometimes referred to as *Elohim* (God) and *Yahweh* in the same context. He accepted worship as God.

He appeared in human form and talked with individuals, such as Hagar, as well as to a large gathering of the nation of Israel. He visited and ate food with Abraham, and Abraham interceded with Him on behalf of those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Angel of Yahweh was the Second Person of the Trinity who occasionally took on the appearance of a man in the OT.

The appearance of the Angel of Yahweh to Moses in the burning bush may be linked with other

indicators of God's glorious presence such as the pillars of cloud and fire that guided the Israelites in the wilderness and the shekinah glory in the tabernacle and temple.

Paul told the Corinthians that the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness was Christ (1 Cor 10:4).

John wrote that the Word who was with God and who was God and who created all things was incarnated as Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14-18).

The Angel of Yahweh was the Second Person of the Trinity who occasionally took on the appearance of a man in the OT and who, in the NT, was actually born as the Man we know as Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus is the Lamb of God “foreordained before the foundation of the world” to be slain to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 Pet 1:17-21; Rev 13:8). From Adam and Eve onward, He gives everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it (John 3:16; 5:24; 11:25-27; 20:31; 1 Tim 1:16; Rev 22:17). ■



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

¹ Editor's note: The expression *the angel of the Lord* occurs once in the NT in Matt 1:24, “Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife...” This angel is called “an angel” a few verses earlier (Matt 1:20). Since Mary was already carrying the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 1:18), this angel was not Him.

How Believers *Ought* to Walk

According to John's First Epistle

By Dan Strathman

John directed these verses—and the entire letter—to mature believers. He was not giving a set of tests to validate their regenerate status as children of God.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout John's first epistle, he stresses that it is critical for believers to abide in Jesus Christ so that they can have confidence when He returns (1 John 2:28). To underscore that point, he gives several tangible examples of how the benefits of the abiding experience are manifest in believers' interactions with one another. One such manifestation is the ultimate expression of love, with Jesus' death serving as the example that believers who pursue fellowship with Him ought to follow (1 John 3:16-17). John's choice of words in these verses is precise. By employing the verb *opheilō*, he gives a specific instruction that summarizes believers' responsibility—not compulsion.

THE MEANING OF *OPHEILŌ*

The basic meaning of *opheilō* is "to be indebted to someone in a financial sense," or regarding "social or moral expectations" (BDAG, p. 743). Another sense is "to be obligated"—that is, that "one must" or "one ought" to do some action (BDAG, p. 743). The latter sense is dependent upon the syntactical structure—the arrangement of words in a sentence—in which a second verb in the infinitive follows the verb *opheilō*. There are three such examples in 1 John (2:6; 3:16; 4:11).

JOHN'S USE OF *OPHEILŌ* IN 1 JOHN

In all three examples, John uses a verb in the present tense and active voice, followed by another verb in the infinitive. First, he tells his readers that they "*ought... to walk*" (1 John 2:6), then that they "*ought... to lay down*" their lives for others (1 John 3:16), and lastly, that they "*ought... to love*" one another (1 John 4:11). In all three examples, John also gives his readers an instruction in the form of an obligation with the model example for the fulfillment of that obligation: God Himself. Furthermore, the way that John uses *opheilō* is consistent throughout the letter. This is an example of a *complementary infinitive* in Greek, where the meaning of the main verb—in this case *opheilō*—is complemented by the subsequent infinitive verb.¹ This is a construction that we routinely use in English when we say something like, "*I ought to go to the store*," or "*I ought to study for my test*." Without the infinitive, the idea is incomplete. This syntactical construction requires the "helper"



infinitive verb to complete the thought,ⁱⁱ and the verbs work together to prompt a desired action. The main verb in all examples therefore expresses an obligation, but an obligation to do what? The subsequent complementary verb in the infinitive answers that question.

A PROBLEM FOR REFORMED THEOLOGY?

John uses *opheilō* to provide instructions to his audience to prompt some action on their part. But because the directive is given first, it implies that his audience has the option, or capacity, to ignore the instruction. After all, if the desired action were automatic, why would there be a need to instruct a person to do that action? The reality is that John gives his audience instructions, but the way he guides them acknowledges that they have the option to ignore the instruction. This also supports the notion that the primary audience of 1 John was spiritually mature since John simply needed to highlight their responsibility rather than compel their action (cf. 1 John 2:13, 20, 27). Because of their spiritual maturity, and because John has already explained to them what is at stake, his audience would have been able to conceive of the consequences if they were to ignore his instructions. This means that believers are not *automatically* compelled to obey and follow Jesus' commandments. John's instructions leave room for the individual to choose whether

to comply. This issue of the individual believer's choice is where Reformed doctrine shows weakness. Reformed theology faces a challenge when reconciling the meaning of these verses, because these instructions conflict with the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Wayne Grudem explains that those who are born again will persevere to the end, and only those who persevere to the end are born again. This reasoning is essentially circular, and John's instructions would be irrelevant to this view. Note Grudem's explanation:

The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly saved.ⁱⁱⁱ

Grudem implies that this is our responsibility. However, Berkhof explicitly states that perseverance is not a responsibility of man, but of God:

It is, strictly speaking, not man but God who perseveres. Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion. It is because God never for-

sakes His work that believers continue to stand to the very end.^{iv}

But if faithfulness—exemplified by the actions that John instructs—is guaranteed, then his instructions are superfluous. From the Reformed point of view, someone truly born again would have no need of such instructions since perseverance is ensured by God. Why, therefore, would John need to provide those instructions? Even if, in their view, someone is not perfect, but God is and is responsible for a believer's perseverance, why would an individual believer's faithfulness really matter at all? On the one hand, a person who is truly saved would have no need of such instruction, so why would John provide it? On the other hand, if a person is not truly saved, they would likewise have no need for such instruction. Even if someone not of "the elect" wanted to, they would have no ability to respond because, according to the Calvinist, the non-elect are "totally depraved" and—from their own theological perspective—unable to persevere in good works.^v Vos noted:

Total depravity, on the other hand, does mean that by nature no love for God is present as the motivating principle of our life: that it does not dwell in us as a disposition and therefore never determines our deeds, thoughts, and words; and, conversely, that in our entire life there is an undertow of hostility toward God that only needs an external stimulus to develop into conscious opposition toward the Lord. There is no spiritual good in us.^{vi}

Calvinists are left with a conundrum and must choose one of two options. Either John is instructing those who are truly saved to do something that will automatically happen, or he is instructing unbelievers to do something that they are totally incapable of. To reconcile this discrepancy, some might try to explain that these are instructions given for believers to follow to prove to themselves, or to others, that they are indeed truly saved. Aside from the difficulties in logic already

mentioned, they would have to contend with the fact that John explicitly associates himself with these instructions; in two of the three examples of *opheilō*, John uses *we* in the instruction (1 John 3:16; 4:11). To harmonize their theology with the text would force them to conclude that John himself was perhaps not saved, despite Jesus' own words to the contrary (John 13:10).

TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, WE OUGHT TO WALK IN THE LIGHT

The straightforward explanation for these verses, and an honest and consistent analysis of John's use of *opheilō*, have nothing to do with the Calvinist concept of "the elect," nor with the topic of assurance of everlasting life. John directed these verses—and the entire letter—to mature believers. He was not giving a set of tests to validate their regenerate status as children of God. He was teaching them how they may continue to abide in Christ and have ongoing fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3-4). It is this fellowship with God—not actions in and of themselves—that will allow faithful believers to be confident and not ashamed when He returns (1 John 2:28). ■



Dan is a GES Seminary student. He lives in Colorado with his wife, Ellie, and daughter, Zoe.

ⁱ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 4th ed (Logos), Zondervan language basics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 372.

ⁱⁱ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 598.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wayne A. Grudem, "Chapter 40. The Perseverance of the Saints (Remaining a Christian)," in *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 788, italics his.

^{iv} Louis Berkhof, "XI. Perseverance of the Saints," in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938), 546.

^v Douglas Mangum, "Depravity," *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

^{vi} Geerhardus Vos, "Volume 2: Anthropology," in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., vol. 1-5 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012-2016), 58. Vos (1862-1949) taught at Princeton Theological Seminary for thirty-nine years (retiring in 1932) and has been called the father of Reformed Biblical theology.

The Words of the Gospel: **BORN AGAIN***

By Art Farstad

All our pet theories
and manmade
dogmas will fade
and fold up like the
last rose of summer.

**This article originally appeared in
the April 1991 issue of
Grace in Focus, which at that time
was a four-page newsletter.*

Have you ever heard or had a conversation something like the following?

“Are you a Christian?”

“Well of course I’m a Christian!
Do you think I’m a heathen? I’m
an American!”

“Well, I mean do you believe—”

“I believe in God.”

“But I mean have you ever put
your faith in Christ; are you
saved?”

“I raised my hand in a revival
meeting once. Is that what you
mean?”

“Are you a *born-again*
Christian?”

Before the Carter presidency in the U.S., January 1977 to January 1981, the one term that Christians could pretty well count on to communicate that a person was truly a believer, a “real” Christian rather than a nominal one or merely a church member, was the expression “born again.”

No more. Jimmy Carter popularized the expression *born again* so that many groups, including even some people who specifically reject salvation through faith in Christ, use the term for all sorts of religious or emotional experiences—even reincarnation!

But let us not give up the expression without a fight—after all, it is our Lord’s!

In John 3 Jesus tells a religious leader that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v 3). Then He makes it personal and uses the word “you” (plural in the Greek, so it’s not only addressed to Nicodemus): “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again!’” (v 7).

Jimmy Carter popularized the expression *born again*.

The Greek verb translated “born” (related to our word *genetics*) is much like the English verb in meaning. The really interesting word that the Savior used is the word “again” (Gk. *anōthen*).

This word occurs in all four Gospels, Acts 26:5, Gal 4:9, and three times in James. The basic meaning is “from the top” (used of the splitting of the veil of the temple), “from the beginning” (Luke’s research into Christian beginnings), and “from above” (Jas 1:17; 3:15, 17).

The translation “again” fits here as well as in Gal 4:9, where Paul chided the Galatians for wanting to go into legalistic bondage again (nothing new under the sun!).

Putting all of these usages together greatly enriches our understanding of our Lord’s meaning. Since the word *anōthen* is derived from a word meaning “up” or “above,” that nuance probably still lingers in the word in John 3 as well.

Isn’t Jesus really saying, to amplify a bit, “You must be born again from above”?ⁱ I think He is. Other nice translations are “You must be born anew” and “You must be born afresh”!

A noun related to this idea that uses the same verb root for “birth” combined with the common Greek word for “again” is *palingenesia*. In Matt 19:28 it is used for *the fresh start* that will take place when Christ becomes King on this old war-torn planet.

The only other usage, Titus 3:5, is exactly what we Christians still mean by being “born again.” Paul refers to salvation as a *washing of regeneration* (Gk. *loutrou palingenesias*, lit., “bath of regeneration”). This salvation-by-grace-alone text was the favorite verse of my missionary brother Dick when he was a teenager: “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (emphasis supplied).

There are approximately 15 million Quichua-speaking South Americans from Columbia in

the north to Argentina in the south. The tens of thousands who have heard my brother’s gospel radio talks over HCJB can be glad it was his favorite verse. It helped guarantee that they would not be getting a daily dose of “neo-Galatianism,” so rampant today, but the pure and simple gospel of grace.

Not only the Apostle Paul, but also the Apostle Peter writes of the new birth (1 Pet 1:23). He sees it as the origin of his readers’ purification “in obeying the truth” (believing the gospel) and brotherly love (v 22):

Having been born again, *not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever”* (emphasis supplied, v 23-25a).

All our pet theories and manmade dogmas will fade and fold up like the last rose of summer. But the gospel of grace enshrined in the eternal word of God, as Peter tells us (quoting Isa 40:6-8), “endures forever.”

We can be glad that all who read this publication are included among those to whom the gospel has been presented: “*Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you* (emphasis supplied, 1 Pet 1:25b). ■



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

ⁱ Editor’s note: Zane Hodges told me that he preferred that precise translation: born again from above.

More of

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Bob spoke at Berean Memorial Church. Irving, Texas



Ken in Mexico with his host, the church music director, and their wives. They are eating cemita sandwiches, which Ken says are the largest sandwich in the world.



The Ritchies went to Uganda with Kathryn in June for a short-term mission trip



Ken speaking at a session of the Mexico Regional



Bob and David Renfro recording Grace in Focus Radio



Bob and Sharon had dinner with Sam Marr, his family visiting from Georgia, and Mark Bruce

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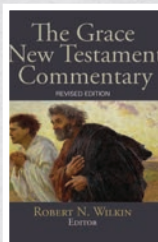


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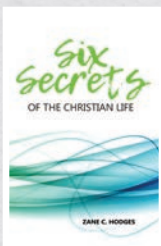


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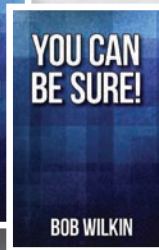
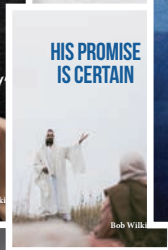
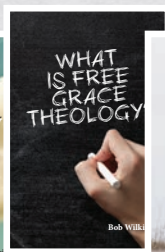
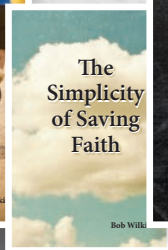
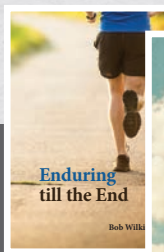


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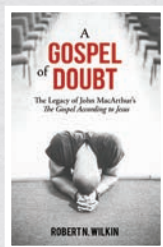
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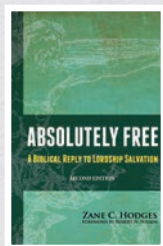


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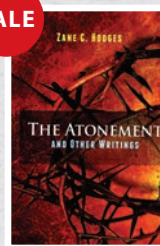


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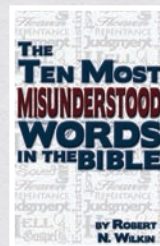


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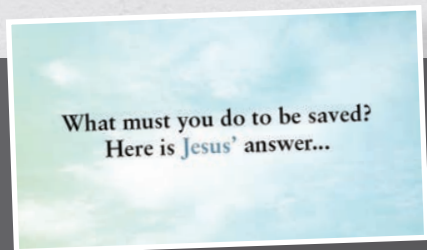
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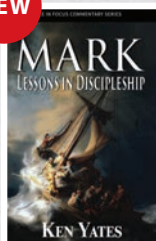
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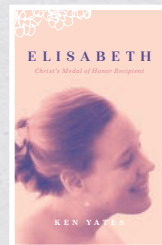
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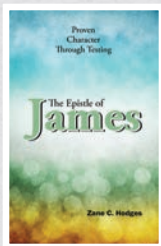
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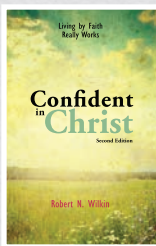
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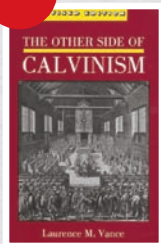


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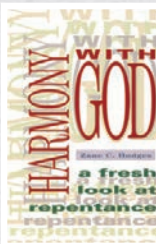
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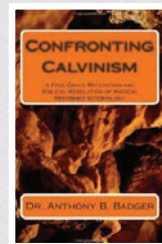
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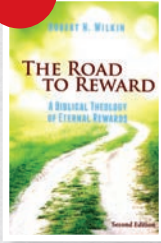


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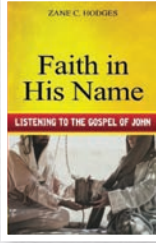
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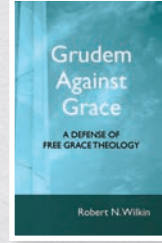
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The Imaginary Proverbs Woman

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

Most of us have heard about the Proverbs Woman. Some refer to her as the “Proverbs 31 Woman.” She is an impressive lady.

Her description is found in Prov 31:10-31. These verses are part of the Scriptures and are therefore inspired by God. We can all learn from them. Unfortunately, they have been misused. People quote from these verses and call upon women to be a Proverbs 31 Woman. I am sure many Christian women have taken that challenge to heart.

In many cases, this has led to depression and defeat. Women who try to be that woman find they cannot meet the standard. There is a reason for that. The Proverbs 31 Woman doesn’t exist. She is an idealized example.

THE DESCRIPTION

This perfect woman is a blessing to all who know her. She works in the home, making sure that the needs of her husband and children are met (vv 13, 15, 19, 21, 27). She has a cottage industry that brings extra money into the household (v 24). Because of her business acumen she successfully seeks out foreign goods in which to invest and buys profitable real estate (vv 14, 16). Her stock market decisions always work out.



The Proverbs 31
Woman understands that the
blessings of
walking the path of
wisdom—obeying
the teachings of the
Lord—will result in
eternal rewards
(2 Cor 5:9-10).

Her labor benefits not only her family; she sees the needs of her servants and the poor in the community and uses her wealth to meet those needs (vv 15, 20).

She is a wealthy, aristocratic woman with slaves, to whom she is very gracious (v 15). Fortunately for all associated with her, she doesn't need to sleep. If something needs to be done during the night, she rises to do it (v 18).

She makes fine clothing. Because of her hard work, her family is known as the town's best-dressed citizens (v 21, 23). Because of her sewing skills, she dresses attractively as well (v 22). She is undoubtedly a beautiful woman. But she keeps it all in perspective. She realizes that her physical beauty and the fine outward clothing that she works diligently to produce are not important. They will pass away. This woman knows that true beauty is found in pleasing the Lord (v. 30). This rich, merciful, attractive woman is humble.

This woman has obviously had the advantage of having been raised in a godly home. She has been taught to be virtuous (v 10). This instruction has imparted to her the wisdom found in God's Word. It has taught her the Law, which has made her the woman of kindness that she is (v 26).

This woman is a wife, a mother, a business owner, wealthy, a slave owner, a real estate owner, kind, merciful, attractive, fashionably dressed, and humble. Because of her upbringing, she is a Bible scholar who accurately expounds the Scriptures. She practices what she preaches.

GOOD LUCK

When I read this description, I want to wish two kinds of people good luck. The first would be a woman who sets out to be the Proverbs 31 Woman. Have any of us ever known a person who meets these requirements? Since she would have to be born into a wealthy home with godly parents, almost every woman is disqualified immediately upon birth. She would have to grow up, get married, have children, and meet the other rigorous requirements. That woman does not exist. To try to be her can only lead to disappointment. We all know wise and godly mothers and wives. I hope

No woman has ever been a perfect Proverbs 31 Woman.

none of them beat themselves up trying to meet an impossible standard.

The second group of people who need good luck are certain young men. They are told to look for a Proverbs 31 Woman when they want to marry. They will spend a lot of time looking for this imaginary person. Furthermore, I've met a lot of men, and if such a woman did exist, she wouldn't marry any man I've known. Because the Proverbs 31 Woman is consummately wise, no man I know of would meet her standards. Such a woman would be better off single.

Men, just be glad that Proverbs includes no additional chapter describing the Proverbs 32 Man. He would be physically fit, attractive, wealthy, a philanthropist, a merciful and godly Bible teacher, and one who never wastes time on such mundane things as fishing and sports. He would top it off with a hefty dose of humility because he knows all his outward success has no eternal value. For married men, imagine that your wife had been looking for someone like that before she married you. You'd still be single.

WHAT IS THE POINT?

If the Proverbs 31 Woman does not exist, why are these verses in the Bible? We are to see this woman as a symbol. At the beginning of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman who calls out for people to follow her (1:20-33; 8:1-21). Wisdom is not a literal woman.

The book of Proverbs describes the blessings that Biblical wisdom brings into a person's life. The woman of Proverbs 31 is an idealized picture of those blessings.

The wisdom found in God's Word will produce virtuous people. Such people are not sluggards, but work hard. They look to the future. They are merciful to those in need. They can teach the truths found in God's Word because they have been

taught it and studied it for themselves. They have put such wisdom into practice in their lives.

The wisdom found in God's Word results in many blessings in this life. But it also teaches that this world is passing away. True wisdom is found in fearing the Lord (v 30), a truth also found at the beginning of Proverbs (Prov 1:7).

Eternal life can never be lost. But the Proverbs 31 Woman understands that the blessings of walking the path of wisdom—obeying the teachings of the Lord—will result in eternal rewards (2 Cor 5:9-10). That is a mindset that any believer can have.

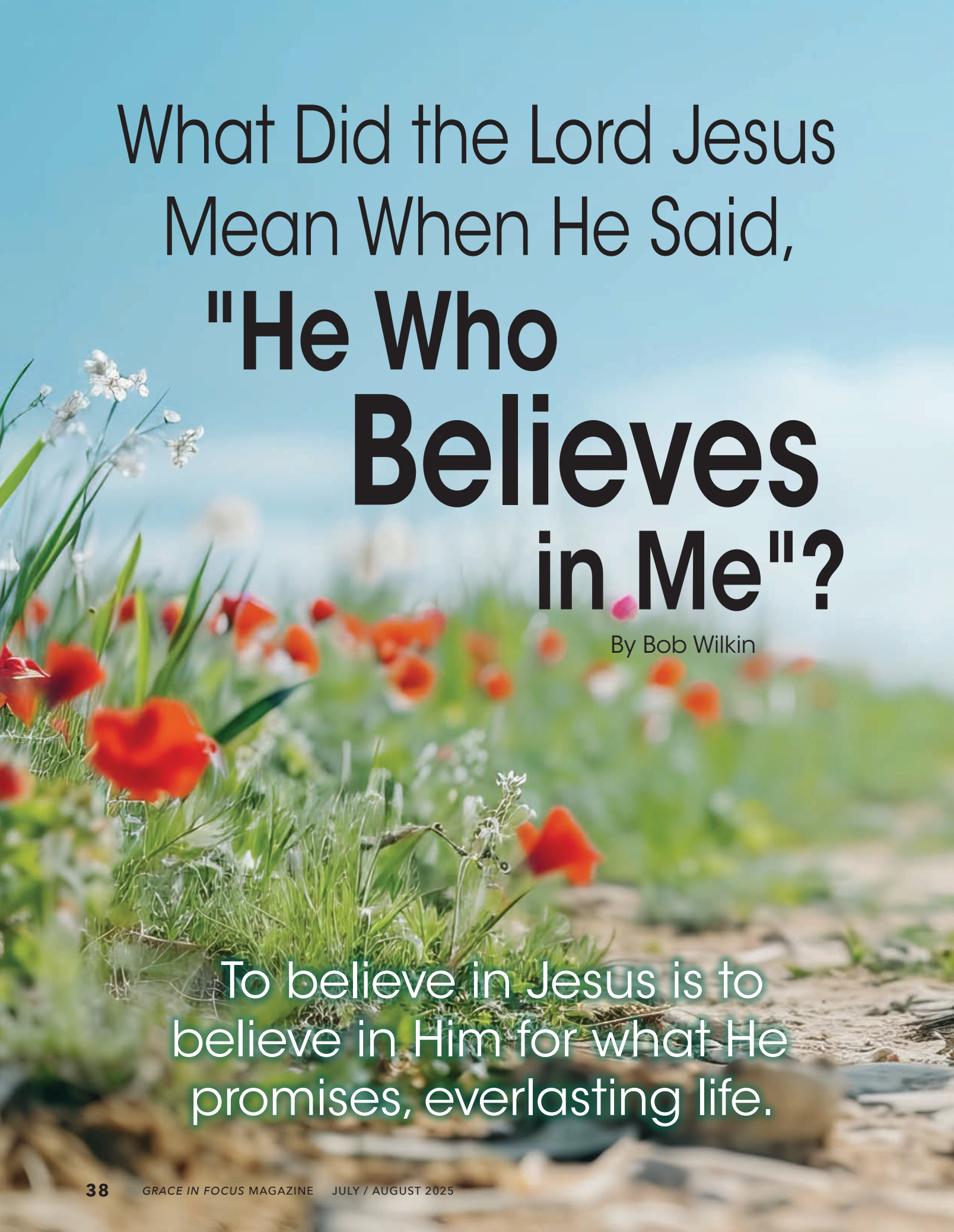
CONCLUSION

No woman has ever been a perfect Proverbs 31 Woman, and no one is called to be such a woman. Instead, Prov 31:10-31 gives an idealized picture of what godly wisdom produces. Believers can experience those blessings—blessings spelled out in the book of Proverbs—if they act upon the wisdom found in God's Word. Such a life will also be rewarded in the world to come and thus has eternal value.

I mentioned that I'm glad there is no chapter in the Bible describing the Proverbs Man. I would quickly realize that I do not meet the standard. But there is, in fact, such a chapter—Proverbs 31! Wisdom, personified as a woman, cries out for all believers to follow her. Men, we won't meet those requirements either, but we can see what God's Word can produce in our lives. The Proverbs 31 Woman is an example for all of us. ■



Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Mark: Lessons in Discipleship*, is a wonderful explanation of Christ's call to discipleship. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.

A photograph of a field of red and white flowers, possibly poppies, under a clear blue sky. The flowers are in the foreground, slightly out of focus, with some in sharp focus. The background is a soft-focus field of similar flowers stretching towards the horizon.

What Did the Lord Jesus Mean When He Said, "He Who Believes in Me"?

By Bob Wilkin

To believe in Jesus is to
believe in Him for what He
promises, everlasting life.



In a November 20, 2024 blog on believing in Jesus for *something*, I mentioned that some Free Grace people say that that is not necessary. All one needs to do to be born again is *believe in Him*. But what does *believing in Jesus* mean if it doesn't mean believing in Him *for the life He promises*?

I've read various explanations of what "He who believes in Me" means. Here are the ones I can recall:

1. Believing that He died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead.
2. Believing that God the Father sent Him.
3. Believing that Jesus Christ is my Savior (for now).
4. Believing that Jesus is the second member of the Trinity.
5. Believing that I have a relationship with God (for now).

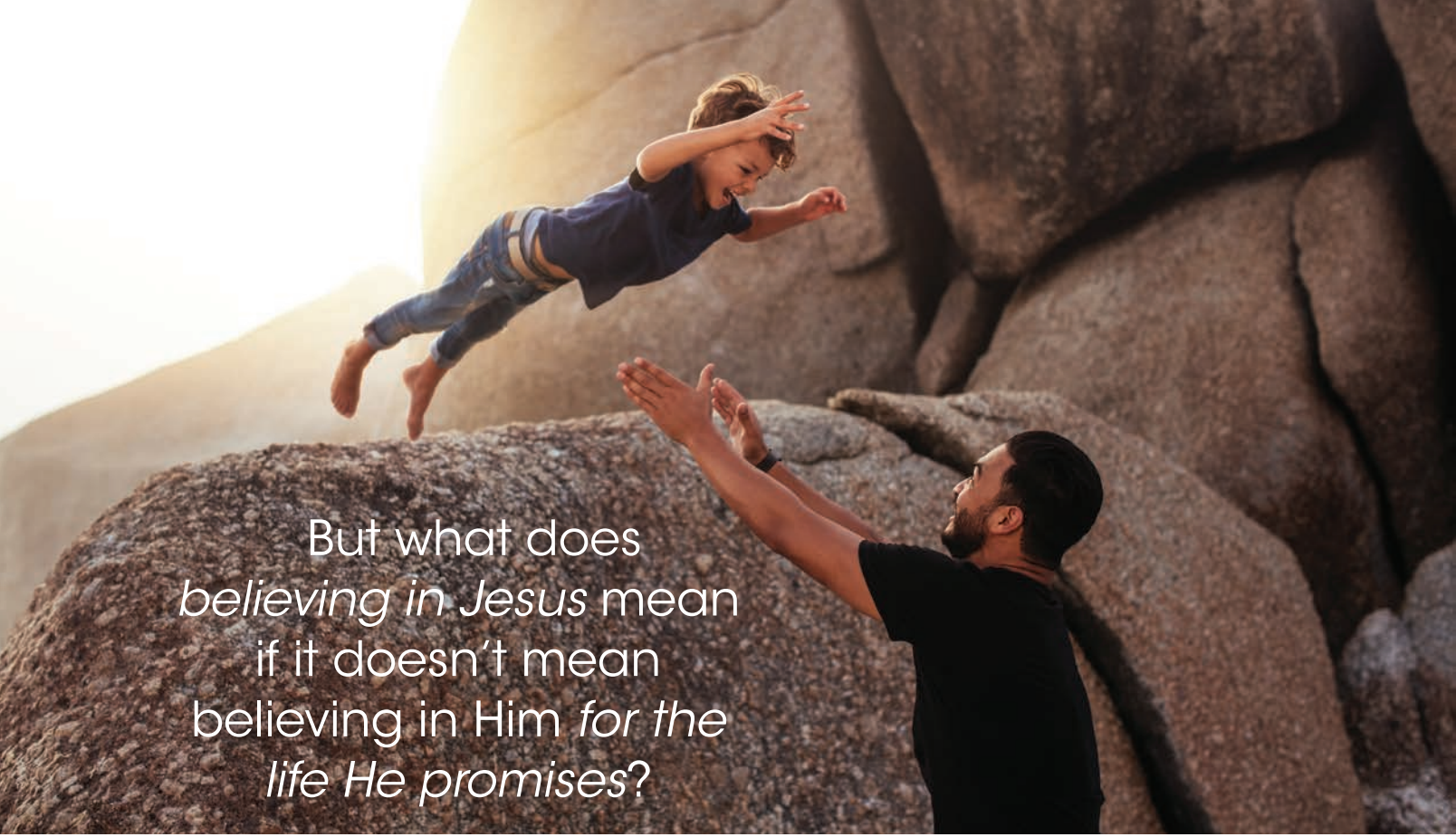
The issue I have with those five explanations is that there isn't a single verse in the Bible explaining that believing in Him is synonymous with any of those beliefs.

Jesus' disciples did not believe that He died on the cross for their sins and that He rose from the dead until a few years after they were born again. That can't be what He meant by believing in Him in John 3:16.

Indeed, Jesus often said that the Father sent Him (e.g., John 5:24), but He never said that believing that fact is equivalent to believing in Him.

Jesus is the world's Savior (John 4:42). He made all savable. But He never said or implied that believing in Him means that He is my Savior only for now.

He is the second member of the Trinity. But nowhere did He equate belief in His deity with believing in Him.

A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a black t-shirt, reaching his arms up towards a young child who is jumping off a large, dark rock. The child is in mid-air, wearing a blue shirt and jeans. The background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise over a body of water, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

But what does
believing in Jesus mean
if it doesn't mean
believing in Him *for the*
life He promises?

The word *relationship* does not occur in the Gospel of John or in the NT. Believing that you have a relationship with Jesus is not synonymous with believing in Him.

To believe in Him is equivalent to believing that He is the Christ, the Son of God.¹ We know that by comparing John 3:16 with John 11:25-27 and John 20:31. Based on John 11:25-27, to believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God is to believe in Him concerning His guarantee of future glorification and irrevocable everlasting life to all who believe in Him for that.

Let me give some modern examples.

Do you believe in Donald Trump? I'm not asking if you believe that he exists, is President, is married with children, etc. I am asking whether you believe in his promise to make America great again. Are you convinced that he will deliver on that promise?


If I asked if you believe in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), I'd be asking if you were convinced that it will deliver on its promise of prosperity for the Chinese people.

To believe in someone is to believe that he will deliver on his promise(s).

If you remove the promise, then believing in someone is meaningless. Kamala Harris believes many things about Donald Trump. But she does not believe in him.

Richard Dawkins calls himself "a cultural Christian." He is an agnostic who loves hymns and Christmas carols. But he does not believe in Jesus.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in Him for what He promises, everlasting life. Beware of separating the promise from the Person. To be born again, one must be convinced that He faithfully fulfills His promise of everlasting life that can never be lost to all who simply believe in Him.

Keep grace in focus. 



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

¹ Believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God does not mean that I'm convinced He is the Anointed One or that He is the second member of the Trinity. As Martha makes clear (John 11:27), believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God is believing that He guarantees everlasting life that cannot be lost to all who believe in Him for that (John 11:25-26).

Why
**LORDSHIP
SALVATION**
Can't Be Ignored*



By Zane C. Hodges

*The following is from Chapter 1 of *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, pp. 18, 20-21.

What could be more profitable to the church than to be impressed all over again with the grand simplicity of God's saving grace?

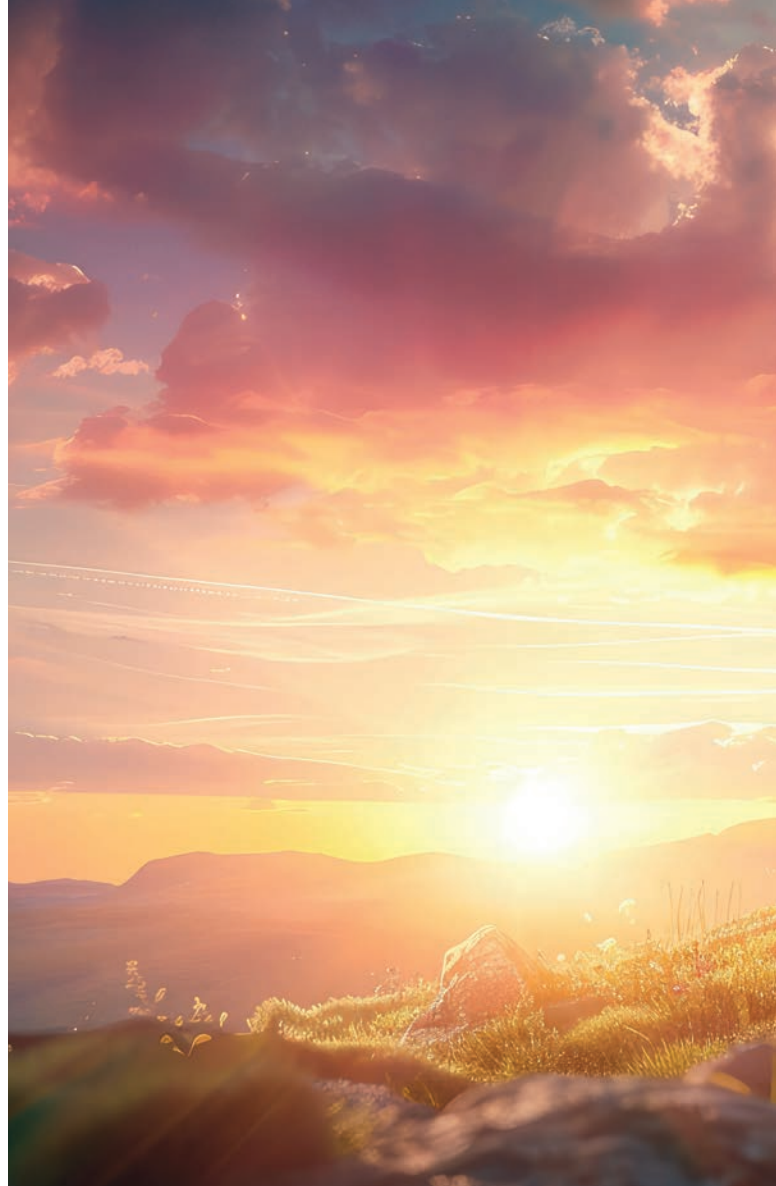
It is dangerous, Lordship Salvation teachers assert, to offer someone the assurance that they are accepted by God apart from the issue of obedience. For them, there is no such thing as an unconditional love of God that is not, in some way, performance-related...

Instead of promoting holiness, the doctrine of Lordship Salvation destroys the very foundation upon which true holiness must be built. By returning to the principles of the law, it has forfeited the spiritual power of grace...

It goes without saying that an error of this magnitude cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the life of the church.

Neither can it be ignored in the vain hope that it will go away of its own accord. Instead, it must be faced and responded to by all who hold dear the gospel of God's saving grace. To do less would be to fail the Lord, and to fail His people, and, indeed, to fail the world for which He died.

For if the church itself cannot decide on the nature of the message it is called to proclaim, how can lost men and women be brought into living touch with the redeeming love of God? And "if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?" (1 Cor 14:8).

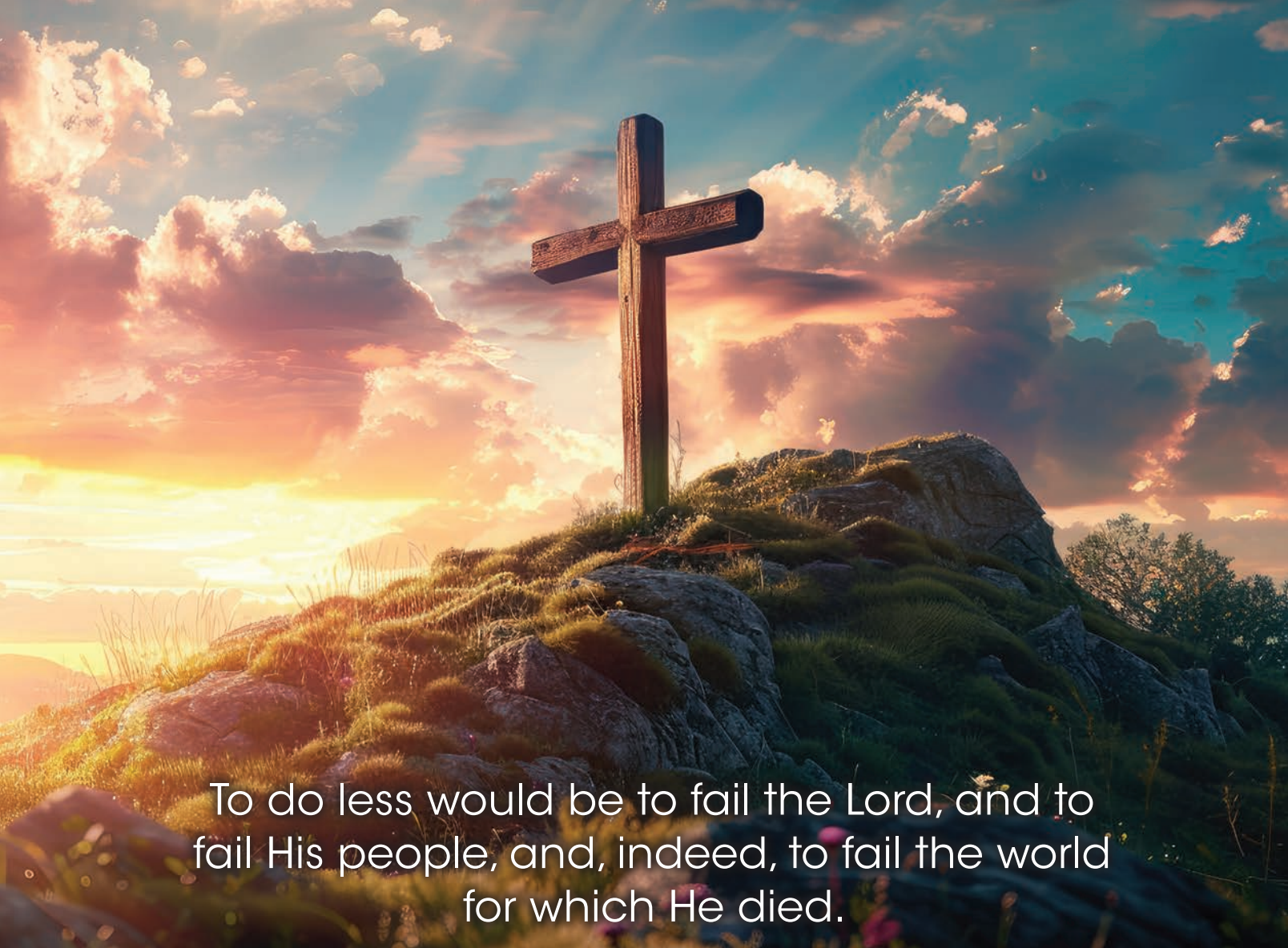


It is true, of course, that there is something distasteful about religious controversy. This author does not like it at all. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that several New Testament books apparently grew out of some kind of doctrinal difficulty or confusion.

Paul's white-hot letter to the Galatians most readily comes to mind. But one might also think of Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John, and Jude. Were it not for the difficulties that produced them, we would not have these valuable epistles.

So, God knows how to use controversy to advance His own interests and to highlight His own truth.

The same God who commanded light to shine on the first day of Creation proceeded next to divide that light from the darkness around it.



To do less would be to fail the Lord, and to fail His people, and, indeed, to fail the world for which He died.

Finally, He gave them both their proper names, for “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night” (Gen 1:3-5).


And God has always done this with the light of His truth. First, He reveals it—He commands it to shine. But He also divides this light from the encroaching darkness all around it, calling each by its true name. And in the religious realm, He calls their names truth and error!

This, then, is the upside of religious controversy. It is a tool in the hands of the living God to bring His truth more sharply in focus. Undesirable though it may be in and of itself, controversy serves to make God’s truth more clearly distinct from the error that would distort and hide it.

It is to be hoped that, by the grace of God, the debate over Lordship Salvation will accomplish these very objectives in our own day and time.

And should that happen, God’s people would have reason to be grateful indeed.

After all, what could be more profitable to the church than to be impressed all over again with the grand simplicity of God’s saving grace? And what could be better for the world to which we are called to proclaim this grace?

For if we’ve got it *straight*, we can then *tell it straight*! 



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

GES CONFERENCE

May 19-22, 2025



Dispensationalism and Eternal Rewards

By Bob Wilkin

GES had two small conferences in Dallas circa 1988 and 1990. But those were regional conferences.

We held our first annual national conference in Irving, TX, from March 25-28, 1996. There were just thirty-five people present. Carolyn Ruthford was the only woman attending that first conference.



Rosy Millet, Sherry and Bob Bryant, and Brad Daskocil



Giant JB, Tom, Bob, and Casey

Most of our conferences until 2010, when we started meeting at The Riley Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, were held in hotels. We met for a few years at the Grapevine (TX) convention center and once at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship.

We met at The Riley Center from 2010 until 2017. We met at The Hope Center in Plano, TX,



Conferees in plenary session

in 2018 and 2019. We then moved to Coppell (TX) Bible Fellowship for the 2020 and 2021 conferences.

We have met at Camp Copass in Denton, TX, for the 2022-2025 conferences and are scheduled to meet there again in 2026 (May 18-21). Conferees like the hotel and motel rooms, meals together in the dining hall, the spacious grounds with swimming, a miniature golf course, a frisbee golf course, a soccer field, basketball court, and a huge lake.

The 2025 conference theme proved to be an excellent one. Conferees greatly enjoyed the following messages:

- Ken Yates on the relationship between Dispensationalism and discipleship,
- Bob Bryant on earth, heaven, hell, and beyond,
- John Claeys on the theme of eternal rewards in the book of Revelation,
- Dix Winston on demystifying Dispensationalism,
- David Janssen on the difference between heaven and the new earth,
- Bob Wilkin on the teaching of eternal rewards in the Old Testament,
- Geoff Stevens on the danger of dismantling Dispensationalism,
- Tony Badger on the Parable of Day Laborers and eternal rewards,

- Mike Lii on whether the saving message changed after the Cross,
- John Niemelä on the Great White Throne Judgment, and
- Bob Wilkin answering five major objections to Dispensationalism.

And those were just the plenary messages. There were also twenty-one excellent parallel messages (three messages were offered in different rooms for seven different parallel sessions). Parallel speakers included J. B. Bond, Steve Lewis, Ken Pierce, Nicole Rossen, Philippe Sterling, Jon Varela, Kathryn Wright, Dave Wyant, and Ellie Strathman. (In addition, most of the plenary speakers also presented parallel messages.)



Bob and Sharon visiting with conferees

You can view unedited versions of all the plenary messages and some of the parallel messages at the GES YouTube channel. Just click on “Live.” We will also post edited versions of most of those messages under “Videos” over the course of the next few months. Audio messages are available now on our website.

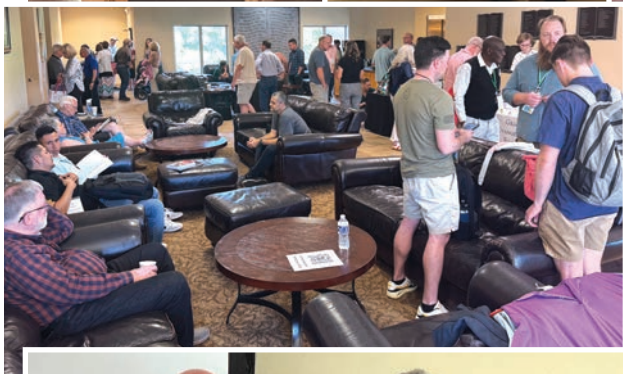
Attendance was excellent, with over two hundred and fifty in attendance, over fifty of whom were first-time attendees.

Next year, we hope to see many new first-timers at the conference. Conference registration is free for all first-time conferees (as well as those needing scholarships). ■■■



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

GES Conference Memories!



Great teaching,
wonderful fellowship &
a good time!

**MARK YOUR
2026 CALENDARS!
May 18-21, 2026**



CITY	CALL LETTERS/NUMBERS	START TIMES (ALL 15 MINUTES)
ALBUQUERQUE	KKIM AM 1000	7:30AM + 2:45PM
BAKERSFIELD, CA	KERI AM 1410	12:15PM
CHATTANOOGA	WLMR AM 1450/FM 103.3	7:15AM
DALLAS	KAAM AM 770	7:00AM + 7:30PM + 12:45AM
DENVER	KLTT AM 670	6:45AM
HUNTSVILLE, AL	WBXR AM 1140/FM 101.3	2:30PM
INDIANAPOLIS	WBRI AM 1500/FM 96.7	2:15PM
KANSAS CITY	KCNW AM 1380/FM 96.1	3:00PM
LANCASTER, PA (NEW STATION)	WYYC AM 1250/FM 98.1	12:45PM + 5:15PM
MEMPHIS	WUMY AM 830/FM 105.5	11:45AM + 8:15PM + 3:00AM
MT.OLIVE, NC	WDJS AM 1430/FM 102.5	7:45AM + 11:00AM
OMAHA	KLNG AM 1560/FM 101.5	4:00PM + 7:15PM
PHILADELPHIA	WNWR AM 1540/FM 95.3	11:15AM + 6:15PM
PITTSBURGH	WWNL AM 1080/FM 103.9	9:00AM
RICHMOND, VA	WDZY AM 1290/FM 103.3	4:15PM
SHREVEPORT	THE PROMISE FM 90.7	2:00PM
TUPELO, MS (NEW STATION)	WCPC AM 940/FM 105.7	8:15AM + 4:15PM
TUCSON	KGMS AM 940	2:00PM + 6:30PM

In this unique 15-minute show, Bob Wilkin and guests discuss issues that are vital to salvation and sanctification, while keeping those issues distinct. Topics discussed include assurance of salvation, evangelism, eternal rewards, problem passages, perseverance theology, Calvinism and Arminianism, how to interpret Scripture, eschatology, and current issues in Free Grace Theology.



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