

GRACE IN FOCUS

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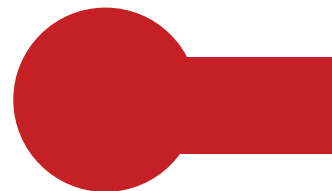
The Power of Repentance

**The Difference a Free
Grace Message
Can Make**

**Reward or
Great Reward?**

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Taught in the Old
Testament**

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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

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If everlasting life is a gift that can never be lost, then why should believers live a life pleasing to God? One answer is found in the Bema. Let's share this important message with all believers, and even with unbelievers.

Letter from the Editor

We are now beginning the second quarter of the twenty-first century. Those born in 2001 turn twenty-five this year. This includes Sam Marr, my administrative assistant. We recently hired Roxann Vidrine to do order fulfillment and data entry, and she was



born in 2006. She turns twenty this year. Colin Jackson, who is in his mid-thirties, returns from Japan in two months and will rejoin the office team, working on journals, radio, and publications.

We are happy to announce that Volume 1 of our three-volume *The Grace Old Testament Commentary* is on pace to be in print in time for our May 18-21 conference. Volume 1 will cover the Torah, Genesis to Deuteronomy. Philippe Sterling, Ken Yates, and I are actively doing the final editing. We would appreciate your prayers.

If you want to get a special pre-sale price on Volume 1, the Torah, it will go on pre-sale in the March-April issue of *Grace in Focus Magazine*.

The GES Seminary begins the Spring semester in January. We now have over a hundred students from all over the U.S. and around the world. We are so thankful for our students and faculty as well as our donors whose support allows classes to be free.

Our aim is to help you keep grace in focus. ■

Robert N. Wilkin

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

Blessed Assurance*

By Zane C. Hodges



*This article is drawn from Chapter 4 (pp. 43-46) of the book *Absolutely Free*. It has been slightly edited.

No amount of stringent Lordship teaching will ever accomplish the miracle of new birth.

A lovely song that has left its words indelibly impressed on the soul of the church is *Blessed Assurance* by Fanny Crosby (text) and Mrs. J. F. Knapp (tune). The first verse is especially wonderful:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

The women who gave us this hymn had obviously grasped the very core of the Biblical gospel. Their words and music are an undying tribute to the essence of the message of grace. Simply put, that message brings with it the assurance of salvation. But how, indeed, is this assurance conveyed? The answer by now should be obvious. The same miracle-working Word that regenerates also imparts assurance to the heart that believes. Indeed, the two things are both simultaneous and inseparable.

Or to put it another way, when a person believes, that person has assurance of life eternal. How could it be otherwise? Think, for example, of the words of Jesus:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

This is extremely clear. The believer, says our Lord, has eternal life. Moreover, he will not come into judgment. In fact, he has already passed out of death into life. And to believe His Word is to believe these things too.

Thus, it is utterly impossible for us to give credence to the gospel message without knowing that we are saved. For that message carries its own guarantee along with it. Therefore, to doubt the guarantee of eternal life is to doubt the message itself.

In short, if I do not believe that I am saved, I do not believe the offer that God has made to me.ⁱ

That brings us back to Martha. When Martha declared that she believed Jesus to be “the Christ, the son of God” (John 11:27), she was responding to the words, “Do you believe this?”

But behind the word *this* lay an important claim that Jesus had made. In fact, in two ways He told her that He guaranteed the eternal destiny of every believer. First, He said: “He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).

And second, He said, “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:26).

Both great declarations are included in the word *this* when Jesus says, “Do you believe this?” It follows that if Martha believed *this*, she believed *this* about herself too.

Indeed, to deny *this* for herself would have been to deny that “whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” But Martha believed and, in

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When a person believes, that person has assurance of life eternal.

The message of John 3:16, John 5:24, and John 11:25-27 is precisely the same.

What really happens when a person believes the saving word of the gospel? The person at that moment knows that he or she has this life.ⁱⁱ

Our need [in evangelism] is to get out of God's way. We must stop trying to do His work for Him. No amount of stringent Lordship teaching will ever accomplish the miracle of new birth. Such teaching, in fact, is an impediment placed in that miracle's path.

What is needed is the simple gospel presented for what it really is—absolutely free! It is this alone that constitutes God's saving Word to the human race. And it is this alone that accomplishes the miracle of regeneration. ■

so doing, she knew that she, too, would never die spiritually. In a word, like all believers, at the moment of saving faith, Martha knew that she had eternal life.

This is not to say, however, that later Martha could not have doubted this truth. Even John the Baptist doubted (Luke 7:18-20). But it is to say this: a person who has never been sure of eternal life has never believed the saving message of God.

In fact, when the matter is carefully considered, this truth stands on the very face of the repeated statements of the Gospel of John. It is even obvious in the greatest salvation verse of all. For in words most believers know by heart, the Apostle quotes our Lord as saying: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

But here too we meet the very claim that Jesus made to Martha. The Son whom God has given is the One through whom eternal life is found by faith. The believer, therefore, possesses that life and consequently does not perish.



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.

ⁱ It is precisely for this reason that John Calvin, for example, held that assurance was of the essence of saving faith. Calvin is emphatic on this point: "In short, no man is truly a believer, unless he be firmly persuaded, that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to him...unless he depends on the promises of the Divine benevolence to him, and feels an undoubted expectation of salvation" (Institutes III.II.16). For additional discussion see Bell, *Calvin*, 22-24 (see chap. 2, fn. 8). Note also Dabney's emphatic argument that Calvin held this view, even though Dabney did not: Dabney, 215-18 (see chap. 2, fn. 9 9).

ⁱⁱ Calvin's splendid definition of saving faith (Institutes III.II.7) is worth quoting: "Now, we shall have a complete definition of faith, if we say, that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds, and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit." This is light years away from the definition of faith held in Lordship Salvation.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Ken and Kathryn at a regional with the Christian Chiropractors' Association (CCA) in Lancaster, PA



Kathryn speaking to the woman's auxiliary of CCA



Don Reiher, new Seminary Administrator



Ken's home study in Indianapolis. We are hoping to start a home church there.



Ken and Kathryn visiting Tony and Donna Badger and some other free grace folk



Greek Exegesis of James, Section 1 (Sam Marr, Dan Strathman, Mark Bruce, Dave Wyant, Bob Wilkin)



Zoom meeting of GES people helping John Niemela edit his translation of the Gospel of John

Was Spurgeon Gracious or Compromising Concerning Wesley

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the most famous preachers who ever lived. He was a staunch Calvinist who believed that a “true” believer could never lose eternal salvation. He proclaimed that it was denying the grace of God to say that eternal salvation could be lost.

But Spurgeon had some interesting things to say about John Wesley, who powerfully preached that a believer *could* lose his salvation. Regarding Wesley, Spurgeon said:

I can only say concerning him, that while I detest many of the doctrines which he [John Wesley] preached, yet for the man himself, I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan, and if there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitfield [another Wesleyan who believed that one could lose salvation] and John Wesley.

Spurgeon went on to say that Wesley’s life was the epitome of holiness and communion with God.ⁱ

That is high praise! Spurgeon wrote that Wesley, who preached things Spurgeon detested, was worthy to be counted with the original twelve apostles who formed the foundation of the Church. If



Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Wesley taught that Christians could lose eternal life. Spurgeon denied that one could have the assurance of salvation.

one wanted to have intimacy with God, Spurgeon said he should follow the example of Wesley.

How should we view such comments? We can do so in two different ways.

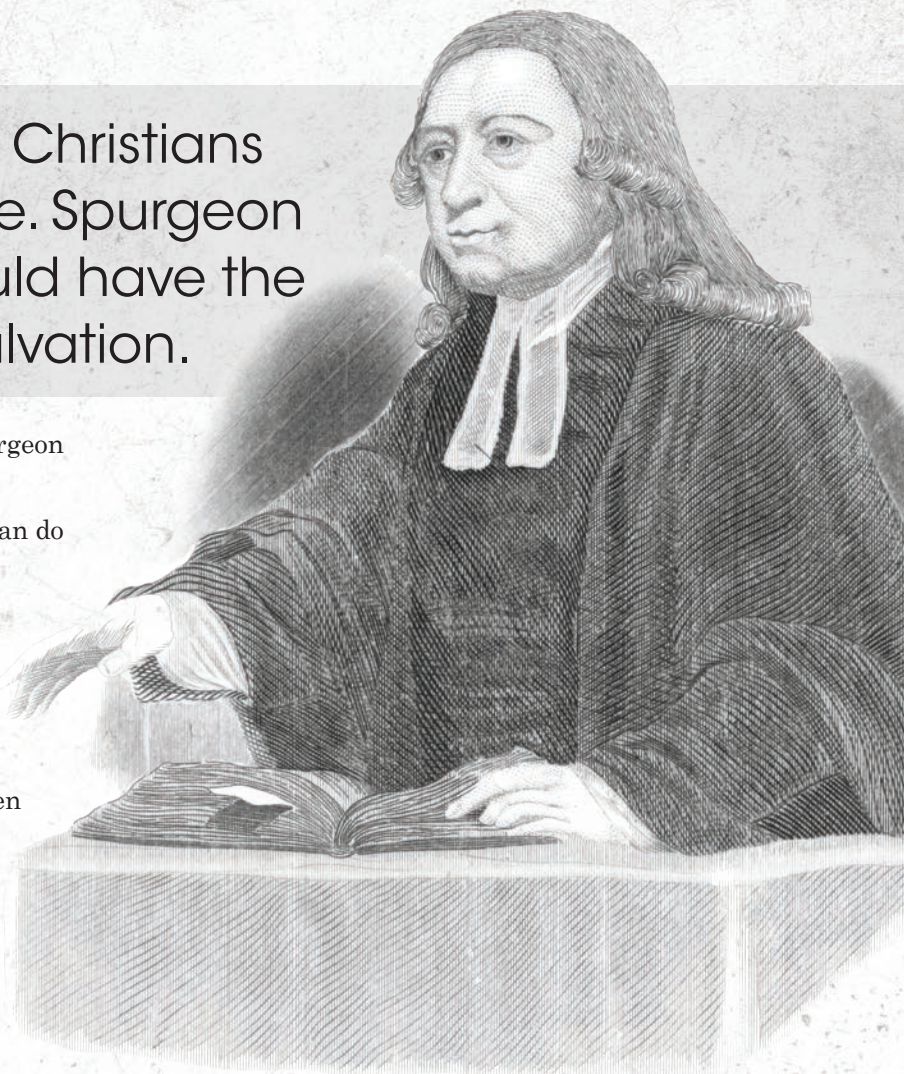
SPURGEON WAS GRACIOUS

Many would say that Spurgeon set an example for us to follow. He did not allow theological differences to get in the way of how he viewed another person. The two men never met; Wesley died years before Spurgeon was born. But Spurgeon had read about Wesley's life.

Wesley was a sincere man. He clearly believed what he preached. Desiring to convert the Indians, he traveled from England to Georgia before the United States declared its independence from England.

Returning to England after a few years of very difficult work, Wesley then confronted the doctrinal errors of the Church of England. He traveled hundreds of thousands of miles on horseback, often preaching two or three times a day. Many attacked him in print and even physically.

Prayer was a staple of Wesley's life. To better serve the Lord, he remained celibate for most of his life. As a result of his hard work, he founded

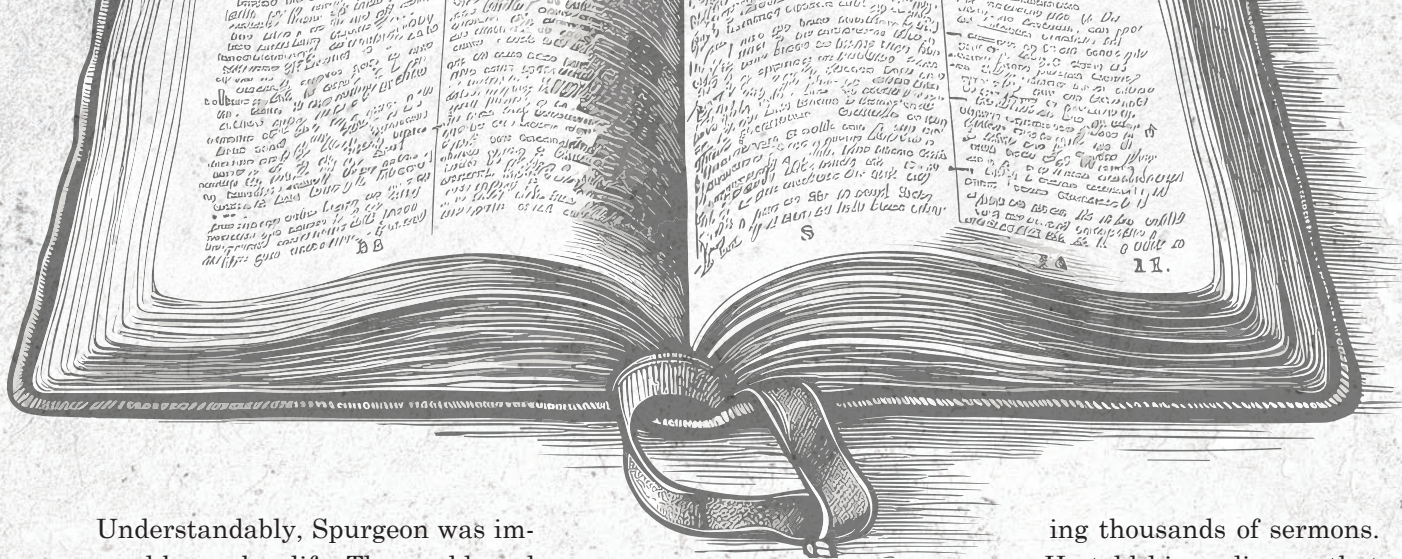


John Wesley

Methodism. He and his followers met the needs of the poor and sick. They established many charities, orphanages, and schools, providing food and education for neglected children. They even helped to pioneer some medical breakthroughs. Wesley himself gave much of his own money to those in need.

Today, many people know Wesley because of the many songs he wrote.ⁱⁱ They are some of the most beloved hymns sung in Evangelical churches.

But if we say that a man teaches “detestable doctrines,” we cannot simultaneously say that he belongs in the kingdom’s hall of fame.



Understandably, Spurgeon was impressed by such a life. The world, and even most in Christendom at large, would agree with Spurgeon's assessment of Wesley. Very few people in history could measure up to Wesley's devotion and sincerity. Most would say that Spurgeon is to be commended. He was willing to set aside doctrinal differences and recognize spiritual greatness when he saw it. Even though he disagreed with most of what Wesley taught, Spurgeon placed him on the same spiritual level as the apostles Paul, John, and Peter.

Spurgeon went on to say that Wesley's life was the epitome of holiness and communion with God.

Many would say we should all be that gracious.

But there is another way to look at Spurgeon's assessment of Wesley.

SPURGEON WAS COMPROMISING

While many would applaud Spurgeon's high assessment of Wesley, especially in a day when truth is relative, it is difficult to understand how he arrived at such a view of the man. Like Wesley, Spurgeon was also a prolific preacher, deliver-

ing thousands of sermons. He told his audiences that there was only one gospel.

God had given it, and all other gospels were false. His entire ministry was based upon the five points of Calvinism.

Wesley disagreed with all five points. (I do too, but for different reasons.) In Spurgeon's eyes, Wesley denied the truths that God wanted unbelievers to hear and believe. This is what Spurgeon meant when he said that he detested Wesley's "doctrines."

If Spurgeon believed the things he so forcefully preached—and I am sure he did—to elevate Wesley to the status of an apostle could be done only by compromising his own beliefs. If Wesley was that pleasing to God, then the things Spurgeon preached were at the very least unimportant, or even worse, heretical. If Wesley was one of the most faithful and godly thirteen men who ever lived, then Spurgeon should have abandoned what he had been teaching and have taught instead the doctrines he "detested."

It is one thing to study the life of a man like Wesley and wish we had the same devotion and commitment to our beliefs. We can be convicted by our lack of discipline and our unwillingness to go the extra mile for the Lord. We can even discuss Wesley and acknowledge that he is an example for all of us in these areas.

But if we say that a man teaches "detestable doctrines," we cannot simultaneously say that he belongs in the kingdom's hall of fame, as the twelve apostles do. We cannot do that if doctrine and truth matter. If, in Spurgeon's mind, Wesley denied the truth revealed by God in the Scriptures, then Wesley does not belong in the company of the Twelve.

Spurgeon said: I detest many of the doctrines which he [John Wesley] preached.

Spurgeon could place him there only by compromising what he preached.

AN ILLUSTRATION

No illustration is perfect, but I would like to provide one to illustrate my point. Suppose a town has two doctors who treat patients with diabetes. One cautions his patients to avoid sugary foods, to eat vegetables, and to exercise. He tells them that these things will control their blood sugar levels.

The other doctor tells his patients to eat cheesecake for every meal. He states that there is no evidence to support the notion that exercise is beneficial in treating diabetes. He worries about and loves his patients. He sincerely believes what he tells them. He wants them to get better. When they fall ill, he treats them at no cost. He visits them when they are hospitalized and gives them his cell phone number so they can call him at any time of day. When they die, he pays for their funerals. In his will, he leaves his entire estate to pay the college expenses for the children of his patients who died. The whole town knows how much he loves those he cares for. He even provides free coffee and cheesecake in his waiting room.

What would we think of the other doctor if he said, "I really hate what my fellow doctor told his patients. He did not tell his patients the truth. But he was sincere and loved them. He worked hard. He was more concerned and devoted to them than I was to my patients. He was one of the greatest doctors who ever lived. If there is a medical hall of fame, he belongs in it."?

We would all think that the other doctor compromised the truth. I might be accused of being ungracious, but that is what Spurgeon did when he wrote about Wesley.

CONCLUSION

Truth is important. There are minor doctrinal issues over which we can disagree. We should be

gracious in those areas. But whether one receives eternal life by grace or by works is not a minor issue. Neither is the belief that one can lose eternal life.

Wesley taught one thing concerning both these areas of doctrine. Spurgeon taught another. Spurgeon appeared to be gracious when he heaped praise upon Wesley. Actually, he was compromising.

I do not doubt that both Wesley and Spurgeon were better men than I. I know they worked harder than I do. I can respect their dedication.

But I disagree with both on major doctrinal issues. Wesley taught that Christians could lose eternal life. Spurgeon, as a strong Calvinist, taught that a believer had to continue doing good works until the end of his life to prove that he was saved. He denied that one could have the assurance of salvation. I teach that the one who believes in Jesus Christ knows, at the moment of faith, that he has eternal life. He can never lose it.

Did Wesley and Spurgeon do many good works? Absolutely. We can graciously say that. But I cannot say that they belong in the council of the apostles without compromising the truth. ■



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.

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "The Man with the Measuring Line." <https://efectualgrace.com/spurgeon-on-calvinism>. Accessed 11/2/2025.

² Editor's note: John Wesley wrote hundreds of hymns. He also translated and adapted over twenty German hymns into English. But his greatest work in hymnody was editing and publishing many hymns written by his brother, Charles Wesley, who wrote over 9,000 hymns (including "Hark! The Herald Angel Sing" and "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today").



BAPTISM and Grace*

By Art Farstad

**This article is adapted from a 1990 journal article he wrote entitled, "We Believe In: Water Baptism."*

Quite early in Christian history the idea grew up that baptism was necessary for salvation. Also, the notion appeared that baptism washed away original sin and (for older candidates) any sins committed before baptism.

While Grace Evangelical Society's constituency may disagree as to the *exact* meaning of water baptism, this is a mild disagreement compared to the issue of whether or not water baptism is necessary for *salvation*!

Members of GES, along with evangelicals generally, will strongly affirm that although commanded by Christ, and hence important, water baptism confers no saving grace.

None of us would ever suggest that any person who received Christ by faith will be eternally lost.

We do believe, however, that they will regret not having been baptized when they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

If baptism doesn't save; if it is a major cause of division in Christendom as to mode, meaning, and proper subjects of the rite; and if it isn't necessary to the Christian life, of what importance is it?

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

The *precise* significance of baptism is still much debated. Many still teach baptismal regeneration, that is, that the person being baptized—usually an infant in circles holding that view—is

We of the Grace Evangelical Society firmly believe in water baptism as significant and important.

actually “born again and grafted into the Body of Christ.” Others, while not holding to baptismal regeneration as such, believe it is part of salvation, and that without it, one will be damned.ⁱ

As to mode, those who pour or sprinkle generally see baptism as a picture of the Holy Spirit’s coming on the believer at salvation. Those practicing immersion usually see the rite as a picture of the believer’s death, burial, and resurrection with Christ.

The *general* meaning of baptism is widely, and we believe correctly, held to be *identification* with Christ and His people.

In 1 Cor 10:2 we read that the children of Israel were “baptized into Moses...in the sea.” What does this mean? Were they *immersed* in the Red Sea? Certainly not. Did it *pour* on them as they passed through? No. Were they at least *sprinkled* by the sea? Not even that. By going through the sea on dry land they were *identified* with their deliverer, Moses, who, under God, saved them from Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt.

That baptism means identification with Christ and the Christian faith is not as clearly seen in those Western countries with a large percentage of the population being baptized in infancy. But it is in the so-called non-Christian world that the general meaning of baptism shines through most clearly. Robert K. DeVries, in his dissertation on NT baptism, writes:

Among educated Hindus, Moslems and Jews, total defection or apostasy from their respective faiths to Christianity comes only when the Christian convert submits to baptism. It is a mark of absolute identification with the Christian faith. Would to God this were true throughout the world.ⁱⁱ

THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

Water baptism is important for obedience and as a testimony.

FOR OBEDIENCE

“To obey is better than sacrifice,” said the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 15:22). Our Lord’s command before His crucifixion was to remember Him in the breaking of bread. His command right before His ascension was to baptize disciples in all nations “in the [triune] name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This alone should be enough to convince the ordinary Christian to be baptized. Once you have left this planet it will be too late to observe either ordinance. The time is now.

AS A WITNESS

As we have noted, in Muslim countries and many other lands outside professing Christendom, such as Israel, a person is not considered to really be a Christian until he or she is *baptized with water*. One can study the faith, attend services and other social functions, yet not be considered a Christian.

While attending an inter-denominational Christmas service at St. George’s (Anglican) Church in Jerusalem some years ago, I was told by my host that the pleasant, middle-aged couple sitting in front of us was Jewish. They obviously were enjoying the lovely music, the Biblical readings, and the spirit of joy. There are many such people, attracted to various aspects of Christianity (often the cultural byproducts—art, music, and architecture) yet unwilling to take a difficult stand in a non-, un-, or often anti-Christian environment.

Only if that couple received water baptism would they be likely to draw hostile attention from the Israeli community. The same holds true in many cultures. The world, at least, recognizes

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the badge of a Christian as water baptism. Unfortunately for sincere and practicing believers in many communions, untold millions of nominal Christians have *received the badge*—whether by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring, whether in infancy, childhood, or adulthood—without ever having personally *received the Savior* by faith (John 1:12). Others have believed but are still not great advertisements for the faith. Many would say that these people are not really saved. They are judging by performance. Fortunately, God sees the heart, and He knows those who belong to Him through faith in His Son.

CONCLUSION

Despite the controversy and differing viewpoints regarding various aspects of baptism, we of the Grace Evangelical Society firmly believe in water baptism as significant and important.

Why? Because Christ has commanded it, because it is the badge of a Christian in the eyes of the world, and because it is a privilege to obey our Lord's command. Since one of the basic meanings of *baptism* is identification, we as believers want to be identified as part of His universal Body, not only by the unbelieving world, but also by Christians in every tribe and nation. ■



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 See Lanny Thomas Tanton, "The Gospel and Water Baptism: A Study of Acts 2:38," *JOTGES* (Spring 1990): 27-52.

ⁱⁱ Robert K. DeVries, "The New Testament Doctrine of Ritual Baptism" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969), 181.

Are Eternal Rewards Taught in the Old Testament?



Evidence from the Book of **DANIEL**

By Brad Doscocil

In reading OT commentaries, the topic of eternal rewards is rarely, if ever, mentioned. It is as if the OT never taught anything about eternal rewards!

However, as Hebrews 11 reveals, OT believers sought eternal rewards and looked forward to receiving them. They understood that the Lord is a rewarder (Heb 11:6). The OT believers mentioned in Hebrews 11 (Hall of Faithers!) sought a “better resurrection” (Heb 11:35). Since believers receive eternal rewards at their resurrection, these Hall of Faithers looked forward to receiving their eternal rewards and experiencing a better resurrection!

Why, therefore, have commentators ignored OT evidence of eternal rewards even though we have “so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1)? Perhaps it is because many do not actually believe in eternal

rewards or that Jesus will one day rule the world as King of kings.

For evidence that OT saints sought and were promised eternal rewards, let’s look at some examples from the book of Daniel.

All these
OT believers
wanted a better
resurrection
(Heb 11:35).
So should we!

Judgment is introduced in Dan 7:9-10. God’s court convenes, and the books are opened. This takes place when the Son of Man comes to establish His kingdom (Dan 7:13-14). The judgments of Dan 7:21-27, therefore, happen during the Tribulation and immediately thereafter. While Daniel 7 focuses on Israel and Jewish believers, Gentile believers are also in view since all faithful believers of the Tribulation will be rewarded (cf. Matt 25:33-40).

In Dan 7:18 we are told that faithful believers will receive and possess the kingdom forever. This is

a summary statement with details following. Those believers will not only enter the kingdom but will possess it. They will have ownership of it. This is a substantial eternal reward and is understandable in light of the fact that God's enemies will seek to annihilate all Jewish people during that horrific time (Dan 7:21, 25; Rev 12:13-17). To have helped a Jewish person or a believer during the Tribulation would have been life-threatening (Dan 7:21, Rev 13:15).

In Dan 7:22, the coming of the Lord is announced, judgment is passed in favor of the saints, and they take possession of the kingdom. These Tribulation believers will be approved by Christ and then will take possession of the kingdom. This is ruling and reigning with Jesus (Rev 20:4, 6). These believers earn these rewards by enduring extreme hardship.

In Dan 7:25, the Antichrist opposes God and will wear down believers, particularly Jewish believers. To *wear down* believers is to persecute and kill them. He will advance his program by changing times, holidays, and laws for the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation. In God's sovereignty and justice, this tyrant is judged, and his dominion taken away forever (Dan 7:26).

Then Jesus' kingdom will commence, and worn-down Tribulation believers will be rewarded with a share in Jesus' government (Dan 7:27). What an enormous honor and privilege for these believers who, because of their stand for Jesus, suffered unimaginable hardships during the Tribulation.

Daniel 11:21-35 describes the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Antiochus), who prefigures the Antichrist of the Tribulation. Antiochus ruled the Seleucid Dynasty from 175 to 164 BC. When Daniel wrote in around 535 BC, the



Daniel in the Lions' Den, Briton Rivière (1872)

events described in Dan 11:21-35 were yet future. These predictions have now been fulfilled in every detail.

In reading OT commentaries, the topic of eternal rewards is rarely, if ever, mentioned. However, as Hebrews 11 reveals, OT believers sought eternal rewards and looked forward to receiving them.

During his reign, Antiochus severely persecuted the Jewish people and nation. He desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by erecting an idol of Zeus in it and offering sacrifices to the image using unclean animals. Daniel called this desecration the "abomination of desolation" (Dan 11:31). Antiochus abolished Jewish sacrifices, corrupted the Jewish priesthood, banned Jewish laws and customs, and persecuted, tortured, and killed those who did not comply with his program of forced Hellenization. What Antiochus did to the Jewish people, the Antichrist of the

Tribulation will do to an exponentially greater extent.



Courageous Jewish patriots who knew God's Word rebelled and waged guerilla warfare against Antiochus. Many, including many Jewish leaders, died fighting Antiochus. But in the end, the Jewish rebels, led by the Maccabees, were successful. They recaptured the temple in Jerusalem and restored it. The Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) was added as a Jewish holiday to memorialize this event.

Some of the brave Jewish leaders who died inspired others to continue the struggle. Many survived. God refined and purified them (Dan 11:35). Their actions made them "refine[d] [and] purif[ied]...[in] white, until the time of the end" (Dan 11:35, cf. Rev 3:4-5; 19:8). Being clad in white is a description of rewards that accompany righteous actions. Their faithful actions in defeating Antiochus and restoring the temple will be rewarded.

In Dan 12:3, Daniel indicated that faithful believers of the Tribulation (Dan 12:1-2) will shine brightly like stars, and those who lead others to righteousness (belief in Jesus) will likewise shine like stars forever. "Shining like a star" is a description of eternal reward. These stars risked death to sow God's Word and lead others to receive Jesus' free gift of everlasting life. In Matt 13:43, Jesus quoted from Daniel 12, saying, "The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the

kingdom of their Father." Jesus' quote comes at the end of His explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. He is describing eternal reward for showing discernment in distinguishing between Satan's falsehoods and God's truth. Jesus is careful to describe the timing as occurring at the end of the Tribulation (Matt 13:39-40).

In Dan 12:13, Daniel is told to go to his grave with the assurance that when he is resurrected at the end of the Tribulation, he will receive his allotted share. This is Daniel's inheritance. It is his share of the kingdom. Daniel, who faithfully served the Lord as a government official in the empires of Babylon and Medo-Persia, will serve in Jesus' government in the kingdom. Daniel will have great privilege and abundance in the kingdom, an infinitesimally richer experience that will last forever. It was worth his seventy years in exile.

Daniel got a preview of his value to the Lord. As an old man, Daniel was told three times by angelic messengers that he was greatly beloved (greatly desirable or precious) by God (Dan 9:23; 10:11, 19). This is high praise for a Jewish man who spent most of his life in exile serving Gentile monarchs. This praise is undoubtedly a foretaste of the commendation Daniel will receive when he is judged by the Lord Jesus Christ.

As these examples from the Book of Daniel show, eternal rewards are taught in the OT. Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego performed acts of righteousness (Heb 11:33). So did the brave Jewish men who fought against Antiochus and restored the temple. Daniel stopped the mouth of lions (Dan 6, Heb 11:33). He also obtained promises, for he requested and received the announcement of when the Messiah would come (Dan 9, Heb 11:33). All these OT believers wanted a better resurrection (Heb 11:35). So should we! ■■■



Brad Duskocil is a CPA in Long Beach, CA, and the Chairman of the GES Board.

When Silence Serves

Why Listening May Be the Most Overlooked Way to Serve

By Georgiana Paleanu

When was the last time someone really listened to you—not just registered your words, but made you feel seen? Those moments are rare, and maybe that’s why they stay with us. In a noisy world, being heard is a gift, yet listening is one of the simplest and most overlooked ways of serving Christ.

The ache of being unheard can persist even in the presence of others.

We often picture service as something impressive: big projects, measurable results, dramatic sacrifices. But the Lord never asked us to be successful; He asked us to be faithful (1 Cor 4:2). And that kind of faithfulness can be as simple as praying for someone, encouraging a weary heart, or offering a listening ear. Even if you’re elderly, sick, isolated, or just beginning



your journey with Christ, you can still serve powerfully in quiet, unseen ways.

The world doesn’t need more quick answers or polished speeches, and you don’t have to be a Bible expert to serve well. Keep learning God’s Word. That’s essential, but don’t wait until you feel fully equipped before you begin. In Jesus’ parable of the minas, each servant received the same amount. Some put theirs to work and gained more, and their faithfulness was commended. But one servant, out of fear, hid his mina away in a handkerchief and wasted the opportunity he had been given (Luke 19:20). The warning is clear: The danger is not in doing something small, but in doing nothing at all. In the same way, it’s better to offer a simple kindness than to hold back because you don’t feel ready. What the Lord asks of us is simple: faithfulness, not perfection.

Listening, though often overlooked, is a vital expression of that faithful walk. It isn’t passive silence; it’s active attention. It means setting distractions aside, giving someone your full focus, and noticing not just their words but also their tone, their pauses, even their silences. That kind of attentiveness helps us discern what another person truly needs. Sometimes it’s something



practical; other times it's simply the gift of presence.

I wish I could say I always practice this. One evening my husband, Oscar, was sharing something heavy, and I jumped into “problem-solving mode” before he had even finished. Later, he gently told me that what he needed wasn't advice. He needed me to listen. Proverbs 18:13 says, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.” Similarly, Prov 18:2 says, “A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.”

I thought I was helping, but I left him feeling unheard. And if I can miss it with the person closest to me, how many others have I missed? That realization led me to reflect on the story of Job—not primarily on his suffering, but on the actions of his friends. Before their speeches went wrong, they did something right: They came, they wept, and they sat with him because they saw that his grief was overwhelming (Job 2:11–13). For seven days they said nothing—no explanations, no quick answers. Just presence.

Their silence reminds me of Jas 1:19: “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” James's words specifically urge believers to be quick to hear God's Word, receiving it with

humility instead of resisting it. But the wisdom of that verse reaches further. If we learn to listen well to Him, we will also learn to listen better to one another. And that is where I often stumble. I rush ahead: quick to answer, quick to explain, quick to fix. In contrast, God Himself shows us a different way. Prayer reminds us of this truth: He never interrupts. He listens patiently, giving us the quiet assurance that He has heard.

He never interrupts.
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I've seen how powerful that kind of presence can be in my own life. One afternoon, when the weight of life felt especially heavy, a friend came over. She didn't shift into problem-solving mode or rush to offer solutions. She simply sat with me. Her quiet presence meant more than the most carefully chosen words ever could. Paul puts it simply: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15).

That kind of listening presence matters more than we realize. And Jas 2:15–16 gives another picture: a brother or sister in need of food or clothing. At face value, it seems simple: Feed the hungry, clothe the cold. But today many needs are less visible. People may not lack bread or clothing, yet they often hunger for attention or long to be surrounded by dignity and uplifted with encouragement. Listening helps us notice those hidden hungers: the weariness in a voice, the silence that masks sadness, the quiet signs of discouragement. Faith, in turn, responds with presence and care.

In the same letter, James warns against partiality. We often picture that as giving the best seat to the wealthy while dismissing the poor (Jas 2:1–4). But partiality slips into subtler places, too.



It shows up in how we listen, giving full attention to some while letting our minds wander when others speak. We may not intend any harm, but the effect is the same: Some feel valued, others feel overlooked.

And one of the deepest wounds of partiality is when suffering feels unseen. You open your heart, and the words seem to vanish into the air. That kind of loneliness can feel as heavy as the grief itself. And it doesn't happen only in seasons of crisis; it slips into ordinary moments too: A friend half-listens while scrolling on a phone, or a conversation turns into advice you never asked for. The ache of being unheard can persist even in the presence of others.

It's worth remembering that James isn't talking about how to be born again. Eternal life is God's gift that is received the moment we believe in Christ (John 6:47), and that never changes. What James is describing is the everyday faithfulness of believers—how we treat one another in community, in the small choices that often go unseen. Grace frees us from fear and directs us toward faithfulness, reminding us that what we do now matters for eternity (2 Cor 5:10).


If you're still wondering—*Is listening really that important? Isn't it too small to matter?*—Jesus said that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unnoticed (Matt 10:42). A cup of water doesn't look like much. Neither does

sitting quietly beside someone. But it matters. Nothing is too insignificant for Him to see.

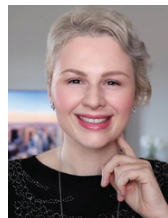
The word *listen* is used in Scripture primarily of listening to wisdom, parents, and God. The Scriptures teach that listening is vital in marriage, parenting, business, education, church life, and helping the hurting. Paul admonished the

believers in Thessalonica to “comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all” (1 Thess 5:14). That involves listening as well as speaking.

Serving Christ rarely looks grand. More often, it looks humble: listening when no one else has time, noticing the overlooked, praying for the weary, sitting beside someone so they're not suffering alone. Serving does not require a platform or a flawless plan; it only requires faith expressed through love.

If you can listen, you can serve. So, perhaps the more important question is this: Who in your life is quietly waiting to be heard? 

The danger is not
in doing something
small, but in doing
nothing at all



Georgiana is a content creator and podcaster who specializes in teaching English as a second language. She translates GES materials into Romanian. Based in Spain, she and her husband, Óscar Pellús—the Spanish-language translator for GES—take joy in making GES content accessible to an international audience.



The Difference Between Believing in Christ and Following Him

By Hershall (Wes) Spradley

I want you to look with me at the details of two Scripture passages. Our focus will be on the distinction between the gift of life given freely by Jesus to those who believe in Him—a gift explained so well by the Apostle John—and the call to follow Him as a disciple, explained clearly by Luke. We are going to look at the story of the woman at the well in Chapter 4 of John. In Luke, we will look at Chapter 14, where we find one of the passages in which Jesus teaches what is required to follow Him.

Believing in Him
is different than
following Him.

In John 4, we will focus much of our attention on verse 10: “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’”

In Luke 14, we will examine verses 25-33.

What is John 4:10 about? What is Luke 14:28 about? Let’s title John 4:10 “The Gift of God and the Giver of the Gift.” And let’s title Luke 14:28 “Counting the Cost.” Without going

any further, what do we already know concerning these two passages? Since a gift has no cost to the recipient, the law of noncontradiction tells us that the two passages cannot be talking about the same thing.

Everlasting life is a gift given without cost to us but following Christ as His disciple is costly indeed.

The law of noncontradiction says that “the proposition and its negation cannot both be simultaneously true, e.g., the proposition ‘the house is white’ and its negation ‘the house is not white’ are mutually exclusive” (Wikipedia). The present possession of everlasting life cannot both be a free gift and something we buy.

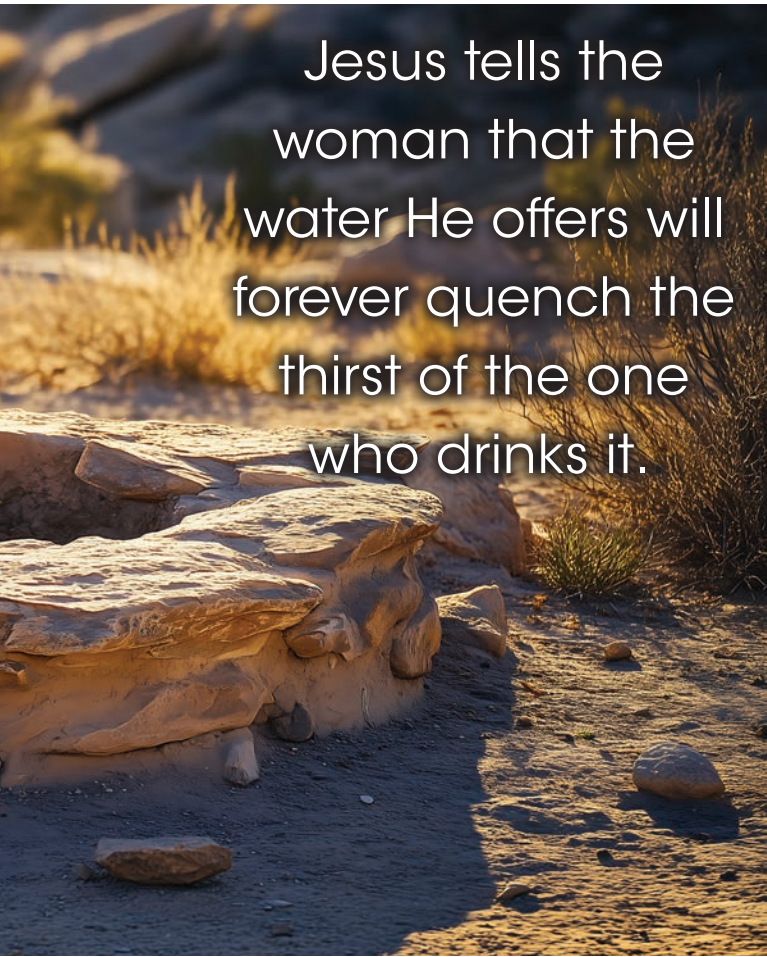
Now let’s look at John 4:10 in more detail. In verse 10 there are two questions for which we need answers. The first question is: “What is the gift?” Verses 13 and 14 answer this question. The gift is eternal life. Using water as an illustration, Jesus tells the woman that the water He offers will forever quench the thirst of the one who drinks it.

The second question concerns the Giver of the gift. Jesus is the only Person in the universe to whom the Father has given the authority to give life. The question is sometimes raised concerning how much information someone needs to know in order to trust in Christ for everlasting life. Verse 10 answers that question. If you knew the gift of God and the Giver of the gift, what then? You would ask Him for the gift. How would He respond? He would give the gift. The gift and the Giver—all we need to know to receive the gift of eternal life. After His statement in verse 10, our Lord directs the conversation to lead the woman of Sychar to understanding two truths. First, He leads her to



an understanding of the gift (vv 11-14). Second, He leads her to an understanding of who He is (vv 15-26). The purpose of the part of the conversation about her sin is not to get her to confess her sins, but to lead her to understand that she is talking to Messiah—a Man who knows everything about her, who is the Father’s designated gift Giver, and who is offering her eternal life as a gift. All she need do is ask Him for it.

Now let’s turn our attention to Luke 14:25-33 and focus on verse 28. The first observation about the passage is that being a follower of Jesus Christ is a costly proposition. He tells the crowd traveling with Him—a crowd that would have been composed of both believers and unbelievers—that one must hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, and that if he does not, he is not able to be His disciple (vv 25-26). It hardly needs to be said that He does not mean hate literally. Rather, He means that our devotion, affection, and commitment to



Jesus tells the
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who drinks it.

our Lord makes all other loves pale in comparison. Anything less, and we do not have what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. Note what the Lord does not say. He does not say that if we do not hate father and mother we cannot be saved. Everlasting life is a gift given without cost to us but following Christ as His disciple is costly indeed.

Following Christ is like building a tower (vv 28-30). Our earthly life is the tower, and every day is a brick in the tower. So how does the idea of cost figure into building a life of following Jesus Christ? Jesus speaks of the cost in terms of hating mother, father, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, and even one's own life. The point is that every brick in the tower of your life of discipleship is expensive.

Following Christ is a day-by-day process. Jesus says to count the cost before you begin to build. It would be better to not be His disciple than to begin and not be able to finish. Is there any possible way we could understand from this that it would be better not to become a Christian? No. While He is

suggesting that we consider not being a disciple, He still offers the gift of life to all those who believe in Him for it.


Following Christ is like going headlong into battle (vv 31, 32). The world, the flesh, and the devil are our enemies. They are powerful. But our resources are quite formidable if we put on the full armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).

Jesus calls the believer to enter the spiritual battle. The cost will be dear. We will suffer as our Lord suffered. But even if a believer backs back down from the battle, he will never perish (John 3:16; 6:35, 37; 11:26).

The present
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The requirements for being a follower of Christ are costly for the disciple, and the Lord makes it clear that if we do not meet the requirements, we do not qualify as His disciples.

On the other hand, the sole requirement for being born again is to believe in the Lord Jesus for the gift of everlasting life.

Believing in Him is different than following Him. 



Wes had a BS from UT Arlington, Th.M. from DTS, and MLitt from UTSA. His love of language carried him through a lifelong journey of study and ministry. Wes went to be with the Lord in August of 2025.



TURN & LIVE

The Power of Repentance

(Ezekiel 3:19; 18:23, 32; 33:11)ⁱ

By Bob Wilkin

My doctoral dissertation for Dallas Theological Seminary was titled, “Repentance as a Condition for Salvation in the New Testament.” That was forty years ago, in 1985. I argued that repentance in the New Testament is a change of mind, mostly about our sinful ways, but that in eleven passages it refers to a change of mind about Christ. In those passages, I suggested that repentance is a condition of everlasting life, if repentance is understood as a change of mind about Christ.

Between 1988 and 1991, we published six articles in our journal summarizing the findings of my dissertation. You can read them online at faithalone.org. Just search under “repentance and salvation.”

In John 3:16, the Lord spoke of those who “believe in Him,” not those who turn from their sins.

In 1989, Zondervan published *Absolutely Free* by Zane Hodges. In chapter 12, Hodges suggested that repentance is turning from our sins and that it is never a condition of everlasting life. He was on the GES board at the time. I remember the board’s discussing his view on repentance. Most of the board at the time were DTS graduates. Everyone except me was urging Zane not to publish that chapter. I was impressed by Zane’s arguments but not yet convinced that he was right. I still needed to work through those eleven passages; but the meditation began then.

Over the next seven years, I came to see that none of the eleven passages I had understood as teaching that repentance is a condition for everlasting life were, in fact, teaching that. My view of repentance and salvation changed in 1997. In 1998 we published a journal article (also available at faithalone.org) titled, “Does Your Mind Need Changing? Repentance Reconsidered.” It shows how and why I changed my view on repentance.

Even though I spent several years researching and writing my dissertation, and seven more years rethinking it, I did not write a book on repentance until 2019, thirty-four years after my dissertation on repentance was completed. The topic was complicated and hard to crystallize. But in 2019, I realized that I was now ready to tackle this subject.

I chose for my title the expression “turn and live,” which is found in several places in Ezekiel. Those passages give us a wonderful understanding of what repentance is and what the straying sinner gets when he repents. They not only give us the Old Testament understanding of repentance, but the

proper understanding of repentance throughout the Bible.

Ezekiel has several verses that link turning from wickedness with living. These are sometimes cited as showing that the Old Testament taught repentance as a condition for everlasting life.

What do the contexts show?

You can see how the following verses could be misunderstood to teach that repentance is a condition for regeneration:

“Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul” (Ezek 3:19).

“Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?” (Ezek 18:23).

“For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!” (Ezek 18:32).

...‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ (Ezek 33:11).

One must impose Lordship Salvation theology upon those texts to turn them into verses about how one escapes eternal condemnation.

However, the most natural understanding of these “turn and live” verses is that *physical death* was in view for those Jews who did not turn from their evil ways.

My view of repentance and salvation changed in 1997.

One must impose Lordship Salvation theology upon those texts to turn them into verses about how one escapes eternal condemnation.

Don't Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, the blessings and curses chapters, teach the same thing? They teach that the wages of sin is death. Repentance is a remedy from premature death.

Charles Dyer comments on the death of a righteous person who falls away and fails to repent (Ezek 18:23-24):

God was not saying that a saved Israelite would lose his [eternal] salvation if he fell into sin. Both the blessing and the judgment in view here are temporal, not eternal. The judgment was physical death (cf. vv 4, 20, 26), not eternal damnation.ⁱⁱ

Similarly, in introducing his discussion of Ezekiel 18, Charles Feinberg notes, "The subject of justification by faith should not be pressed into this chapter; it is not under discussion."ⁱⁱⁱ Later, commenting on verse 9 (which refers to life's being conditioned upon obedience to the Law of Moses), Feinberg writes,

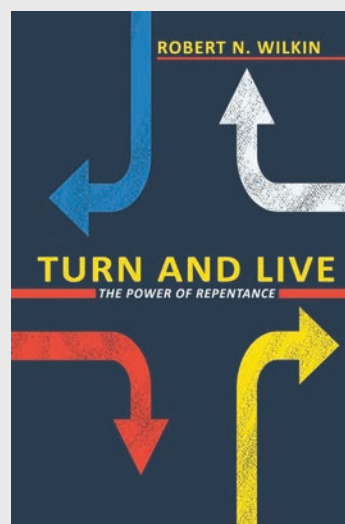
This statement, we must caution again, does not have eternal life in view, but life on earth. Eternal life is not obtained on the grounds mentioned in this portion of Scripture.^{iv}

Ezekiel 18 is not cited in the Gospel of John (or in any New Testament book). Surely if these were key verses showing that repentance is a condition of everlasting life, then John would have quoted the Lord Jesus saying so to someone like Nicodemus, the woman at the well, or Martha.

The Old Testament makes it clear that repentance is a condition for escaping temporal judgment and premature death. The Old Testament

never taught that repentance is a condition for escaping eternal condemnation. Neither, of course, does the New Testament. The fact that neither *repent* (*metanoia*) nor *repentance* (*metanoēō*) occur in the only evangelistic book in the Bible, the Gospel of John, shows that it is not a condition of everlasting life. John's Gospel and all of Scripture shows that faith in Christ is the one and only condition of everlasting life.

In John 3:16, the Lord spoke of those who "believe in Him," not those who turn from their sins. Those who believe in Jesus have everlasting life. Straying believers or unbelievers who turn from their sins prolong their physical lives. ■



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

ⁱThis article contains a portion of Chapter 3 of my book *Turn and Live* (pp. 22-23).

ⁱⁱ Charles H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament Edition, edited by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 1261.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), p. 99.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 101.

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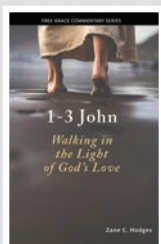


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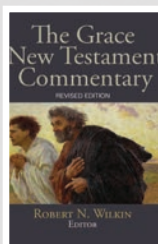


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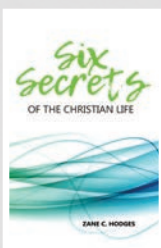


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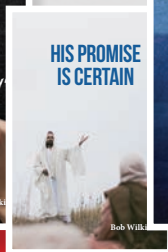
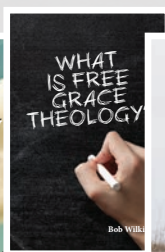
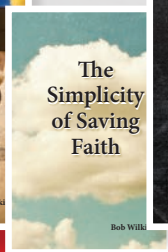
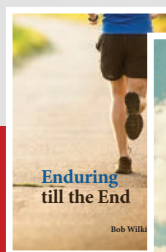


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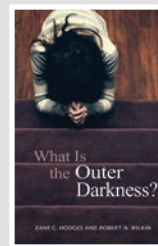
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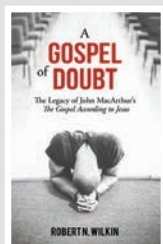
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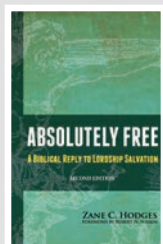
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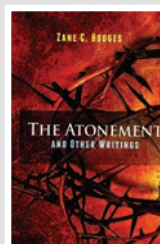
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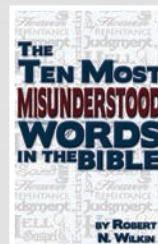
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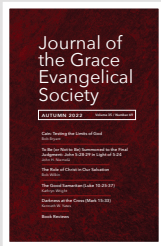
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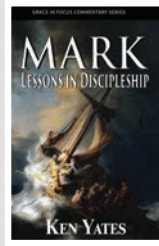
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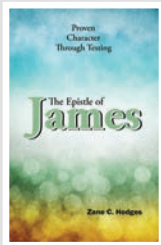
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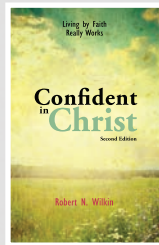
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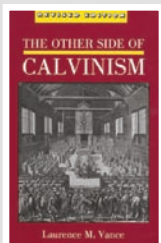
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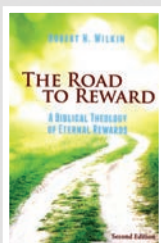
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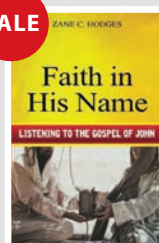
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Reward or Great Reward?

By Bill Fiess

Famous athletes often share their thoughts on rewards in the context of their achievements and the value of hard work. Here are some notable quotes from athletes that reflect their views on rewards:

- **Michael Jordan:** "If you do the work, you get rewarded. There are no shortcuts in life."
- **Serena Williams:** "I really think a champion is defined not by their wins but by how they can recover when they fall."
- **Usain Bolt:** "Don't think about the start of the race, think about the ending."

MOST CHRISTIAN LEADERS DON'T MENTION REWARDS

However, in the Christian realm it is quite different. Most Christian pastors rarely mention rewards, and many even demean the idea. One very famous leader (now deceased) of a large Christian organization taught his followers: "Don't work for rewards; just love Jesus!" The best-known Christian evangelists today mention almost nothing about eternal rewards. In fact, the Navigators, perhaps the best-known Christian discipleship ministry in the world, does not explicitly teach about eternal rewards.

JESUS CHRIST SPOKE REPEATEDLY ABOUT REWARDS

By contrast, Jesus Christ spoke about eternal rewards over and over again.¹ For example:

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..." (Matt 5:11-12).

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev 22:12).

"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his work." (Matt 16:27).

Furthermore, Jesus commands His followers to work for rewards. He says:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither

If God calls that reward “great,” how great must it be?

moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:19–21).

*“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no **reward** from your Father in heaven...But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself **reward** you openly” (Matt 6:1, 3–4).*

How can I love Jesus and yet reject His commands? It seems impossible to love Jesus and not work for rewards.

CHALLENGED TO WORK FOR GREAT REWARD

In fact, Scripture challenges and motivates us to work for **great reward**. It states:

*Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is **great reward** (Ps 19:11).*

*“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your **reward** will be **great**, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).*

...for you [the believing readers of Hebrews] had compassion on me [the author] in my chains [MT reading],ⁱⁱ and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for

*yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has **great reward** (Heb 10:34–35).*

At this point we should mention that while a believer cannot ever lose eternal life,ⁱⁱⁱ he will be evaluated for his works at the Judgment Seat of Christ.^{iv} There, he could lose eternal reward.^v

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN SEEKING GREAT REWARD?

Now you might ask, “What does seeking great reward involve?” It stands to reason that there will be degrees in the rewards believers will receive. But Jesus Christ emphasizes that the ultimate privilege of a believer will be sharing in His eternal reign. This involves persevering to the end of my life. Jesus states:

*“But hold fast what you have till I come. 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” (Rev 2:25–27).*

This also is suggested by Heb 10:36 [note Heb 10:35 above], which states: “For you have need of **endurance**, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: (Heb 10:36).” That promise is “the promise of the eternal inheritance”—ruling with Jesus Christ—mentioned in Heb 9:15. This is attained by being faithful to the end (Heb 3:6, 14).

SOME EXAMPLES

Actually, the entire book of Hebrews is motivating us to be partners (*metochoi*) of Jesus Christ (Heb 1:9), and Hebrews 11 gives example after example of Old Testament believers who were

Believer,
are you
working for
great
reward?

successful, that is, who were working for great rewards in the age to come.

Zane Hodges had this to say about Hebrews 10:

Vengeance and judgment await the apostate (vv 30–31). But the readers can be strengthened against such failure by the recollection of their former fidelity in time of trial (vv 32–34). This past confidence is to be maintained now: “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward” (v 35). What they need is “endurance” so that they may accomplish God’s will and receive the reward He has promised (v 36). The coming of Christ draws near (v 37) and this should give them courage to hold on.^{vi}

The best-known
Christian evangelists
today mention
almost nothing about
eternal rewards.

Dwight Moody does a superb job of expressing the gravity of the term great in relation to rewards:

Be not discouraged, Christian, although the way be rough and weary; look up beyond, there is reserved for you a “great reward in heaven”—up in heaven, beyond the clouds, the sorrows, and the tears. Oh, my friends, if God calls that reward “great,” how great must it be? We, perhaps, would call it great, even if it had not been very much, for we are accustomed to little things; but when God calls it “great,” we may be sure it is something to look forward to. See, then,

that you are looking to heaven for your reward.^{vii}

WHAT ABOUT YOU AND ME?

If someone wins the World Series, he receives great temporal reward. If someone wins the Super Bowl, he receives great temporal reward. But *great eternal reward* can be won by both small and great if they are faithful servants of Jesus Christ (e.g., Matt 25:21, 23).

This poem, quoted by well-known theologian W.E. Vine, expresses well the challenge to work for great eternal rewards.

Go now, and “work,” believers!

But work in peace, and free!

Of grace the glad receivers—

To live in victory!

A call to glory summons:

“Exceeding great reward!”

Then down with all life’s burdens,

You chosen of the Lord!^{viii}

Believer, are you working for great reward? ■



Bill Fiess teaches mathematics at Southwest Virginia Community College. He also teaches Introduction to Logos Bible Software for the GES Seminary.

ⁱ The Greek word *misthos*, meaning *wages or reward*, is used sixteen times by Jesus Christ. But, as we will see, Jesus also mentions rewards in many other ways. Logos Bible software notes fifty-eight passages in which Jesus spoke of rewards⁷—and this may not be conclusive.

ⁱⁱ The Critical Text (CT) reads *tois desmiois*, *the prisoners*, rather than *tois desmois mou*, *my chains*, in the majority of manuscripts.

ⁱⁱⁱ See John 6:35–40.

^{iv} Rev 22:12; 2 Cor 5:10.

^v Rev 3:11; 1 Cor 3:15.

^{vi} Hodges, Z. C., *A Free Grace Primer: The Hungry Inherit, The Gospel Under Siege, Grace in Eclipse*, edited by R. N. Wilkin (Grace Evangelical Society, 2011), p. 186.

^{vii} Moody, D. L., *Life Words from Gospel Addresses*, edited by G. F. G. Royle (John Snow & Co., 1875), p. 85.

^{viii} Vine, W. E., *Collected Writings of W.E. Vine* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

Messiah's Formula for Eternal Life

By Tyler Shean



The gift is obtained by all who believe in the
Giver of the gift.

So the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, though You are a Jew, are asking me for a drink, though I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus

replied to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water (John 4:9-10, NASB).

In John Chapter 4, we find a remarkable interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. This account is indispensable for anyone seeking to better understand or communicate with others what one must do to receive everlasting life.

Within this chapter, Jesus Christ, the Messiah Himself, gives us the authoritative formula. In fact, over the course of this interaction, Jesus tells us exactly who gives eternal life, what you need to do to have it, and what it is (eternal and irrevocable).

What Jesus told the Samaritan woman in this encounter perfectly supports a Free Grace view of salvation. The doctrine of Free Grace holds that everlasting life is a free gift from God, received by faith alone in Christ alone apart from works of any kind. In other words, in order to receive everlasting life, one must simply believe (be convinced or persuaded) that Jesus Christ gives eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it.

Let's examine the first portion of Christ's statement in verse 10: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink...'" This includes the *what* and the *who* in Messiah's formula. As the consummate evangelist, Jesus started with the goal: the gift of God. We know from John 4:14 that the gift of God is eternal life: "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*" (emphasis added; cf. John 3:16). Living water is a metaphor for the message (or promise) of life, which, once believed, results in a person's having everlasting life.¹

The *who* is not explained until later in the dialogue (vv 25-26).

With *the gift of God* established, Jesus moved into the action that would reveal who the Giver of this gift is: "you would have asked Him." In

4:16-19, Jesus gave hints about who He is. He told the woman things about herself that required supernatural insight.

What Jesus is plainly saying to the Samaritan woman was: "If you knew that I freely give eternal life, and you knew who I am, you would ask Me for the living water and I would give it to you."

The Samaritan woman gradually moved in her understanding of who it is who offered her this living water. She realized that He was greater than Jacob who gave the Samaritans this well (v 12). Then she perceived that He was a prophet (v 19). Finally, she understood that this could be the Messiah. So, she

asked him, "I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things'" (v 25). (She later confessed [v 30] that He had just told her "all that I ever did.") Jesus then answered her and gave her the final piece to the formula: "I who speak to you am He [the Messiah]" (v 26).

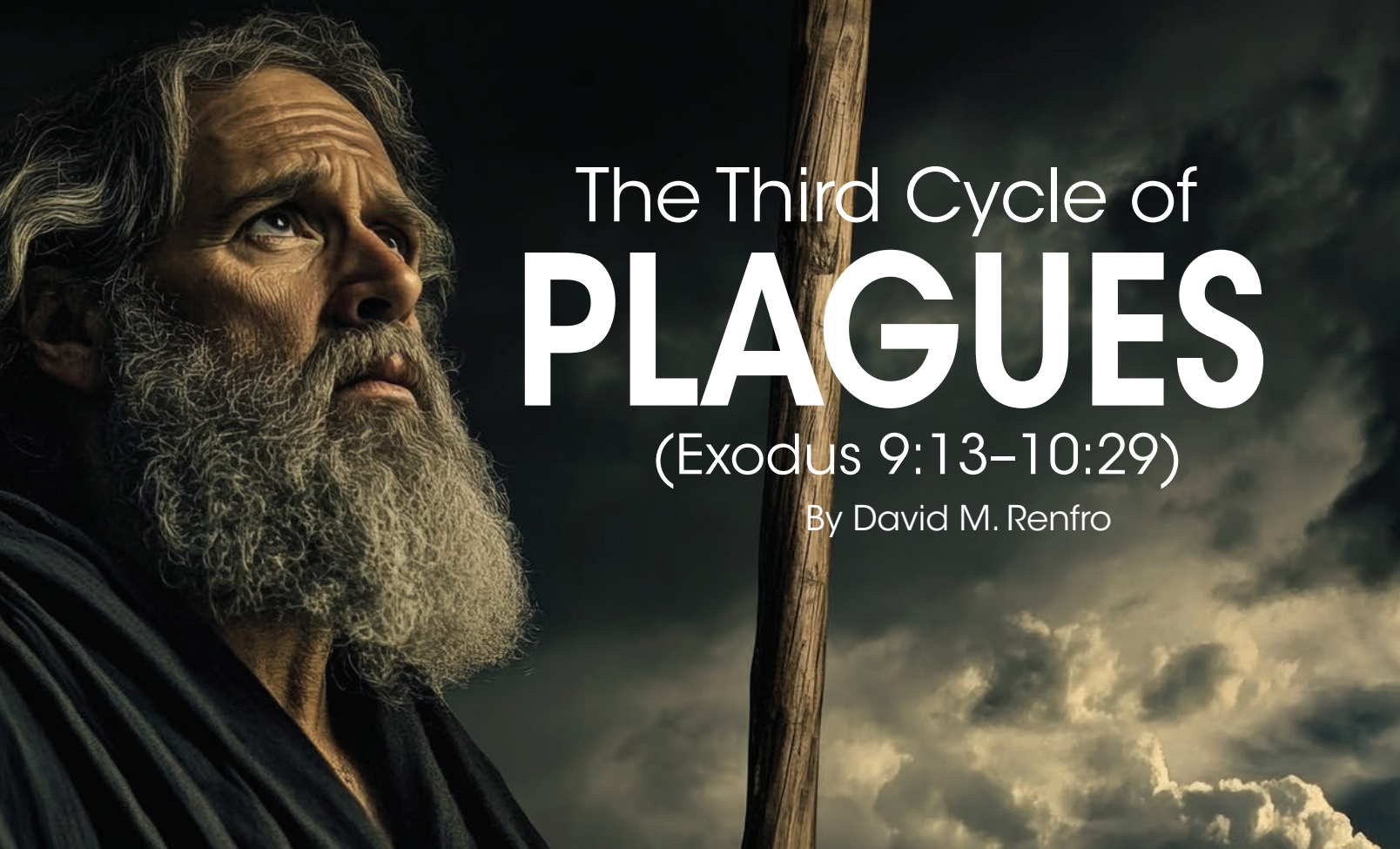
She drank the living water and received the gift of God at that moment.

The gift of God is everlasting life. The Giver of the gift is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the gift is obtained by all who believe in the Giver for the gift. If we simply believe in Jesus for everlasting life, then we have it. We can be sure that Jesus freely gives the gift of eternal life to anyone who believes in Him, and that once we receive the gift, we will never lose it! ■



Tyler is a business marketing professional who lives in San Diego with his wonderful wife Taryn and dog Seve. In his free time chances are good you will find him on the golf course. Tyler is a GES Seminary student and this paper was submitted in the Fall semester Soteriology class, taught by Prof. Dix Winston.

¹ Wilkin, Bob, "Asking Jesus for the Living Water (John 4:10)," Grace in Focus (May/June, 2019)



The Third Cycle of PLAGUES

(Exodus 9:13–10:29)

By David M. Renfro

Like the first two, the third cycle of plagues was designed to lead Pharaoh and the Egyptians to repent of their sinful ways and let the people of Israel go.

The first nine plagues occur in three cycles of three plagues each. The third-cycle plagues (Exodus 9:13–10:29) are more destructive than the previous ones, ruining the Egyptians' economy, comfort, and lifestyle, and potentially causing bodily injury or death.

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAIL (EXODUS 9:13 – 35)

THE PLAN

Yahweh commanded Moses to warn Pharaoh of another plague. Because of Pharaoh's increasing stubbornness, this plague would be more severe than the previous six. Hail would cover the land, causing destruction and threatening both man and beast with death. The goal was to convince Pharaoh

that obeying Yahweh and freeing the Israelites was in his and his empire's best interest.

THE PLOT

Moses confronted Pharaoh with the demand: Release the Israelites. He warned that Yahweh would send *all My plagues* (v 14, a reference to those remaining) to Pharaoh's *very heart*, where his stubbornness resided (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 8:15, 32).

Yahweh told Pharaoh that He could have wiped his empire off the face of the earth had He wanted to (v 15). Instead, He raised him to power to show that He was the only source of his power. Yahweh wanted to use Pharaoh to *show His power in him* and to *declare His name* (character) *in all the earth* (v 16). Instead, Pharaoh exalted himself (v 17).



As a result, on the following day, Yahweh would send *hail* such as had never before occurred in Egypt (vv 18, 24). Some of Pharaoh's servants heeded Moses' warning and sheltered their families and livestock (vv 20, 21).

Yahweh told Moses to *stretch* his hand *toward* heaven to begin the plague (v 22). Moses obeyed. The result was thunder, lightning, and hail (vv 23, 24) that struck man, beast, and vegetation throughout Egypt (v 25), but not in the Israelite territory of Goshen (v 26).

The hail was so intense and so destructive that Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron. In an effort to manipulate Moses, He said that he had *sinned* (v 27). He asked Moses to entreat Yahweh to stop the hail (v 28). He promised to then free the Israelites.

Moses said that when he had *gone out of the city* (v 29), he would ask Yahweh to stop the plague. But Moses saw through Pharaoh's insincerity. The king was not really acknowledging and submitting to Yahweh as the only God (v 30).

Verse 32 says that the plague did not destroy the *wheat* and *spelt*. Yahweh showed grace by leaving the Egyptians with crops they could eat and feed to their livestock.

Moses went out of the city to entreat Yahweh, who responded to Moses' request (v 33). In another act of grace, He stopped the rain, hail, and thunder.

Not surprisingly, Pharaoh again *hardened his heart* (v 34). He apparently believed that when he declared what he wanted, the God of the Hebrews had to obey him. Pharaoh did not repent of his hard-heartedness and refused to let the Israelites go (v 35).

THE PURPOSE

This plague targeted these Egyptian deities:

- Nut, the goddess of the sky
- Osiris, god of crops and fertility
- Set, god of storms

The seventh plague demonstrated to Egypt and Israel that Yahweh is the only deity with power and authority over the forces of nature.

THE EIGHTH PLAGUE: LOCUSTS (EXODUS 10:1–20)

THE PLAN

This plague—locusts—was announced to Pharaoh, but when it would occur was undefined. Locusts—a symbol of judgment in several Bible passages (Joel 1:4, 2:25; Rev 9–11)—were a destructive force familiar throughout the Ancient Near East. This plague would produce an infestation of locusts such as the Egyptians had never seen.

Because locusts consume most parts of plants, they destroy crops, causing famine. In an agricultural culture, this would destroy the economy. The threat of locusts would, therefore, frighten the Egyptians.

THE PLOT

Yahweh again told Moses to approach Pharaoh, warning that He had *hardened his heart* (v 1) and those of his servants so that He could demonstrate His sovereign rule through His *signs* (the plagues).

This is the second time that Yahweh, rather than Pharaoh himself, hardened Pharaoh's heart (see 8:15, 32; 9:34; 9:12). Why did Yahweh do this? The answer is twofold. First, He again wanted to show

Pharaoh and the Egyptian people that He, not their gods, rules the physical world (v 1). Secondly, the remaining plagues were to demonstrate to His covenant people that He is Yahweh, the Sovereign who delivered them. They could then teach future generations the greatness of Yahweh as their Deliverer (v 2).

Moses told Pharaoh what was about to happen: If he did not let the Israelites go, Yahweh would *bring* (lit. “multiply”) *locusts* to the land of Egypt (v 4). These locusts covered the *face* (lit. “eye”) of the earth (v 5). They not only ate everything the Egyptian farmers had planted but also infested the houses of the Egyptians (v 60), a people obsessed with cleanliness.

Pharaoh’s servants confronted him about how dire the situation had become (v 7). So, Moses and Aaron were brought before Pharaoh (v 8). Pharaoh told them to *go* and *serve the LORD* but, still trying to control who did what in his kingdom, asked who would go.

Moses answered that everyone, along with their flocks and herds, would go so that they could hold a feast to Yahweh (v 9). Pharaoh answered that Yahweh “had better” be with them because evil was ahead of them (v 10). The word for *evil* (Heb. *rah’ah*) is similar to the name of the Egyptian sun god, Ra. Pharaoh probably meant that Yahweh “had better” be with the Israelites because the chief Egyptian god (Ra) was in their way.

Pharaoh, still thinking he was in control, said that only men could go and serve Yahweh (v 11),



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called Moses and Aaron back (v.16). He confessed (probably insincerely) that he had *sinned*, then asked them to *entreat* Yahweh to take away the locusts (v 17). Moses did so (v 18), and Yahweh caused the west wind to drive the locusts into the Red Sea (v 19), leaving not one locust in all of Egypt. This may foreshadow His later destruction

then had Moses and Aaron driven from his presence.

Yahweh told Moses to stretch out his *hand* to start the plague of locusts (v 12). Moses did so, and the Lord used an *east wind* to bring in the locusts (v. 13).

By the next morning, locusts covered the entire kingdom of Egypt, causing incredible damage to crops, trees, and the land in general (v 14–15).

Pharaoh relented and called Moses and Aaron back (v.16). He confessed (probably insincerely) that he had *sinned*, then asked them to *entreat* Yahweh to take away the locusts (v 17). Moses did so (v 18), and Yahweh caused the west wind to drive the locusts into the Red Sea (v 19), leaving not one locust in all of Egypt. This may foreshadow His later destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exod 14:24–28).

This was a demonstration of Yahweh’s power over nature’s creatures. He had the power to create and direct—then destroy—the locusts at will. Relieving the Egyptians of the plague of locusts was also a tremendous act of grace.

However, Yahweh again *hardened* Pharaoh’s heart (v 20), resulting in his not allowing the Israelites to leave.

THE PURPOSE

This plague demonstrated the powerlessness of the Egyptian god Osiris, the god of crops and fertility.

It also showed that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is sovereign over animal life, including animals worshiped because they were believed to be powerful. But they did not have absolute power—Yahweh does.

Yahweh told Pharaoh that He could have wiped his empire off the face of the earth had He wanted to.



THE NINTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS (EXODUS 10:21–29)

THE PLAN

Because of Pharaoh's continued stubbornness, Yahweh told Moses that He would strike Egypt with a darkness it had never experienced before. This darkness would not affect the Israelites' territory.

THE PLOT

Without warning, Moses stretched his hand *toward heaven* to begin the plague (v. 22), demonstrating that the source of the plague was not Moses, but Moses' omnipotent God. Egypt was immediately covered by *thick darkness*—not the normal darkness we are familiar with, but an almost palpable darkness. Twenty-four-hour darkness was unheard of in Egypt. Yahweh's "turning off" the sun was a reversal of the original creation (Gen 1:2–5).

Darkness also represented evil, chaos, and judgment.

It was so dark that the Egyptians could not see each other or go anywhere (v. 23). Notice that the darkness lasted for three days, the length of time Jesus was in the tomb (Matt 12:40; 27:63).

However, the Israelites had light in their dwellings. They were not included in Yahweh's judgment, another indication that they were His chosen people.

THE PURPOSE

This plague targeted these Egyptian deities:

- Ra, the sun god, chief Egyptian god; This plague demonstrated Yahweh's ability to shut down the sun god at will. Ra was powerless before Yahweh.
- Nut/Hathor, goddess of the sky and symbolic mother of the pharaohs.

Some Bible scholars have related this plague to the "silence in heaven" before the Great Tribulation's last plague (Rev 8:1). When the fourth trumpet sounds (Rev 8:12), a third of the heavenly bodies are darkened, including the sun and moon.

The ninth plague proved to the Egyptians and the Israelites (and us) that Yahweh is sovereign over light and darkness. We can learn an important lesson from this plague: Because Yahweh is in absolute control of all things, we are enabled and should be motivated to persevere in godly living and obedient worship of our personal, infinite Creator.

CONCLUSION

Like the first two, the third cycle of plagues was designed to lead Pharaoh and the Egyptians to repent of their sinful ways and let the people of Israel go. The tenth plague would be the worst, resulting in Pharaoh's finally letting the people go, but not because he had repented. ■



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Mary Magdalene at the Feet of Jesus,
James Tissot (1886-1894)

A Time to Listen and A Time to Speak

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

There are many sayings about the importance of keeping your mouth shut and your ears open. For example, we have all been told that we were given two ears and one mouth for a reason. We should spend a lot more time listening than speaking.

The older we get, the more we understand the wisdom of such sayings. But we can take that too far. We may get the impression from such pearls of wisdom that we should always keep our mouths shut.

If we want to please the Lord, we certainly need to listen. But there are also times when we need to talk.

In the Gospel of Luke, the Lord instructs us to use our mouths as well as our ears.

LISTENING TO THE LORD

Luke 10:38-42 records a time when the Lord visited the home of Martha and Mary. Martha was busy cooking and cleaning. Her sister was busy doing something different. She was using her ears.

Jesus was teaching. Luke says that Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word.” She was listening. It pleased the Lord. When Martha complained that Mary was only listening and not helping, Jesus praised Mary. He told Martha that Mary had chosen the best course of action.

It is what we would expect. Mary was putting her ears to work. She wasn’t using her mouth. She

understood that she had a lot to learn from the Lord. It was a time to use the two ears the Lord had given her.

There is a time to listen to God and a time to speak to Him.

WHAT DID MARY HEAR?

As Mary sat at the Lord's feet, what did He talk about? What was He teaching her? Luke doesn't say, but I am pretty sure I know.

Mary was a believer. She didn't need to know how an unbeliever would receive eternal life by faith in Christ alone for that gift. She already had eternal life. She needed to know how she should live now that she was a believer. She needed to be taught discipleship truths. That is what the Lord gave her.

A significant theme of Christ's teaching was the coming kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). All believers will live in that kingdom. Faithful believers—those who are disciples—will be great in that kingdom. They will be greatly rewarded when Christ begins His reign. I do not doubt that Jesus was telling Mary and the other believers in that house how they could please Him and receive His approval when He evaluated their lives.

Jesus was the greatest Teacher who ever lived. He was telling Mary of marvelous things. She could receive eternal rewards and rule with the King forever. She was soaking it in. I picture her with her mouth closed. Her ears were working overtime. It was a time to listen, not speak.

SPEAKING TO THE LORD

Sometime after the Lord praised Mary for listeningⁱ He told His disciples (including us!) about the importance of talking. Luke 11:1 says that Jesus was praying. Upon the completion of His prayer, an unnamed disciple asked Him to teach them all how to pray.

Luke says that He told them, "When you pray, say..." Both *praying* and *saying* involve speaking.

What follows Jesus' command that the disciple use his mouth is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4). As many have pointed out, it is more accurate to refer to it as the "Disciple's Prayer." It is what the disciple should say when he approaches the Lord in prayer.

WHAT ARE WE TO SAY?

When the Lord tells us to use our mouths, what does He want us to say? Even though most believers can recite the Lord's (Disciple's!) Prayer, many have not studied it in detail. I would suggest that it deals with things a disciple should do. These are likely the things Mary had heard the Lord speak of when He taught in her house. They are the kinds of things that will make a disciple great in Christ's kingdom. After listening, Mary and Jesus' other disciples were to speak to the Lord about these things.

When the believer lives a holy—or sanctified—life, he honors the Holy One who gave him a new birth from above.

The believer should pray that God's name "[be] hallowed." That is not a common term in modern English. The basic meaning is "to be sanctified." The leading Greek lexicon/dictionary says it means "to honor" it. The disciple should ask the Lord to cause His name to be honored. Our heavenly Father is holy. When the believer lives a holy—or sanctified—life, he honors the Holy One who gave him a new birth from above (John 3:3; Jas 1:17-18). Simply put, the disciple should ask that he live a sanctified life so his Father will be glorified and His name hallowed (Matt 5:16).

The Lord instructs us to use our mouths as well as our ears.

When the disciple talks with His Father, he should also ask that the kingdom come quickly. On that day, His will “will be done” on this earth in the same way that it currently is in heaven. This would likely have been a significant topic of Christ’s teaching in Mary’s home. It is a major topic of NT teaching. The disciple should ask that the Lord’s glorious kingdom come soon. Christ will share that glory with those who are faithful to Him (Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12). Implied in this request is the disciple’s desire to be counted among that group and to be rewarded by the King (Matt 6:13).

The disciple should then ask the Lord to provide for his daily needs. This is a recognition that he can do nothing without the Lord. The disciple is entirely dependent upon the Lord, both in his physical life and his spiritual growth. We cannot please Him without His strength. We cannot produce any spiritual fruit in our own power (John 15:6).

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(John 15:6).

Mary, no doubt, wondered about the sin that was in her life. It is present in the life of every believer. The Lord told His disciples that when praying, they should ask for forgiveness of their sins. This involves confessing those sins (1 John 1:9), which entails speaking. The Lord will forgive those sins, and the disciple will continue to have communion with Him.

Finally, Jesus told the disciples to ask the Lord to keep them from the temptations that Satan brings. The evil one wants the disciple to fail. He wants them not to have communion with the Father or to honor Him. He does not want them to be rewarded in Christ’s kingdom. The disciple should talk with

the Lord and ask Him not to allow that to happen. This acknowledges that sin is always a danger in the life of the believer.

The Lord told His disciples to *say* all these things. We don’t just need our ears. We need our mouths.

CONCLUSION

After believing in Jesus for eternal life, the believer’s most incredible privilege is the opportunity to be His disciple. A disciple follows in Christ’s footsteps and desires to be more and more like Him (Luke 6:40; 2 Cor 3:18).

If we want to be disciples, we will need to use our ears. We need to listen to what He says in His Word. That is what Mary did, and it pleased the Lord.

But we also need to use our mouths. After we hear what the Lord desires us to hear, we need to go to Him and use our mouths to talk about those things. As we speak to Him in prayer, we should ask Him to make us the kind of disciple who honors Him.

There is a time to listen to God and a time to speak to Him. May we use our ears and our mouths. ■



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¹ Editor’s note: There is no indication of the length of time between the end of chapter 10 and beginning of chapter 11, and the location is different. Mary was listening to Jesus, and Martha was serving Him, in their house (Luke 10:38). Chapter 11 occurred “in a certain place.” Reiling and Swellengrebel comment, “and it happened”, cp. on 1:8. No indications as to time and place are given beyond *en topō tini* “in a certain place” (A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke, p. 428). However, many commentators point out that Luke has put these accounts back-to-back to illustrate the need for disciples both to listen to God (and His Word) and to pray to Him. For example, Valdés comments, “The narrative transitions from listening to Jesus (cf. 10:38–42) to speaking to God the Father” (“Luke” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, p. 282).



Why Should We Tell Everybody about the Bema?*

By Bob Wilkin

**This article is a slightly edited version of a blog post from August 8, 2024.*

“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

I’ve been heading GES since June of 1986. Next summer will mark the fortieth anniversary of GES. At our summer board meeting each year, the

board evaluates me. To prepare for that judgment, I must do my job faithfully every day.

If I lose sight of my evaluation, I will slacken in my efforts. That is human nature. But if I focus on my evaluation, I will double my efforts.

The Bema is like that. The Lord has told us a lot about the exam we’ll face after this life is over. We are to prepare for it daily. By being faithful daily,

Nearly every page of the NT deals with the doctrine of the Bema and eternal rewards.

we are well-positioned to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

I assume that you are reading this because you’re already highly motivated to live for Christ, and that one of your motivations is the Bema. You long to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” You greatly desire His approval (1 Cor 9:27). You long to reign with Christ in the life to come (2 Tim 2:12; 4:6-8).

Many church people have never even heard of the Bema. That is sad. For those of us who have heard about it and are motivated by it, there is an important application that we may overlook. We are not only to be watchful for His soon return and the Bema, but we are also to teach others this vital truth.

If you don’t tell your family and friends about our coming exam at the Bema, you are leaving them ill-prepared for what is to come.

The Lord Jesus commanded us to teach others what He commanded (Matt 28:18-20). He commanded us to set our hearts on heavenly treasure (Matt 6:19-21). He taught many parables about the importance of watching for His soon return and the Bema that would follow (e.g., Matt 24:45-51; 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).

The Apostle Paul preached

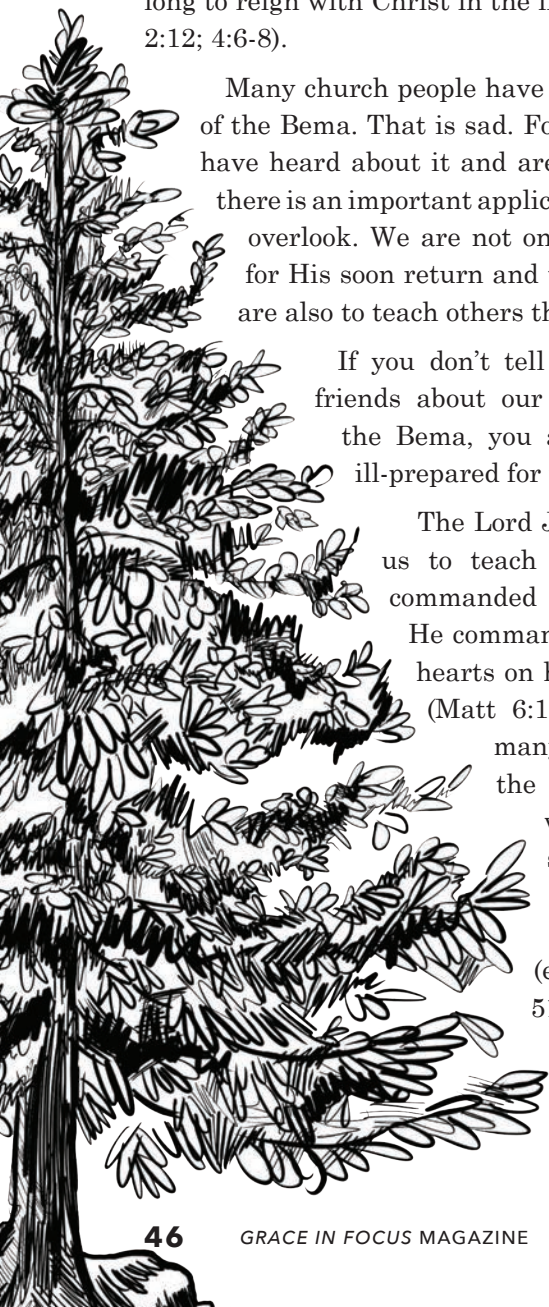
to all believers about the Bema (1 Cor 3:5-15; 4:1-5; 9:24-27; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Gal 6:7-9; Phil 3:14; 4:17; 2 Tim 1:12; 4:6-8).

The Lord and His apostles warned about negative consequences at the Bema for unfaithful believers (Matt 24:48-51; 25:24-28; Luke 19:20-26; 1 Cor 15:2ⁱ; Gal 6:8; Col 1:21-23; Jas 2:13; 3:1; 5:7; 1 John 2:28; Revelation 2–3).

It is even wise to tell unbelieving family and friends about the Bema if the opportunity arises, though no verse commands us to proclaim it to unbelievers.

Don’t leave your family and friends ill-prepared for the most important exam in life.

The Lord alluded to the Bema when talking with the unbelieving rich young ruler. He promised him treasure in heaven if he sold everything and gave it to the poor (Luke 18:22). The young man wasn’t asking about treasure in heaven. He was asking about inheriting eternal life, by which he meant, “What must I do to have eternal life?” (Matt 19:16). Jesus wanted this unbelieving young man to know that if he believed in Him, he would be eternally



We are accountable for how we live.

secure and that if he followed Him, he would gain eternal rewards.

We are commanded to teach our children, and it is reasonable to assume that we'd teach them about the Bema even if they haven't yet come to faith in Christ for everlasting life.

Pastor Bob Bryant gave a talk at our conference in which he said then when he evangelizes people, he tells them about the Bema because he finds it helps them understand how God can give everlasting life away with no strings attached while, at the same time—both during this life and after this life—holding believers accountable for their actions.

This isn't to suggest that unbelievers must understand the Bema to believe the simple message of John 3:16. However, knowing about the Bema can move them in that direction.

I once heard Zane Hodges say that nearly every page of the NT deals with the doctrine of the Bema and eternal rewards. If he's right, and I believe he is, then we need to explain Bema passages to our family and friends so that they are well-prepared for our coming judgment.

I can't tell you precisely when the Lord Jesus will return to rapture us to Himself. But I can tell you that He will soon return,ⁱⁱ and that when He does, He will judge us at the Bema.

To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). The Lord expects you to tell your family and friends about the Bema. Don't leave your family and friends ill-prepared for the most important exam in life.


That exam will be different from a college exam. It will be like an annual performance review at work, except that it will cover not just one year,

but your entire Christian life of service. The only way to prepare in advance is to be faithful in your service for the Lord each day.

While everlasting life is a gift that we receive by faith in Christ, apart from works (John 3:16; 6:28-29; Eph 2:8-9), we are accountable for how we live. The Lord commands us to be ready for the

Bema, to focus on it daily. We are to share that command with our family and friends.

Just as we are to share the message of everlasting life, we are also called to share the message of accountability and eternal rewards.

Keep grace in focus and you will remain highly motivated to please the Lord Jesus Christ and gain His praise and approval and the eternal rewards that follow. 

The Lord
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ⁱ The present passive *are being saved* is conditioned on believers continuing to believe in Jesus' death and resurrection: "by which you are [being] saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain." Saved in 1 Cor 15:2 is a sanctification term and refers to being and remaining *spiritually healthy*. See my Nov 12, 2025 blog entitled, "Was Paul Talking about Sanctification When He Wrote about Salvation in 1 Corinthians?" at <https://faithalone.org/tag/1-corinthians-152/>.

ⁱⁱ Of course, first century believers also knew that His return was soon. Only a year or two after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, James wrote, "The Judge is standing at the door!" (Jas 5:9). Around thirty years after Jesus' ascension, John said, "Little children, it is the last hour..." (1 John 2:18). His return has been *soon* ever since He left. It remains soon. Whether He returns this year or several centuries from now, His return is imminent. We should live every day in the realization that He is coming like a thief in the night. His return could be today.

**BELIEVE IN HIM
FOR LIFE →**



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