

GRACE IN FOCUS

What Is God's

CHARTER →



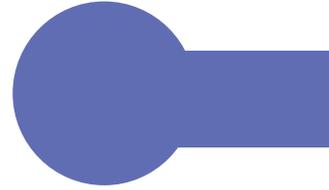
FOR
HUMANITY? ↙

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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

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43 Making Promises You Shouldn't Keep

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When we focus our attention solely on keeping the letter of the law, we can end up committing even greater sin. We can tie ourselves in knots to the point where any action will violate one of God's commands. We need to focus on the two greatest commands and make all our decisions in light of those.

46 Continuous Belief in Jesus Is Not Required to Be Saved

Zane Hodges

This excerpt from *Absolutely Free* is a beautiful and succinct defense of once saved always saved. John chapter 4 makes it abundantly clear that everlasting life is received at the moment of faith. The gift of grace is absolutely free and absolutely permanent.

Letter from the Editor

Change is challenging. Whether it is a new Congress, a new President, a new boss, a new school, or a new city, change is stressful.

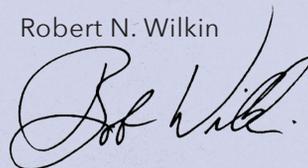
GES has changed a lot over its forty years of existence. While the ministry of GES has steadily grown over the years, it has not been free of stress. Following Christ is not always easy. It is not the path of least resistance.

Our magazine has been changing. Anneliese (Anto) Marr, Sam's sister, who is a professional designer of book covers, has changed the way the front and back cover look. Sam has been working with our typesetter, Debbie Payne, to adjust the interior pages. The quality of articles submitted has improved as well.

Even our office is changing. On January 15th, Dan Strathman started as GES's Chief of Staff. His goal will be to coordinate the staff, contract laborers, and volunteers in our nine areas of ministry (Publishing, Speaking and Teaching, Media outreach, Seminary, Focused Free Grace History, Church Planting, Strategic Planning, Treasury, and Stewardship).

Back in 2010 we released our New Testament commentary. The thought of doing a commentary on the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament was put on hold because it seemed way too big an undertaking for such a small ministry. But between 2020 and 2021, the dream was turned into a work in progress. To date, the commentary is nearing completion, and Volume 1 is in the final editing stages. You can pre-order during March and April at a 30% discount (\$25 versus \$35). We hope you find it edifying that there will soon be a commentary on every Old Testament book from a Free Grace perspective. ■

Robert N. Wilkin



The Very First **Grace** *in Focus* Article

By Bob Wilkin



Forty years ago, I sent the letter that follows these introductory paragraphs to thirty people. It was the very first *Grace in Focus* article. I knew these people were concerned about clarity in evangelism. Most were DTS graduates. One was Zane Hodges, a retiring DTS professor.

During the first few years, GES was largely known for what we were against—Lordship Salvation. Then, around 1990, the board mandated that we become known for what we were for. We began to write and talk about the simplicity of faith, the promise of everlasting life to the believer, the Judgment Seat of Christ and eternal rewards, motivations for obedience, and explanations of tough texts.

A possible name
for this new society
is the *Grace*
Evangelical Society.

At our 2006 annual conference, GES found itself at a crossroads. Half of those at the conference believed that to be born again, one must be convinced that by faith in Jesus Christ he is given everlasting life/salvation that is irrevocable.¹ The

other half disagreed. They considered assurance to be a discipleship issue. The result was a split. Since that time, GES has continued to maintain that assurance is of the essence of saving faith.

For forty years GES has searched, refined, and proclaimed God's promise of everlasting life to all who simply believe in the Lord Jesus for it and the promise of eternal rewards to believers who endure in faith and good works.

This year we celebrate our founding, cherish our growth, and press forward with the clear and simple message of eternal life by faith alone and eternal rewards by faith plus perseverance in faithfulness.

Here is the first letter I sent out:

Hi. For those of you who don't know me my name is Bob Wilkin. I am a Dallas Theological Seminary Grad (Th.M. 1982; Th.D. 1985). I taught at Woodcrest College (formerly Dallas Bible College) last year until it folded (on 12/31/85) and I have been hired to teach at Multnomah School of the Bible beginning this Fall. I am writing because I have a burden for the purity of gospel proclamation today and I understand that you do as well. I have a few ideas which I want to share with you.

I believe that it is time for a new organization. Specifically, I believe that it is time for the establishment of a society made up of those of

GES has continued to maintain that assurance is of the essence of saving faith.

us who believe in a non-Lordship Salvation view of the gospel. Whereas the Evangelical Theological Society has as its doctrinal statement an affirmation of inerrancy, this society would have as its doctrinal statement an affirmation of salvation as a free gift of God which is only conditioned on simple faith. I have included below a proposed doctrinal statement which I have written. I would like to have your suggestions on how to improve it.

Like the Evangelical Theological Society, I envision this society having regional meetings two or three times a year. At those meetings like-minded believers united around a burden for the gospel could fellowship, discuss new books and articles which have come out on the gospel, and present and discuss original papers by our members. Once a year we could have a national gathering of the society as well.ⁱ

A possible name for this new society which has come to my mind is the Grace Evangelical Society. Again, I would like your suggestions on a name for this society.ⁱⁱ

I think that this society, unlike the Evangelical Theological Society, should be made up of both Christian professionals (educators, pastors, parachurch workers, etc.) and laypeople. Anyone with a burden for the gospel of grace could be included. What do you think of this idea?

I also envision this society producing a quarterly or semi-annual journal.^{iv} It would be dedicated to publishing articles defending a free grace view of the gospel. It could also include book and article reviews and listings of ministry openings and those seeking positions.

For the time being I think that we should have a monthly newsletter.^v I am willing to do it unless someone has another suggestion.

My hope is that we could have regional meetings in January of 1987. Hopefully by that time we can have developed enough of a membership to make that feasible. I, for one, would very much

like to attend such a meeting. I also hope that by September of 1987 we could have had our first national meeting.

Well, what do you think of this idea? Are you interested? If yes, please let me know. I'll put you on the mailing list.^{vi} I would also like to have the names and addresses of others whom you know whom you believe would be interested in this society as well. Don't forget to include any suggestions which you have. If you have any announcements for the July newsletter, let me know that too. Also, please let me know if you (or your secretary or someone in your family or church) would be willing and able to address and stuff envelopes once a month. I will provide the mailing list and the monthly newsletters until we can establish some national officers or some other arrangement.

Bye for now. 📧

In His Grace,

Bob Wilkin



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

ⁱ They weren't saying that one had to *continue to believe* in the promise of everlasting life to maintain that life. But they were saying that one had to believe it at some point to be born again.

ⁱⁱ While we had several regional meetings in Dallas before 1995, the first national conference was held in Irving, TX in 1995.

ⁱⁱⁱ In January of 1987 there were three regional meetings held (Portland, OR, Dallas, TX, and Chicago, IL). Each meeting discussed the name of the organization. At the Dallas regional, the name *Grace Articulation Society* was proposed. It was quickly rejected when someone pointed out that the acronym would be GAS.

^{iv} The first issue of the journal came out in Autumn of 1988. Dr. Art Farstad was the first editor.

^v The newsletter came to be called *Grace in Focus* starting in September-October 1995. It became a 16-page magazine in 2012, a 32-page magazine in 2014, and 48-page magazine in 2016.

^{vi} They responded! By January of 1987, just six months later, the mailing list had grown from thirty to over 1,000.



The Role of the Upper Room Discourse in John's Gospel

By John Claeys

How one views the Upper Room Discourse (chapters 13-17) plays a determinative role in understanding the purpose of John's Gospel. If, for example, one sees this Last Discourse as material primarily for believers, then that individual will generally view John as a hybrid of evangelistic material and discipleship instruction. But if one understands that the role of the Last Discourse is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, that understanding lends itself to viewing the entire book as evangelistic.

The purpose statement of the Gospel of John is found in 20:31,

which presents John's Gospel as evangelistic: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Since there is nothing in 20:31 that resembles discipleship material, we must ask: How is the Last Discourse related to the purpose statement? How is the Last Discourse evangelistic?

I have found much evidence within the Last Discourse—enumerated below—indicating that the Gospel of John is

Jesus' seven
"I am"
statements in
John's Gospel
clearly
present Him as
the Christ.

evangelistic. Some specifically state an evangelistic focus, while many demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Giver of eternal life.

1. The discourse is set within John's accounts of Jesus' eight signs around which his Gospel is arranged. The first seven signs occur before the discourseⁱⁱ and the last and greatest sign, Jesus' death and resurrection, occurs after (19:1–20:29; cf. 2:18-22).

2. As the Christ, Jesus used this discourse to prepare His disciples for what was about to occur. He sought to prime them for His betrayal (13:18-19; 16:32), death (15:20b-21; 16:20), resurrection (16:20), and ascension into heaven (13:33, 36; 14:1-2, 4; 16:16, 28; 17:4-5). In addition, He prepared them for the coming of the Holy Spirit (14:3, 16, 18-19; 16:7-11, 13-15; 17:11a, 13).ⁱⁱⁱ

3. No one ever faced death the way Jesus did. The way He faced death demonstrates that He is the Christ (cf. 13:1, 15: 17:26).

4. Jesus showed that He is the Christ by demonstrating His perfect knowledge of what lay ahead and where He was going (13:10-11, 19, 21, 26-30, 38; 14:28-30; 16:2-4, 16, 32 [13:33; 14:19; 16:19]).

5. Jesus demonstrated that He is the Christ by fulfilling Scripture (e.g., 13:18).

6. His command to His disciples to love as He had loved them (13:34-35; 15:12, 17) is a terrific apologetic to move the unbeliever to believe in Him.

7. Jesus showed that He had the authority to send the Holy Spirit to indwell them (14:3, 16-18, 23; 15:26; 16:7-13, 16). Only the Christ has that kind of authority.

8. Jesus revealed that the Holy Spirit testifies of Him and glorifies Him (15:26; 16:14-15).

9. Jesus' words are the Father's words (14:10, 24; 15:15). Only the Christ, the Son of God, could make this pronouncement, particularly the words of 15:15: "...all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."^{iv}

10. Jesus also claimed to have such great authority that if His apostles ask anything in His name, He will do it (14:13-14) and the Father will do it (15:16; 16:23-24). Only the Christ has such authority granted by the Father.

11. Jesus declared that the one who loves Him (14:21) and keeps His word (14:23) will be loved by the Father, and that, as a result, He and the Father will abide in him (14:23). This is a bold declaration that He could make only if He were the Christ.

12. Jesus claimed to give peace to His disciples that the world cannot provide (14:27; 16:33).

Only the One sent from God could declare this kind of authority with veracity.

13. Jesus declared that everything the Father has belongs to Him (16:15). If He were not the Christ, this would be the statement of a madman.

14. Jesus revealed that He came from the Father (16:27-28; 17:21). Only the Christ could make this statement in truth.

15. In keeping with the evangelistic nature of John's Gospel, Jesus' seven "I am" statements in John's Gospel clearly present Him as the Christ.

16. Jesus revealed that the one who has seen Him has seen the Father (14:9). He is the perfect Representative of the Father (1:29).

17. Jesus disclosed to the Eleven that, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (13:10; 15:3), thereby reminding readers of the Gospel that the Eleven had eternal life because they had believed Jesus' promise.

18. Jesus revealed to His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit. He then revealed the Holy Spirit's role in evangelism, convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8-11). This truth fits perfectly into the evangelistic Gospel of John.

19. Jesus announced that He is the Giver of eternal life (4:10). This is the definition of *the Christ* (11:25-27; 20:31).

The way He faced death demonstrates that He is the Christ.



20. Jesus prayed for those who will believe in Him in the future (17:20). The inclusion of this statement indicates the evangelistic thrust of John's Gospel.

21. The Father loved Him before the world began (17:24). This means that He is the preexistent One, the Christ.

The role of the Last Discourse is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ

Therefore, chapters 13–17, as well as chapters 18–19, are included in John's Gospel to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ. These chapters declare repeatedly that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ. In fact, chapters 13–17 are preparatory to chapters 18–19, which present the eighth—and greatest—of the signs in the Gospel of John (cf. 2:18-22). Of course, those signs are presented to lead the unbelieving readers (John 20:30-31) to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Giver of eternal life.

After presenting the eight signs, chosen by the Apostle John and the Holy Spirit to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, John explains why he included those signs:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31). ■



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

ⁱ This article is a condensed version of the author's article in the Autumn 2025 issue of *JOTGES*, "The Gospel of John: Evangelistic Book, or Something Else?"

ⁱⁱ The first seven signs were turning water into wine (2:1-11); healing the nobleman's son (4:46-54); healing the paralytic (5:1-9); feeding the five thousand (6:1-13); walking on water (6:16-21); healing the man born blind (9:1-7); and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45).

ⁱⁱⁱ Though many view v 3 as referring to the Rapture, it seems more likely that this verse speaks of the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. (John 17:11a, 13 could be included in this same discussion.) Compare the last half of the verse ("I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also") with v 18 ("I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"). Both make the promise of "I will come..." (Clearly, v 18 is connected to the promise of the Holy Spirit in vv 16-17. Jesus would not leave them as orphans because He would send the Holy Spirit to them.) A promise of the Rapture seems disjointed in this context—which speaks of His ascending to heaven in order to send the Holy Spirit to them—for nothing else is said about the future beyond Jesus preparing the disciples for His going away. How would the Rapture prepare them for His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven?

^{iv} Even a prophet would not make this claim of directly hearing from the Father, as it was the Holy Spirit who gave prophets their messages.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Bob spoke at Berean Memorial Church in Irving, TX November 9th



Dan, Bob and Sam in the office



Going home after the conference. Marino, Jr., Ken Yates, Marino, Sr.



BoiseRegional



Marino, Jr giving one of the sessions



Group shot of Coppell Retreat

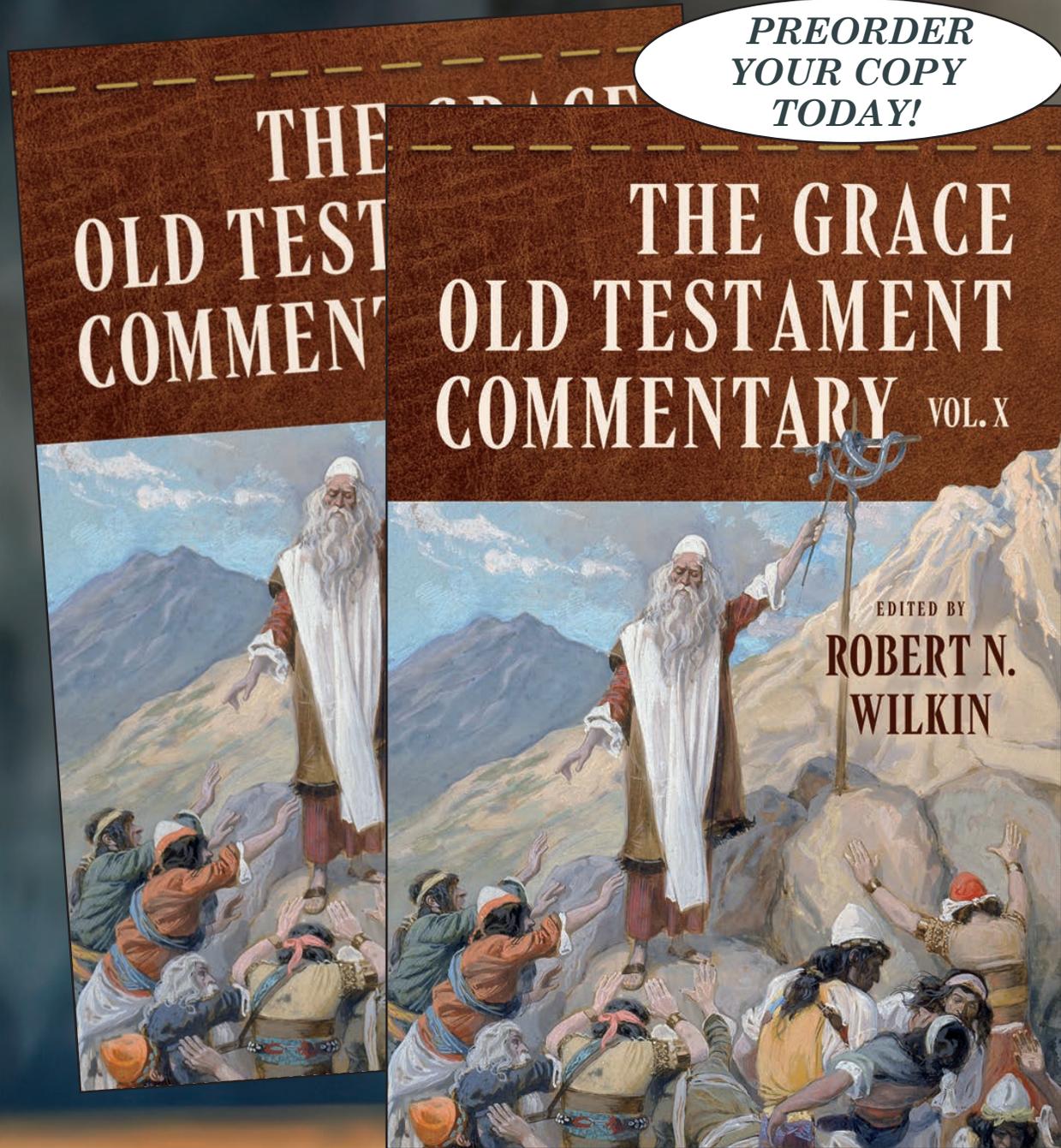


Dinner after the service in SC

***THE GRACE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY,
VOL 1: THE TORAH***

is now available for preorder at \$25. You can order through our website, over the phone, or by sending the order form on page 32.

***PREORDER
YOUR COPY
TODAY!***



Books will be delivered beginning in May. After placing your order, you will receive a confirmation and a tracking number. Volumes 2 and 3 are not available for preorder yet. Please contact Sam Marr for more details at sam@faithalone.org.

Coming Out in May!

Grace Old Testament COMMENTARY Volume 1

By Bob Wilkin

For the past four years, Scott Sayre has headed a large team of writers and editors who are working to produce the Grace Old Testament Commentary. The GES Board began discussing this project in August of 2020. In August of 2021, we laid out a three-to-five-year plan, including authors and deadlines. By January of 2022, work had already been done on many of the commentaries.

Last year we decided to divide the commentary into three volumes due to its large size. Volume 1 covers the Pentateuch: Genesis (Wilkin), Exodus (Stevens), Leviticus (Wilkin), Numbers (Pierce), and Deuteronomy (Yates).

Philippe Sterling, Ken Yates, and I have been doing final exegetical and theological editing of Volume 1 since the summer. We are on track to have it in print by the 2026 National Conference in May. Pre-orders will be taken during March and April. See the bookstore on pg. __ or visit our website.

Sam Marr's sister, Anneliese (aka Anto) Marr, is designing the cover. What you see here is the draft version.

Below are short samples from each of the five books of Volume 1.

GENESIS

3:14-15. The LORD God pronounced judgment on the three principals here, in reverse order...

Genesis 3:15 is *the protoevangelium*, the first gospel. The Lord prophesied about His own death as a victory over Satan. The **Seed** of the woman (Jesus Christ) **shall bruise your** [Satan's] **head**, a mortal wound, **and you shall bruise His heel**, a reference to the death of Messiah. Paradoxically, by dying on the cross, the Lord Jesus defeated Satan. That is true in the Christian life as well. When we suffer for Christ, we are victorious over the devil.

EXODUS

15:1-2. Deliverance prompted Moses and the people to praise the LORD for His victory over

the horse and its rider, whom He had **thrown into the sea!** Moses declared his loyalty to the LORD and resolved: **I will praise Him... I will exalt Him.** Believers in the coming Tribulation "who have victory over the beast" in Rev 15:2 will echo this song: "They sing the song of Moses... saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty...O King of the saints!'" (Rev 15:3). The victory song by Moses and the Israelites foreshadows victory through Christ, the coming triumphant King.

LEVITICUS

26:40-45. This amazing chapter ends with the prospect of a time when Israel **will confess their iniquity**, humble their hearts, and **accept their guilt.** When that happens, God **will remember His covenant with Jacob, and...with Isaac...**

and with Abraham. The patriarchs are listed in reverse order. The normal order, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, occurs nineteen times in the OT and eight times in the NT.

Even while the Jewish people were in captivity, God did not **cast them away**. Nor did He **break His covenant with them**. Israel returned to the land for over 500 years. But when it rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, Jerusalem was destroyed, over one million died, and the people were scattered.

NUMBERS

21:9. With great haste, Moses made a serpent of bronze (*nekhosheth*), the same material covering the altar on which priests burned sin offerings (Exod 27:1-8). He then affixed the serpent to a tall pole (*nes*), used for hoisting a banner or standard (cf. Exod 17:5; Isa 11:12). The sign became visible to everyone in the camp, including the mixed multitude. A seraph's biteⁱ was not only painful, but fatal (v 6). Once the bronze serpent was lifted up, word spread quickly that whoever looked upon it, even momentarily, would be healed and live.

Continuous gazing was not required, nor was any additional action (cf. Ps 22:27; Isa 45:22; John 3:14). Those who heard but refused to look remained condemned to die (cf. John 3:18).

The bronze serpent had no intrinsic power to deliver anyone but served as a type or symbol of Messiah's expiatory work. Yahweh alone had

the power to heal the sting of death (Hos 13:14; 1 Cor 15:55). In this instance, He directed Moses to forge an instructive tool that would prove useful in the hands of faithful teachers pointing people toward the faith of Abraham (Gen 15:6). In time, Israel treated the bronze serpent as a false object of worship, burning incense to it (2 Kgs 18:4). In much the same way, people today ascribe miraculous properties to purported slivers of the "true cross," relics of the saints, the Shroud of Turin, etc.

DEUTERONOMY

6:4-5. These verses contain the great Shema, based on the Hebrew word for the first word: "**Hear.**" Israel was to remember that their **God is One** (monotheism). This is the very foundation of the covenant He made with them—there is no other God. Because of what He had done for them, they were to **love** Him with every part of their being. The NT equivalent is found in 1 John 4:10, 19.

The unity of God does not deny the Trinity. God is one Being, but three Persons. A careful study of OT verses that refer to Yahweh and are quoted in the NT shows that many OT references to Yahweh referred to the Lord Jesus Christ. Compare, for example, Isa 40:3 and Matt 3:3, Isa 6:1-5 and John 12:41, and Isa 45:23 and Phil 2:10. *Yahweh* sometimes referred to God the Father and sometimes God the Son.

CONCLUSION

We are very thankful to Scott Sayre and his team for all the hard work they have done. Work continues on Volumes 2 and 3 even as Volume 1 is about to go to press. We hope to have Volume 2 out by May 2027 and Volume 3 by May 2028.

Thanks to all of you who have prayed and financially supported GES. This project is a partnership of many people.

If you like steep discounts, you might want to pre-order Volume 1 before the end of April. Pre-orders will be mailed out in late May and early June. 



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

ⁱ Seraph is the Hebrew word for serpent.

GRACE

When It Hurtsⁱ

By Art Farstadⁱⁱ

This morning as I drew aside the drapes and looked out my bedroom window, I saw a pale purple-and-gold-streaked sky that brought to mind this fine nineteenth-century German hymn:

When morning gilds the skies,

My heart awaking cries:

May Jesus Christ be praised;

Alike at work or prayer

To Jesus I repair:

May Jesus Christ be
praised.

After days and days of bleak gray skies and rainy, rainy weather, it was a lot easier to believe in God's grace this morning. This was especially true since last evening I received a good doctor's report after days of abdominal pain and two quite unattractive and uncomfortable diagnostic tests.

But what about those other days? When skies are gray and you are "blue"? When everything goes wrong, when there's sickness, pain, financial problems, or even death in your circle of loved ones? Where is the grace of God *then*? No gilded skies. No good news. Where is grace *when it hurts*?

Shakespeare wrote, "He jests at scars that never felt a wound" (*Romeo and Juliet*. Act 2, Scene 2, Line 1). Lest you think I write without feeling, I have lost parents through cancer and stroke, and have had three major operations, including heart and cancer surgery. I'm writing this article for those who are hurting today. You can experience *grace when it hurts*.

Over the past two weeks I've heard the following true stories—all involving born-again people who have experienced God's grace through faith in Christ:

The first is of a young married couple. The husband, a construction worker, was hurled from the sixth floor when a crane hook caught his glove. He leaves a widow and their child.

A middle-aged evangelical pastor lost his younger brother through AIDS last year and is only now recovering emotionally.

A mother and father have just received the devastating news that their son has leukemia of the worst type.

A Romanian mother of five in California was loading bikes onto the family's van. Apparently, one of the kids released the brake accidentally. The van rolled back, dragging her to her death. Her husband is inconsolable. When children are involved, the hurt seems especially hard to bear. They're so young and understand these things even less than we adults do.

Where was God's grace in these events—or in the many other tragedies you could add to this list?

First, in all the events recounted, the principal people involved were believers. Therefore, while they do hurt, we know that the end results will be for their *good* (Rom 8:28).

Second, the grief is only *for a time*; the grace is *forever*:

There
is grace
sufficient for
today if you
will only
believe.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor 4:17).

Third, in many times of grief, there is a *grace factor* shining behind the cloud of suffering. For example, at the funeral of the construction worker, his pastor was able to preach the clear Gospel of Grace to about 200 people. Many, no doubt, were unsaved and might never darken the door of a church. Who knows whether, due to his funeral, the deceased may someday welcome a fellow worker at heaven's gate?

In many times of grief, there is a *grace factor* shining behind the cloud of suffering.

In the AIDS case, the patient's brother, sister-in-law, and family were enabled by God's grace to minister graciously to the very end, and to teach and be taught about grace themselves.

How the Romanian tragedy and the leukemia case will enhance God's grace we don't know. In fact, we often don't—and won't—know until eternity. In such cases, we must exercise our faith and trust in God. It's grace all right, but it's grace *through faith*. Of one thing we can be sure: just as "grace has brought me safe thus far," so "grace will lead me home."

There is also the grace of *prayer*, both our own, and the prayers of the (living!) saints for us.

When my mother was diagnosed as having terminal cancer, the elders of Fairview Chapel who came to practice James 5 at St. Joseph's Hospital asked her whether healing or God's will no matter what, was her desire. Mama chose the latter. She died a few months later.

A photograph showing a person's hand resting on a wooden floor. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a doorway or a hallway. Overlaid on the image is white text in a serif font.

I'm writing
this article for
those who
are hurting
today.
You can
experience
*grace when
it hurts.*

This was my first brush with death, and it was hard. I was the youngest son. I was also probably the closest to a very attractive and devout mother (our Irish Catholic neighbor even said she reminded him of "the blessed mother herself"—high praise for an evangelical from a man from County Cork!).

The prayers of friends and relatives were so real that I could feel them, both at the funeral and at the graveside. The truths I had taught from 1 Thessalonians 4 to my Greek classes at seminary suddenly came alive. My grief was real and deep. But the grace would last. Mama would rise without wrinkles, gray hair—or cancer.

Whenever you hurt, if you believe in Jesus as your Savior, you can know that your life has been



But the grace would last. Mama would rise without wrinkles, gray hair—or cancer.

surrounded by grace since *before* you were even born. There is grace sufficient for *today* if you will only believe. And no matter what *future* shocks may come your way, you can count on God's grace, even when it hurts. ■



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.

¹This article originally appeared in the April 1992 issue of what was then *Grace in Focus* newsletter. It has been slightly edited.

ⁱⁱ Art was on the original board of GES from 1988 until his death ten years later. He had multiple blocked arteries and bypass surgery when in his mid-forties. Those bypasses failed when he was sixty-three. His second bypass surgery was unsuccessful. He died a week after the second bypass surgery, on September 1, 1998.



Unbiblical Emotional Manipulation in Preaching

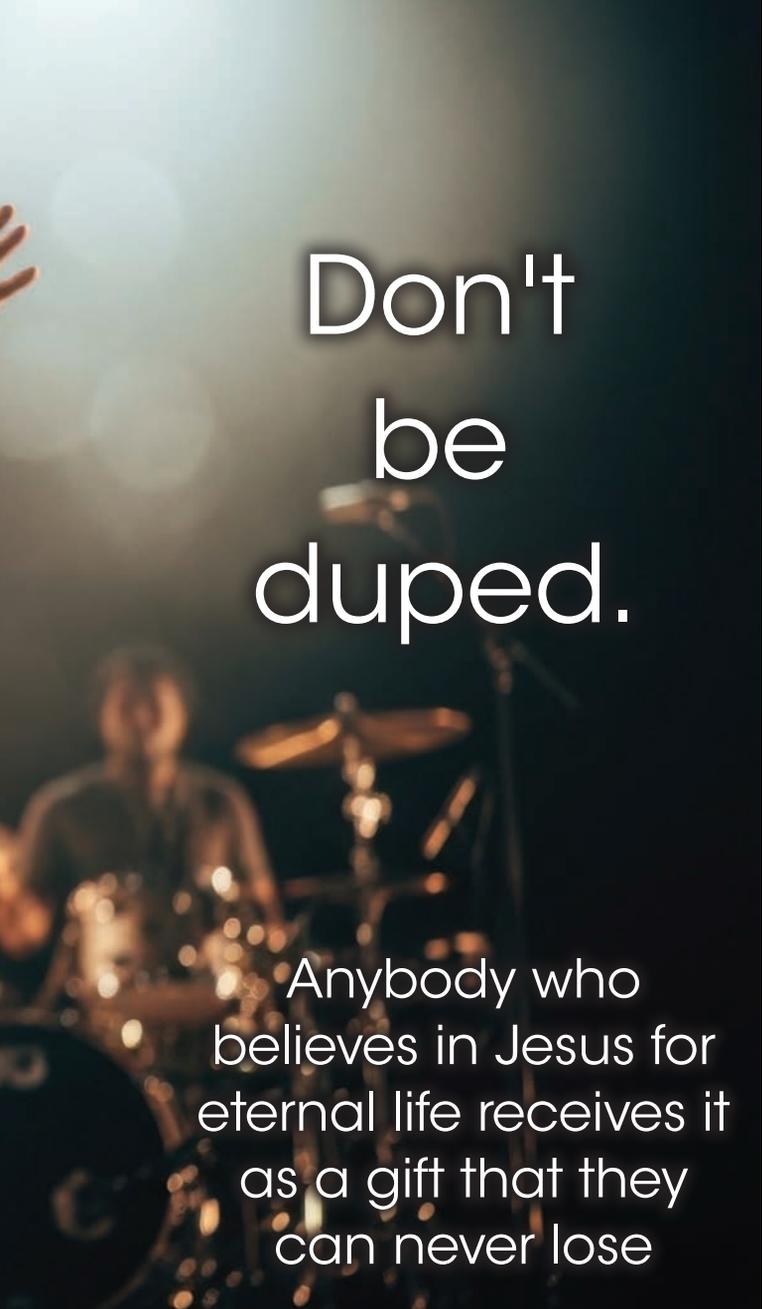
By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

If you have listened to many sermons, you have probably been the victim of emotional manipulation. Sometimes, speakers use such techniques to promote their theology, whether that theology is Biblical or not. Such a speaker likely sees an emotional appeal as settling the issue.

I have heard one such appeal on more than one occasion. There are variations, but I can summarize the gist of it. It goes like this:

“Look at Jesus on the cross! Look at His suffering. Your sin put Him there. If you are a believer, you cannot live as if you can sin all you want. If you have ‘really’



Don't be duped.

Anybody who believes in Jesus for eternal life receives it as a gift that they can never lose

believed, then you realize what your sin did to Him. You will not live like you did before you believed. If you do not live a holy life—if your sin does not cause you pain for what it did to Him—you are not saved.”

If these words are accompanied by an explanation of the horrors of crucifixion, or by music extolling the Lord's love for us while He was on the cross, they can have a dramatic impact on our state of mind. The theology expressed in the words above teaches that a “true” Christian will live a godly life because he grasps the gravity of sin and realizes what Christ did for us. If a person claims to be a

believer but does not live a righteous life or have that kind of contrite attitude, then he obviously does not believe what he claims to believe.

No amount of emotional appeal changes the fact that even the most spiritually minded believer, with the best of intentions, sins (1 Cor 2:14-16; Rom 3:23).

I am sure that many have been convinced that such a theology is true because of how much it tugs on one's heartstrings. This argument is not based upon Scripture, but it seems logical. How could I continue sinning if I understand what pain the Lord endured on the cross because of my sin?

Many who hear this argument have been left wondering whether they are really believers. We all struggle with different kinds of sins. We succumb to those sins. How could we do that after what Jesus did on the cross? Many have been left with the thought that: “Maybe I don't really believe after all.”

BUT IS IT BIBLICAL?

Those who use this emotional pitch will insist that the message is Biblical. The pitch is just another arrow in the quiver that supports what they are saying. They quote well-known verses such as, “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:17) or “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16, 20). GES has a substantial collection of material that demonstrates that those verses are taken out of context when used in that way.

The New Testament is full of commands for believers to live godly lives. These commands would

The Bible teaches that believers can indeed live according to the flesh.

not be given if all “true” believers automatically lived righteously. The Bible teaches that believers can indeed live according to the flesh. The New Testament offers many examples of Christians who did not live in a way that pleased the One who hung on the cross for them—the One who suffered for our sins. The church at Corinth, for example, had many believers who were well-accustomed to sinning in various ways.

In this article, however, I do not want to focus on the lack of Biblical support for the idea that “real” Christians won’t live sinful lives. I want to address the emotional issue. Is it logical to argue that if a person believes Christ suffered so cruelly for sins, they will not continue to live in them? To put it another way, can a person believe something but act contrary to what he really believes? Even if emotions are involved, the answer to that question is undeniably “yes.”

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

I have high cholesterol. My grandfather and father both died from clogged arteries. My doctor has told me that this is the highest health risk I have. He put me on medicine to control it. He told me that I need to watch what I eat. I believe him. I am convinced that I need to watch my cholesterol.

I love cheesecake. Almost invariably, whenever there is a dinner at a church, cheesecake will be on the dessert table. I “truly” believe I should not eat it. I am convinced that it is detrimental to my arteries. I know it is stupid to eat it. I exercise to keep my cholesterol down, and I know that if I swim for two hours, eating a large slice of cheesecake will undo all that time and effort.

But 90% of the time, I will eat that cheesecake. If there are nuts in it, which probably makes it even worse, I will eat it 100% of the time. Every time I take a bite, I say, “I know this is bad for me. This is dumb. But I don’t care.”

If someone were to say to me, “Ken, you must not believe that cheesecake is bad for you; if you believed that, you wouldn’t eat it,” I would assure them that I really believe it. The problem is not that I don’t believe it. The problem is that I do dumb things.

My point is simple. Life teaches all of us an important truth: We can really believe something but act as if we do not.

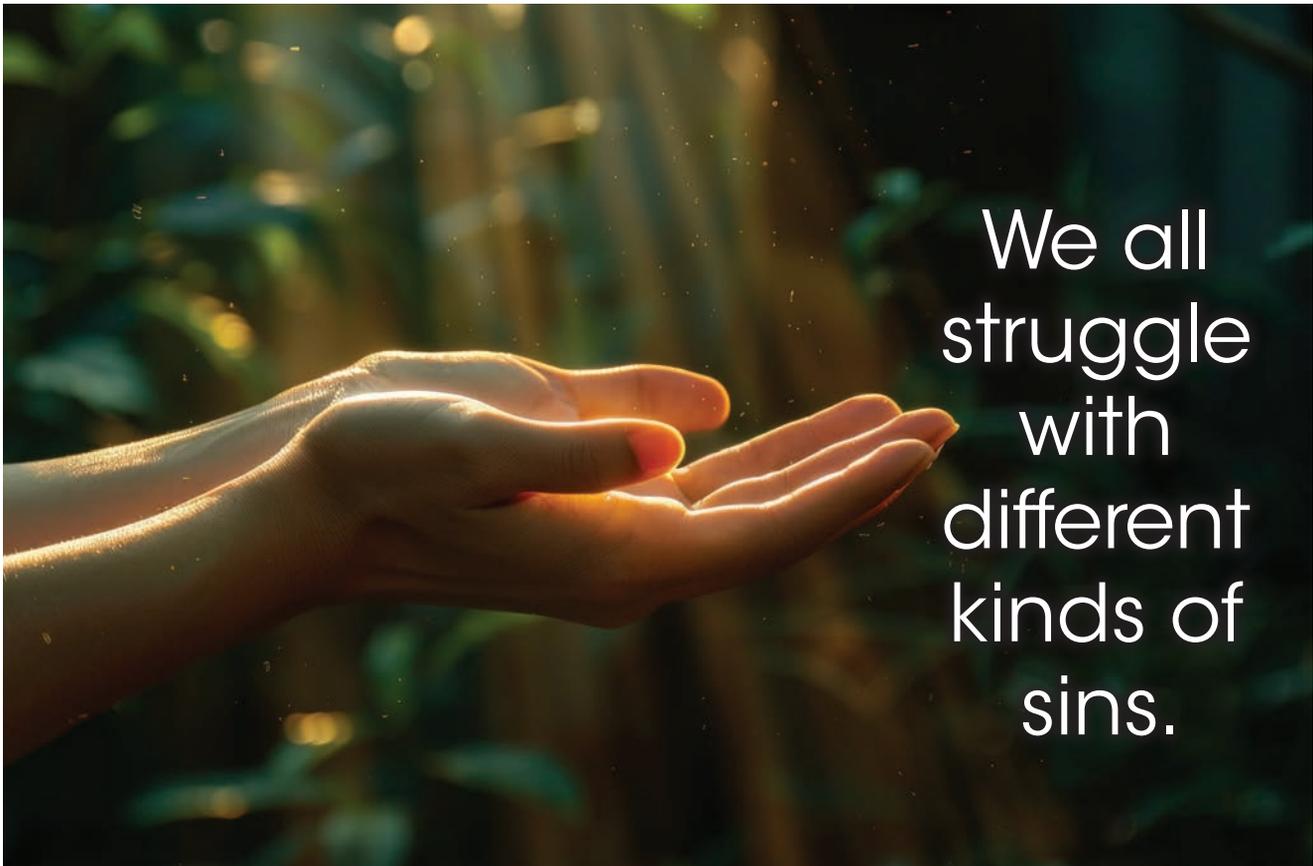
In this case, there are many reasons why I eat something that I believe might kill me. I tell myself that I’m going to die anyway. Something else might kill me first, so I’ll take my chances. I tell myself that I will just go be with the Lord, and that will be better. Maybe the doctors will be able to unclog my arteries after I eat all that bad stuff. I can have my cake and eat it too. Finally, cheesecake is worth dying for, especially if it contains nuts.

AM I JUST WEAK?

I suppose the theologian mentioned above will accuse me of being weak. I am too easily conquered by temptation. Besides, he will maintain that the believer has the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit may not help our diet, but He will give us strength against sin. He will remind us of what Christ did for us on the cross and will guarantee victory in that area.

But once again, life has demonstrated that this is not the case. All believers sin. They sin every day. If the Holy Spirit guarantees victory over sin, why do we struggle? Couldn’t we look at the Lord on the cross and ask the Spirit to take over? Wouldn’t that keep the believer from sinning? These theologians say that the Spirit will allow you to sin a little, but not too much. That makes no sense at all. How could I look at Jesus on the cross and say I will only sin a little?

It is the experience of every believer who has ever lived that sin will be a part of our lives as



We all
struggle
with
different
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sins.

long as we live in these bodies. Every believer mentioned in the Scriptures had the same problem. No amount of emotional appeal changes the fact that even the most spiritually minded believer, with the best of intentions, sins (1 Cor 2:14-16; Rom 3:23). His knowledge of what his Savior did for him at Calvary does not result in sinlessness on his part, even though that is his desire as long as he remains spiritually minded.

CONCLUSION

The Lord's sacrifice on the cross removed the barrier of my sins so that He could give me eternal life when I believed in Him. His sacrifice is the basis of my ongoing forgiveness when I confess those sins. He suffered greatly for my benefit. I "really" believe that.

But I still sin. I wish I didn't. The things I want to do, I sometimes don't. That was Paul's experience as well (Rom 7:15). Sin will be a part of our experience as believers until these fleshly bodies are resurrected (Rom 8:23).

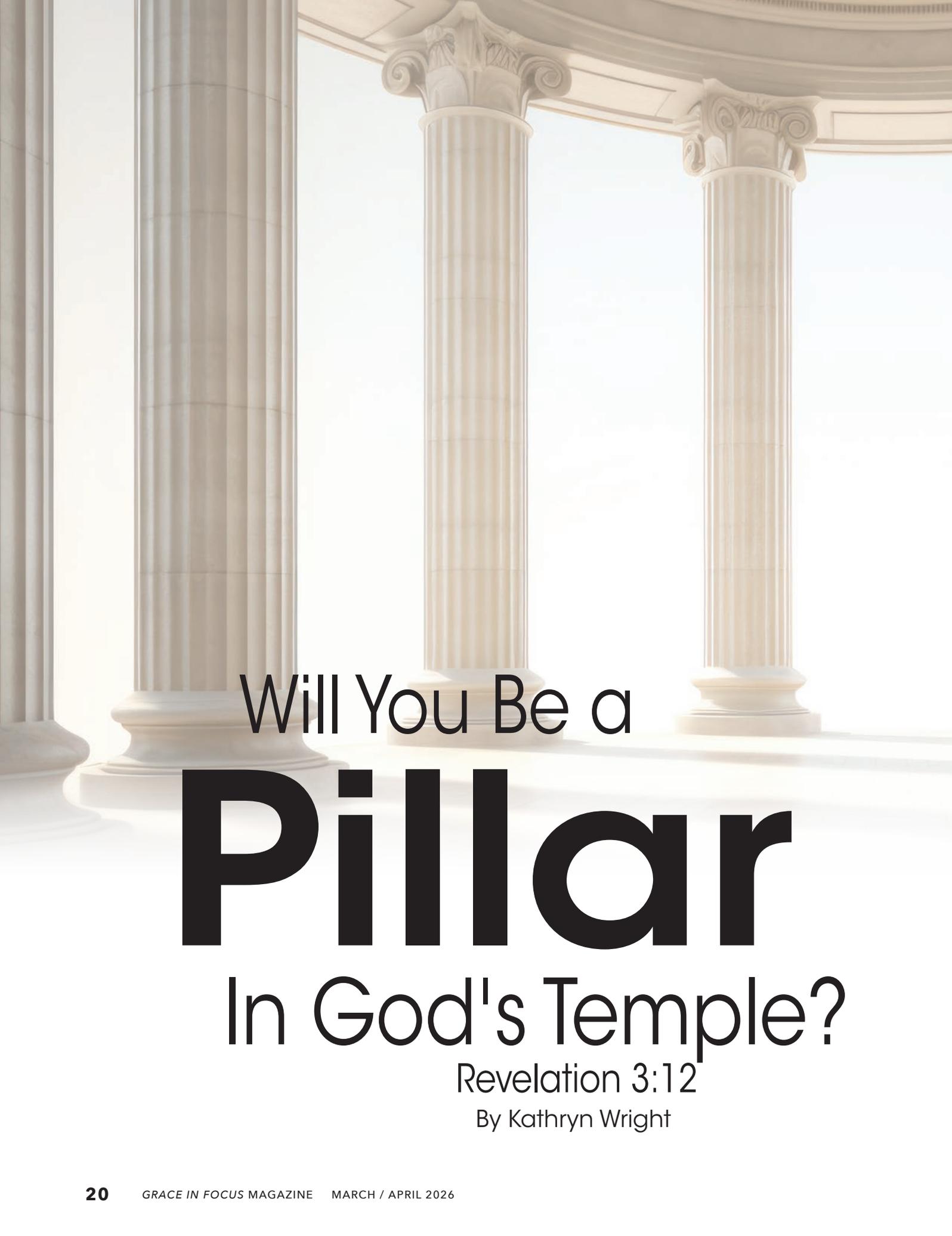
Anybody who believes in Jesus for eternal life receives it as a gift that they can never lose. But there is a popular theology that wants to rob us of our assurance. It says that if a person "really" believes that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, they can't continue sinning. Since we all sin, this can only lead to our doubting our eternal salvation.

But our experience shows this theology is not true. We don't always live consistently with what we believe to be true. More importantly, the Scriptures also show this theology is false.

Preachers who hold that theology will often appeal to emotional arguments. Don't let them get away with it. Don't be duped. ■



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.



Will You Be a
Pillar
In God's Temple?

Revelation 3:12

By Kathryn Wright



He will be recognizable as one of His own, a walking monument that will proclaim His name for all to see.

INTRODUCTION

There is a bronze statue of a man in Harvard Yard. At the base of the statue is an inscription identifying the figure as “John Harvard Founder 1638.” However, by examining the university’s history, we find that all three of these “facts” are either misleading or incorrect.

A JOKE OF A STATUE

First, the figure is not actually a depiction of John Harvard. There are no surviving images of the man. Therefore, when the statue was created by Daniel Chester French, he used a student as a stand-in model. The result is that when people walk by the statue today, they aren’t seeing a rendition

of John Harvard at all, but of some random student from years later.

Second, John Harvard was not *the* founder of Harvard. At best, he might be called *a* founder. While Harvard was a significant donor to the school, the school was technically established by an act of the Massachusetts legislature. John Harvard supported the school and donated his money and his library to further its cause, but he did not start the institution.

Third, the date is wrong. The school was founded in 1636, not 1638.

For a school so well known for its academic rigor and prestige, the statue's lack of accuracy is ironic. As a result, John Harvard's monument has become a point of mockery, an inside joke among students. What was meant to honor the man has become a source of laughter instead. That's the problem with human honor and praise: It often gets corrupted over time.

ANOTHER KIND OF MONUMENT

When I heard this story, I thought of a statue or monument mentioned in the Bible. In the book of Revelation, when speaking to the faithful church at Philadelphia, the Lord says:

“He who overcomes, I will make him *a pillar in the temple* of My God, and he shall go out no more...” Rev 3:12a (emphasis added).

In this passage, the Lord addresses persecuted believers (vv 8-9). He instructs them to hold fast to their Christian confession amid their difficulties (v 11). In verse 12, He describes the rewards they will receive if they overcome and persevere until the end. It should be noted that the perseverance of the church in Philadelphia was not a foregone conclusion. There is no guarantee that any believer will remain faithful to the Lord.

The overcomer will not only enter the kingdom but will be publicly identified and honored as one who faithfully followed the Lord.

Scripture shows that believers can fall away. This is especially true of believers who, like those in the church at Philadelphia, are facing severe persecution. They can choose not to hold fast. If they do not hold fast, they will still enter the kingdom. Eternal life can never be lost. But believers can miss out on the rewards the Lord offers. We can lose honor and privileges in His kingdom.

If believers are faithless, the Lord remains faithful to His promise that whoever believes in Him shall not perish (2 Tim 2:11-13; John 3:16). However, if they persevere and hold fast, the Lord promises them a great reward. That is what Rev 3:12 describes.

Notice that the reward for overcoming is not eternal life. Eternal life is not earned by overcoming but is received by faith alone. Here, the Lord is not discussing how someone receives eternal life. He is talking about something in addition to that gift. He says that He will make the overcomer a *pillar*.

This pillar will serve as a way of honoring such a believer, as the statue of John Harvard sought to do.

WHAT IS THIS PILLAR?

The concept of a temple pillar evokes the image of a monument. While not a statue like that of the fake John Harvard, the idea is similar. The believer who faithfully serves the Lord will be a “pillar of the community” in the coming kingdom, publicly honored for his faithfulness.

Claeys comments on this verse:

The term pillar (*stylos*) is used three other times in the New Testament. In Galatians 2:9, the word refers to the stalwarts of the church, James (the half-brother of the Lord), Peter, and John... The temple

Eternal life can never be lost. But believers can miss out on the rewards the Lord offers.

was the center of service to, and worship of, God. Just as the pillars of James, John, and Peter were looked up to by the early church (and even today by believers who love God’s Word), to be a pillar of God’s temple would be seen as a great honor or as being connected to God in a significant way. In addition, a pillar is in a position of prominence; thus the overcomer will be a prominent display of his or her faithfulness to God (John Claeys, *Revelation: The Road to Reward*, Grace in Focus Commentary Series (2025), p. 111).

WHAT WILL THE SIGN SAY?

In addition to the believer’s being a pillar, there will be an inscription describing him. However, this inscription will differ substantially from that on John Harvard’s statue. The Lord goes on to describe three things that will be written on the overcomer: the name of God, the name of the city—New Jerusalem—and the Lord’s new name.

“...I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” Rev 3:12b.

The overcomer will not only enter the kingdom but will be publicly identified and honored as one who faithfully followed the Lord. He will be recognizable as one of His own, a walking monument that will proclaim His name for all to see.

CONCLUSION

John Harvard donated his money and resources to further the theological education of others,ⁱ and that is admirable.ⁱⁱ But human attempts to honor

him fell short. We find that monuments intended to celebrate men are often destroyed or give distorted information, as in the case of this statue in Harvard Yard.

But the work done for the Lord is different. The honor He gives to the faithful will endure for all eternity. John Harvard died, and a bronze statue stands as man’s poor attempt at praise. The pillars of the coming Kingdom, however, will be live, walking monuments to the Lord’s work through them. Their inscriptions cannot be incorrect, distorted, or corrupted, for they will bear His name.

John Harvard’s statue carries three lies, but the overcomer will bear three truths. While John Harvard’s monument has become a source of ridicule and even shame, the faithful believer can be assured of glory and honor forever because of faithful work done for the King. The praise of men is fleeting, and their opinions are often corrupt, distorted, or both. In response, believers should seek to please the Lord, for He never forgets; His opinion is always true; and His praise will endure throughout eternity. ■



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

ⁱ Editor’s note: Harvard (originally *Massachusetts College*) was established to train Puritan pastors for the ministry. It remained a school of theology for over a century.

ⁱⁱ Editor’s note: John Harvard was British and a graduate (bachelor’s and master’s degrees) of Cambridge University (Emmanuel College). He emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637 and was chosen to be a teaching elder and assistant preacher at a Puritan church in Charlestown. Less than a year and a half later, on September 14, 1638, he died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty or thirty-one. He left £779 pounds (the equivalent of about \$2 million today) and his library of 400 volumes to *Massachusetts College*.



The CHARTER FOR HUMANITY

Eternal Life in Messiah's Kingdom (2 Samuel 7:19)

By Dave Wyant

*And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God;
and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great
while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?*

Have you ever been involved in a discussion about how people who lived during Old Testament times received eternal life? If so, then you know that there is a lot of confusion surrounding this topic. Maybe you, yourself, wonder how people in Old Testament times received everlasting life. The Bible clearly teaches that eternal salvation is by faith in a Person—Jesus Christ, for the promise—eternal life (1 Tim 1:16). However, I encounter many people—some in ministry—who still think that those who lived during Old Testament times had to convert to Judaism and keep the Mosaic Law to have eternal life. After all, weren't the Jews God's chosen people? Doesn't that mean that the people who lived then had to convert to Judaism to receive eternal salvation?

We know from Gen 3:15 and 15:6 that even in the Old Testament, justification was by faith in the coming Messiah, not by works.

We also know that Jesus' evangelistic ministry occurred during the dispensation of the Law of Moses. The Church was not born until Acts 2. The Gospel of John tells us that Old Testament people were born again by believing in Jesus for the gift of God, everlasting life (John 3:16; 4:10; 5:24).

I believe that an obscure OT verse teaches that regeneration is by faith in Messiah, apart from works. The verse is 2 Sam 7:19. King David made a statement showing that the saving message is universal for all humanity throughout all time. Believing in the Person for the promise is the only way that anyone in any period of human history has been eternally saved.

The historical context of 2 Samuel 7 is that the Lord had provided peace and prosperity for the nation of Israel through King David. After David finished building his palace, he expressed a desire to build a house for the Lord (vv 1-3). However, through the Prophet Nathan, the Lord said that David would not build a house for Him (vv 4-7). Instead, the Lord promised to build a house for David. That house would be a dynasty consisting of an eternal throne occupied by an eternal King reigning over an eternal kingdom (vv 8-17). David responded to the Lord's gracious promise in humble prayer (vv 18-29).

In his prayer, David made an enigmatic statement that comes in a clause at the end of v 19. This clause has proven difficult for translators, as exhibited by the wide variety of ways it has been translated. The NIV translates the clause as a statement of fact: "and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is for a mere human!" The RSV renders the clause: "and hast shown me future generations, O Lord God!" The NRSV interprets it as an imperative:

The Lord promised that the Seed of the woman would be victorious over the Serpent, reversing the curse by restoring and blessing creation and humanity.

"May this be instruction for the people, O Lord God!" The NKJV turns David's statement into a rhetorical question: "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" These translations have vastly different meanings and represent only a small sample of the multitude of interpretations found in the English versions.

The Hebrew text in question consists of just five words: "*wezōth tōrah hā'ādam 'ādōnay yhwēh.*" A literal translation of this clause reads: "and this is the law of man, Lord Yahweh" (author's translation).

The phrase that has caused so much difficulty consists of just two words, "*tōrah hā'ādam,*" literally, "the law of man." Although the Hebrew word *tōrah* simply means "law," "teaching," or "instruction," the NIV84 translates this one word with an entire clause: "your usual way of dealing with." This rendering uses six English words to translate one Hebrew noun, *tōrah*. Many modern English translations do the same thing.

The noun *tōrah* is derived from the verb *yarah*, meaning "to teach, instruct." The Hebrew dictionary defines *yarah* as *teaching* "in the sense of stretching out the finger, or the hand, to point out a route."¹ Thus, the *tōrah*, "teaching," is a law or a body of instruction that points the way or gives direction. For the Nation of Israel, the *Tōrah* was the codified law that established the nation as a political entity. We might think of the *Tōrah* as Israel's constitution, or charter. Thus, *tōrah* can be understood as a "law" or a body of "instruction" in the sense of a "constitution," "outline," or "charter." In fact, this is exactly how the International Standard Version translates *tōrah* in this verse: "and this is the *charter* for mankind, O Lord God!" Thus, in v 19b, David referred to a "charter." This raises the question: What is this "law" or "charter"?

Whatever this charter is, it cannot be referring to the Mosaic Law, which was the constitution

Even in the Old Testament, justification was by faith in the coming Messiah, not by works.

exclusively for the Nation of Israel (Exod 20:2). However, David proclaims that this charter is “*torath hā’ādām*,” literally “the charter for humanity,” (author’s translation), not just the charter for Israel. Whatever this law/teaching/instruction/charter is, it is not exclusively limited to the Jews. It is “the charter for humankind.” The word *this* at the beginning of the clause in v 19b is the clue that reveals the content of this charter.

In the context of 2 Samuel 7, the word *this* points back to the Lord’s promises in vv 8-16. The literal centerpiece of these verses is the Lord’s promise that He “will set up your [David’s] seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom,” (v 12, NKJV). David’s use of the Hebrew word *zerāh*, meaning “seed, offspring, descendant,” links this passage to the Seed Promise, a major theme throughout the Old Testament. The Seed Promise was first issued to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After they sinned, the Lord promised that the Seed of the woman would be victorious over the Serpent, reversing the curse by restoring and blessing creation and humanity (Gen 3:15).

In the Abrahamic covenant, the Lord promised Abraham that by his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3; 22:18). It was when Abraham believed in the Person of the Lord for the promise of the Seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed that Abraham was justified (Gen 15:1-6; Rom 4:1-8; Gal 3:6-14). The Seed Promise was extended to Isaac and Jacob (Gen 26:1-4; 28:10-15). The Seed who would conquer the Serpent would be a royal descendant, literally *Seed*, of Israel (Gen 35:9-12). The promise that the Seed would be a King was also given to Judah (Gen 49:8-12).

In the Davidic covenant, the Lord promised King David that his Seed would sit on an eternal throne, reigning over an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:12-16). Although Solomon would be the son of David who would build the temple in

Jerusalem, the exalted language of this promise clearly conveys a prophetic fulfillment beyond its historical fulfillment through Solomon. This is a prophecy of the messianic, millennial kingdom that spills into eternity. Jesus is the Seed, the preeminent Son of David, who fulfills this prophecy (Matt 1:1; 22:42; Luke 1:32, 69).

Thus, when David said, “This is the charter for humanity,” (2 Sam 7:19b), he was referring to the Seed Promise (2 Sam 7:12). Believing in the Person, or Seed, for the promise—eternal life in God’s Kingdom—results in justification. “This is the charter for humanity, O Lord Yahweh,” (2 Sam 7:19b). It was the charter for all humanity from Adam and Eve to Moses (4200–1500 BC), issued 2,500 years before the Nation of Israel even existed (Gen 3:15). It was the charter for all humanity—not just the Jews—from Moses to Jesus (1500 BC–33 AD) during the dispensation of the Law (2 Sam 7:19b). And it is the charter for humanity now (1 Tim 1:16). The Seed Promise has always been inclusive, not selective, for both Jew and Gentile. The Seed Promise concerns eternity and is offered to all humankind (John 3:16). Eternal salvation was, is, and always has been by faith in the Person, the Son of David, for the promise—eternal life in God’s Kingdom. In the words of King David, “This is the charter for humanity,” (2 Sam 7:19b). ■



David Wyant is the pastor of Bethel Church of the Brethren in New Middletown, OH, an adjunct professor at SES and GES Seminary, and a part-time hospital chaplain. He has a PhD in Biblical Studies from Baptist Bible Seminary and an MDiv from Moody Theological Seminary. He lives with his wife, Lynn, and their cat, Pixi, in Youngstown, OH.

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1711.

More of

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



December 17 Board Meeting



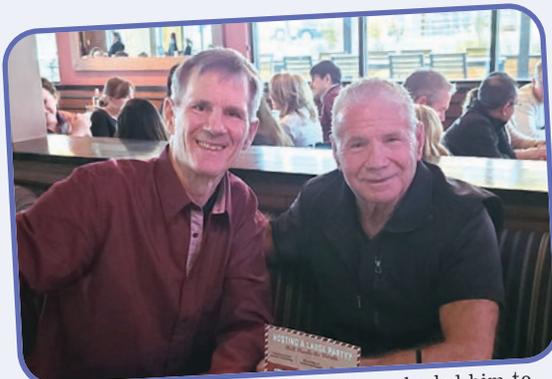
Bob and David Renfro recorded ten radio podcasts on 1 Peter



New Chief of Staff Dan Strathman and his wife Ellie



Ken at lunch with Doyle, Lou, Buzzy, and Patsy after speaking at Bayside Community Church in Tampa on November 23rd



Bob having lunch with Warren Wilke, who led him to faith in Christ



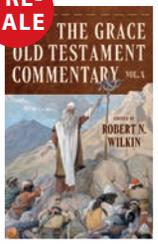
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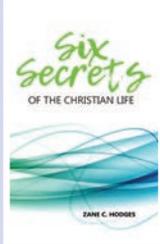


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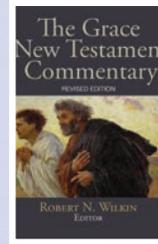


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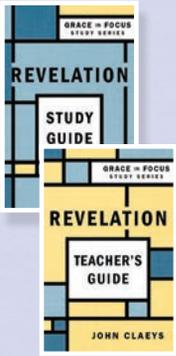


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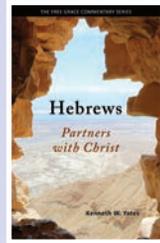


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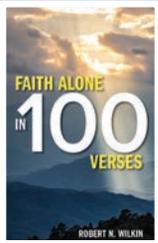


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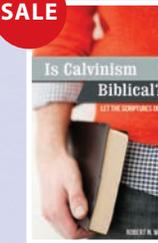
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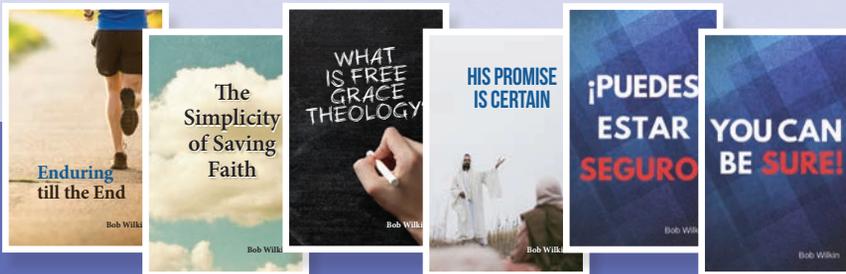


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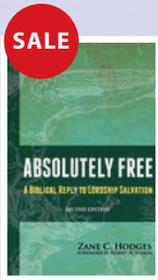
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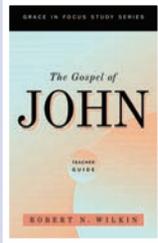
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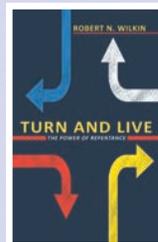
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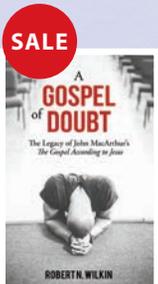
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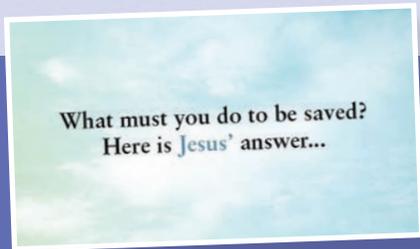
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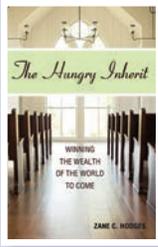
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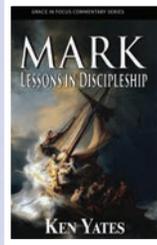
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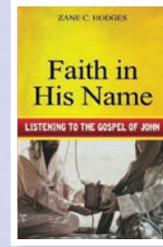
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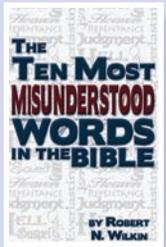
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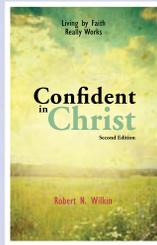
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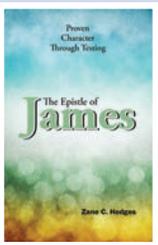
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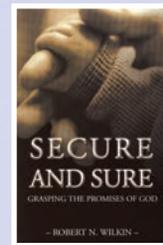
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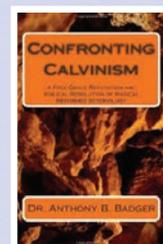
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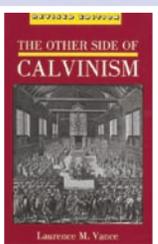
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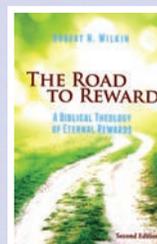
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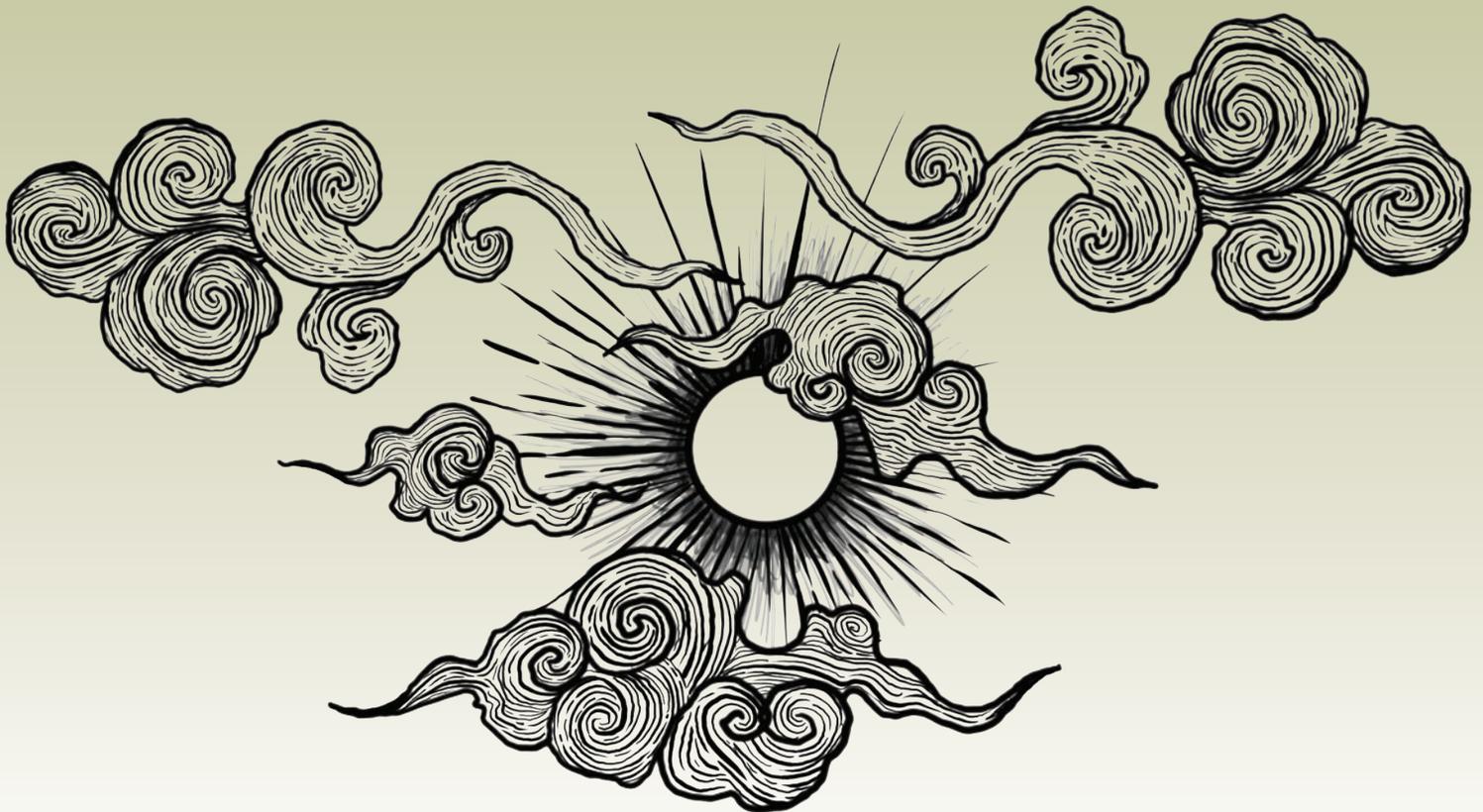
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It's Okay to Not Be Okay:

*A Biblical Reminder That Struggle Is Part of Life,
Not a Lack of Faith*

By Georgiana Paleanu

I don't know exactly when it happened, but somewhere along the way we started believing that we need to look "fine" all the time. Maybe it's the pressure to keep up, or the constant online stream of polished moments—smiles, vacations, achievements—creating the illusion that everyone else is doing great. Everyone else is happy. And if you're not, maybe you're failing somehow.

And when you're struggling—emotionally, physically, spiritually—it can feel even heavier.

Because the moment you're hurting, it suddenly seems like everyone else is doing better than you. You see people posting photos of celebrations, accomplishments, new beginnings. You see smiles, progress, joy. But instead of feeling motivated, you feel more alone. It's as if life is moving forward for everyone else while you're stuck carrying a burden that no one else can see. That feeling is real... and God understands it far more than we realize. I've felt that weight myself. There have been seasons

when chronic pain and fatigue made even simple days feel heavy, and I'd scroll past everyone else's highlights, wondering why my own life looked so different.

But Scripture gives a far more honest picture of the human experience. David, a man after God's own heart, prayed, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" (Ps 42:11). In another moment, he confessed, "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord" (Ps 130:1). These passages remind us that God never expected us to walk through life emotionless or unshaken. He knows our humanity.

And here's what I'm slowly learning: Being human is not spiritual failure.

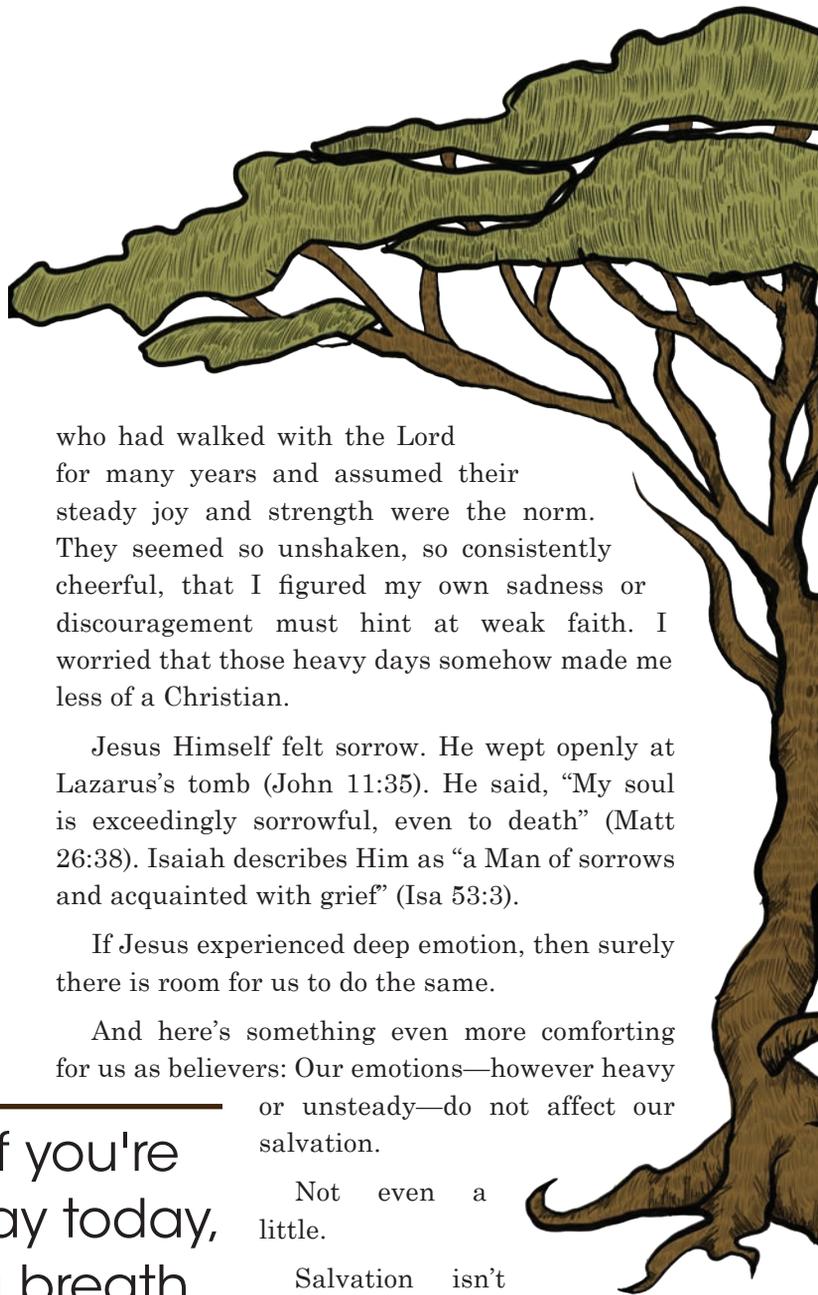
It's okay to not be okay. It really is.

God never asked us to pretend or force cheerfulness. He never told us to hold everything together by sheer willpower. Instead, He invites us to come to Him exactly as we are—tired, overwhelmed, confused, sad, hurting. Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt 11:29–30). I've clung to those words on days when getting out of bed felt like too much.

One of the most comforting truths in Scripture is that God doesn't avoid the brokenhearted—He draws near to them. "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart" (Ps 34:18). When your heart feels messy or heavy, He doesn't step back. He steps closer.

And He welcomes honesty. Psalm 62:8 says, "Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." I've learned to pray more raw prayers lately—"Lord, I'm hurting today, and I don't even know what to ask for"—and somehow that honesty brings a quiet peace I never found in pretending.

For a long time—especially as a new believer—I thought struggling meant that something was wrong with me spiritually. I looked at Christians



who had walked with the Lord for many years and assumed their steady joy and strength were the norm. They seemed so unshaken, so consistently cheerful, that I figured my own sadness or discouragement must hint at weak faith. I worried that those heavy days somehow made me less of a Christian.

Jesus Himself felt sorrow. He wept openly at Lazarus's tomb (John 11:35). He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matt 26:38). Isaiah describes Him as "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3).

If Jesus experienced deep emotion, then surely there is room for us to do the same.

And here's something even more comforting for us as believers: Our emotions—however heavy or unsteady—do not affect our salvation.

Not even a little.

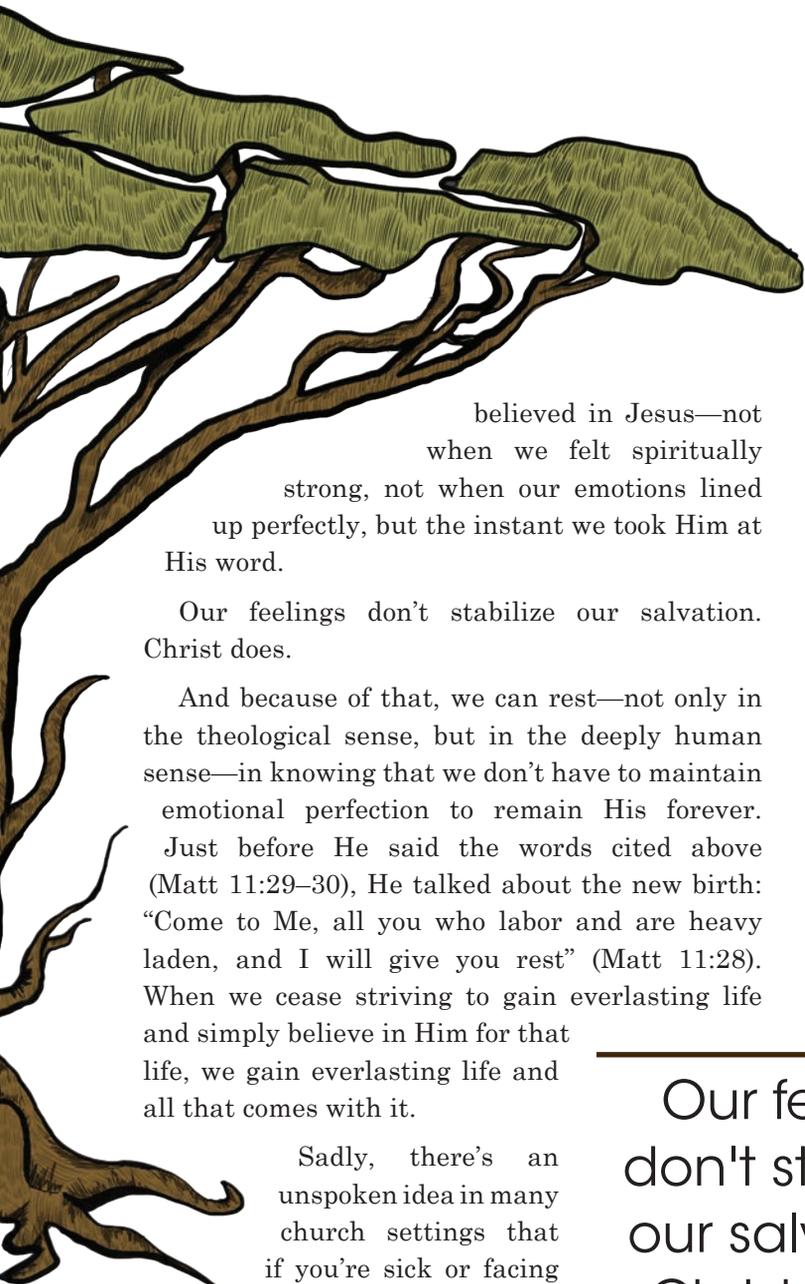
Salvation isn't tied to how we feel on any given day. It rests entirely on what Jesus has already done and on His unbreakable promise. He said plainly, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

He didn't add, "...as long as he feels joyful" or "...as long as he never doubts or hurts."

He said "has"—present tense, permanent, unbreakable.

We are held securely in His hand (John 10:28–29). We are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14). Eternal life was given the moment we

So, if you're
not okay today,
take a breath.
God is steady
even when
you're shaky.



believed in Jesus—not when we felt spiritually strong, not when our emotions lined up perfectly, but the instant we took Him at His word.

Our feelings don't stabilize our salvation. Christ does.

And because of that, we can rest—not only in the theological sense, but in the deeply human sense—in knowing that we don't have to maintain emotional perfection to remain His forever.

Just before He said the words cited above (Matt 11:29–30), He talked about the new birth: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). When we cease striving to gain everlasting life and simply believe in Him for that life, we gain everlasting life and all that comes with it.

Sadly, there's an unspoken idea in many church settings that if you're sick or facing hardship, perhaps your faith falls short—or that maybe you've somehow deserved it. That kind of thinking makes it harder for people to be honest about the burdens they're carrying. They end up hiding their pain, forcing a smile, and pretending that everything's fine.

It's not a lack of faith to admit that we're hurting. Trials such as chronic illness, loss, or disappointment are simply part of living in a fallen world. Jesus Himself said, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Trials and burdens aren't punishments from God; they're opportunities for growth. As James reminds us, trials test our faith and produce patience, shaping

us into people who are “perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas 1:2–4). They strengthen our character, deepen our dependence on Him, and build endurance. Through my own ongoing health challenges, I've come to know God's nearness in ways I never would have otherwise.

And there's more: Enduring trials faithfully leads to rewards. Not earthly rewards that fade, but eternal ones given at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). James puts it this way: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (Jas 1:12). The crown of life isn't about earning salvation—that's by faith alone—but about the extra blessing God gives for persevering through hardship with our eyes on Him. For the believer, no trial is wasted; each one refines us and prepares us for greater joy in His kingdom.

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “sympathize[s] with our weaknesses.” He understands the moments when our strength runs out. He understands the days when tears come easily and hope feels thin. And because He understands, we can, as verse 16 says, “come boldly to the throne of grace”—not after we feel better, but precisely when we don't.

Paul knew this tension well. He admitted his weakness openly, and God answered: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Weakness is not the enemy. Pretending is. God meets us where we truly are.

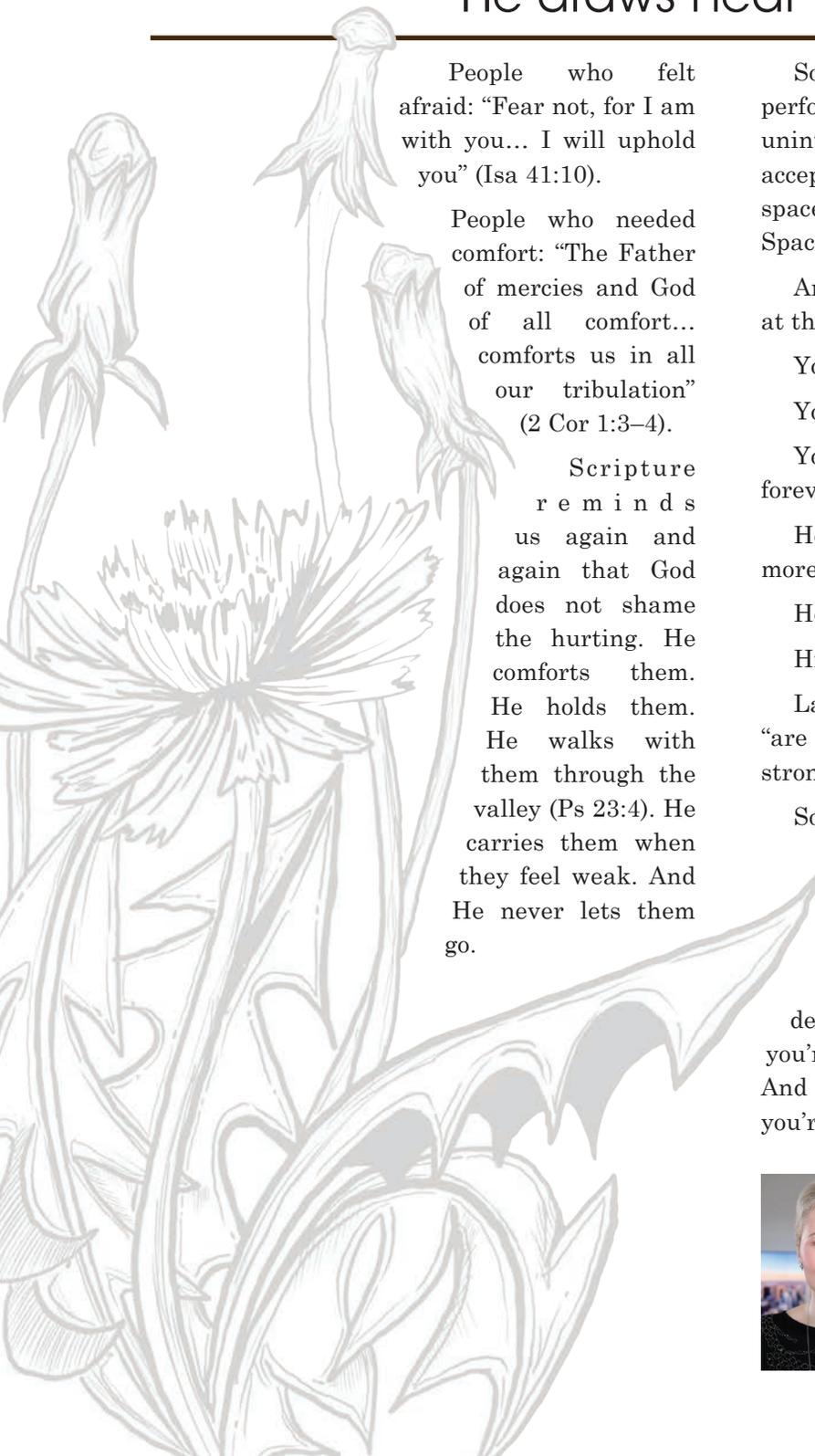
And that's what I love most about the honesty of Scripture. It isn't full of perfect people—it's full of real people. People like us.

People who were overwhelmed: “When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Ps 61:2).

People who felt uncertain about what to do: “My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart” (Ps 73:26).

Our feelings
don't stabilize
our salvation.
Christ does.

One of the most comforting truths in Scripture is that God doesn't avoid the brokenhearted—He draws near to them



People who felt afraid: “Fear not, for I am with you... I will uphold you” (Isa 41:10).

People who needed comfort: “The Father of mercies and God of all comfort... comforts us in all our tribulation” (2 Cor 1:3–4).

Scripture reminds us again and again that God does not shame the hurting. He comforts them. He holds them. He walks with them through the valley (Ps 23:4). He carries them when they feel weak. And He never lets them go.

Social media may create pressure to perform. Some Christian environments may unintentionally make us feel that joy is the only acceptable emotion. But God doesn't. He gives us space to breathe. Space to grieve. Space to heal. Space to rest.

And that brings us to the quiet, hopeful truth at the center of grace.

You don't have to be okay to be loved by God.

You don't have to be okay to belong to Him.

You don't have to be okay to remain His child forever.

He doesn't love the polished version of you more than the tired version.

He doesn't stay close only on your good days.

His compassion doesn't wear out.

Lamentations 3:22–23 says that His mercies “are new every morning.” Not just on your strongest mornings. Every morning.

So, if you're not okay today, take a breath.

Bring your honest heart to God.

Let Him be the refuge He promises to be.

Because the truth is simple, freeing, and deeply comforting. God is steady even when you're shaky. He is strong when you are weak. And His grace holds firm—even on the days when you're not okay. ■



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.



What's Wrong with Calvinism?

Part 1: Calvinism's *T* & *U* Are TUmultuous

By Bob Wilkin

Calvinism can be remembered by using the acronym TULIP. In a series of three articles, I will consider each of the five points. This first part covers the *T* and *U*. Part 2 will consider the *L* and *I*. Part 3 will consider the *P*, which has two different aspects to it.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY AND TOTAL INABILITY ARE TOTALLY UNBIBLICAL

The *T* in TULIP stands for Total Depravity. Many mistakenly think that Calvinists use this term as a way of saying that we are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). That is not what Calvinists mean by Total Depravity.

Calvinists mean that our entire being is tainted by sin. As a result, we are unable to respond to God. Calvinists use the expression *Total Inability* to explain the *T* in TULIP.

A favorite illustration of Total Depravity is a cadaver at the bottom of a well. Rescuers come. They don't know that the person at the bottom is dead. They throw a rope down and ask the person to tie it around his waist so they can pull him to safety.

But dead men don't hear anything. Nor can they grab the rope and tie it around their waists. It is

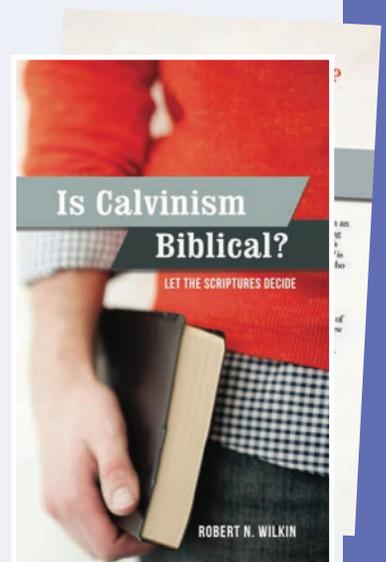
a waste of time to talk to a dead man or to throw him a rope. What the dead man needs is to be made alive.

The *T* in TULIP means that regeneration must precede faith.

The Lord taught in John 3:16 that faith precedes regeneration. But Calvinism says that this is impossible, considering Total Depravity.

In my book, *Is Calvinism Biblical?* I consider two verses that disprove Total Depravity: John 6:35 and Acts 10:4.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). He did not say, "He who never hungers will come to Me, and he who never thirsts will believe in Me." Believing in Jesus comes first. Belief precedes regeneration and eternal security.



Spiritual death does not mean total inability. It does not mean that regeneration must precede faith. It means that the unbeliever lacks the life of God.

Cornelius was a God-fearing centurion. He worshipped in a Jewish synagogue, though he was a Gentile. God sent an angel to speak to him. The angel said, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). The angel went on to tell the unsaved centurion to send for Simon Peter (Acts 10:5) “who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14).

The angel was talking to that dead man at the bottom of the well. But the man heard him! The man understood and responded to him. Cornelius sent three men to get Simon Peter. And when Peter came, Cornelius believed and was born again.

Spiritual death does not mean total inability. It does not mean that regeneration must precede faith. It means that the unbeliever lacks the life of God. That is what spiritual death is. But the unbeliever can seek God (Matt 7:7-11; Acts 10:1-8; 17:27; Heb 11:6).

If an unbeliever is willing to believe in Christ, he will receive the message he must believe to be born again. The Lord Jesus rebuked some legalistic Jews saying, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40).

Notice the words: “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” According to Calvinism, cadavers can have no willingness to believe in Jesus. But the Lord Jesus said otherwise.

Don’t be duped by the *T* in Calvinism. Its explanations of *Total Depravity* and *Total Inability* are unbiblical.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION IS UNCONDITIONALLY UNBIBLICAL

According to Calvinism, in eternity past, before the Creation, God chose, or elected, those individuals who would have everlasting life. That choice was unconditional—that is, He did not use foreknowledge to know who would freely believe or who would willingly serve Him. His choice was not based on anything in the people chosen.

The *U* in TULIP is *Unbiblical*. There are two proofs from Scripture that Unconditional Election is contrary to Scripture.

First, it is unbiblical because in the Bible, election is always to service and never to eternal destiny.

Willingness or unwillingness has nothing to do with everlasting life, according to Calvinism.

Israel was chosen or elected to serve the Lord and to be the major world power (Matt 24:22, 24, 31). Jerusalem was chosen to be the world capital (1 Kings 11:13; Zech 2:12; Rev 21:2). Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples (Luke 6:13). Matthias was chosen to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:24-26). Paul was chosen to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). The Father chose the Lord Jesus to die on the cross for our sins (Matt 12:18; 1 Pet 2:4). God chose Peter to be the one to take the promise of life to Cornelius and his household (Acts 15:7). Jewish believers in the first century were chosen to be sojourners when they were dispersed

(1 Pet 1:1-2). Local churches have been chosen to serve the Lord in their communities (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 5:13; 2 John 1, 13).

Second, Biblical election is often conditioned upon the faithfulness of the person chosen. For example, all church-age believers could be chosen to rule with Christ. But only those who persevere in the faith will be so chosen. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Lord Jesus will choose which believers will rule with Him in the Millennium and on the New Earth (Matt 22:14; Jas 2:5; 2 Pet 1:10-11; compare Luke 19:16-26; 1 John 2:28; Rev 3:21). Some believers will, but many will not.

In *Is Calvinism Biblical?* I cite two verses that disprove the *U* in TULIP: Acts 13:46 and John 5:39-40.

Using language inconsistent with unconditional election, Paul rebuked the Jews in Antioch for rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ: "...you... judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life..." (Acts 13:46). If God elected unconditionally, then no one could judge himself either worthy or unworthy of everlasting life.

I mentioned above that John 5:39-40 disproves Total Depravity. Those verses also disprove Unconditional Election. Jesus said that some legalistic Jews were "not willing to come to [Him] that [they] may have life." That is inconsistent with the *U* in TULIP. According to Calvinism, if God did not elect someone, then there is nothing he can do to avoid eternal condemnation. The non-elect are doomed. Willingness or unwillingness has nothing to do with everlasting life, according to Calvinism. Have you ever seen a cadaver that was willing to grab a rope?

I've debated with many Calvinist pastors and theologians. None of them have been able to say that they are sure they have everlasting life. One reason is that they cannot be sure they are of the elect. They look at their works to try to determine whether they are on a trajectory that suggests they will probably persevere (the *P* in TULIP). But they know that they might fall away. If they do, then in

their view they prove that they were never elected by God.

What a sad way to live. You can't know where you will spend eternity until after you die.

The Calvinist teaching of Unconditional Election is unbiblical and dangerous. Don't believe it for a second. It is hazardous to your spiritual health.

CONCLUSION

Calvinists stress that all five points of the system are logically consistent. They stand or fall together. That is true of the *T* and *U* in TULIP. They are consistent. The *T* is consistent with the *U* and vice versa. But consistency does not prove validity. Communism, for example, is logically consistent with its understanding of the flaws of capitalism. Atheism is logically consistent with its premises.

If you are a Calvinist, I urge you to read the Gospel of John carefully and prayerfully. Ask God to show you if certainty of one's eternal destiny is possible. Are all who simply believe in Jesus eternally secure? Do I need to look at my works to see if I'm no longer a cadaver and if I've been elected? Or can I simply take Jesus at His word? God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6).

If you have a Calvinist friend or loved one, please encourage them to read John's Gospel carefully and prayerfully. Ask them if they would like to be sure of their salvation, if that were possible. Calvinists lack assurance, but they would like to have it. ■

What the dead man needs is to be made alive.



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Losing the Life We Save, Saving the Life We Lose

By Hershall (Wes) Spradley

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:14-17).

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. (Luke 9:23-26).

We could use the word *salvation* to describe the subject matter of these two passages. However, we must be aware that each is talking about a different type of salvation. To rightly divide the Word of truth, we must make a distinction between eternal life and discipleship. Some passages in Scripture, especially in John's Gospel, teach that whoever believes in Jesus Christ has everlasting life and will never perish. Other passages in Scripture, especially in the Synoptic Gospels and epistles, present the conditions of discipleship and testimonials about real-life disciples.

To rightly divide the Word of truth, we must understand that New Testament writers apply the word *salvation* to both of those theological concepts. It is important that we pay attention to exactly what each writer says if we are to correctly understand how he is using the word *salvation*. One evidence that the two passages cited above are using *salvation* differently is the condition in each case. In 9:24, Luke quotes Jesus as saying that if you want to be saved, then you must lose your life. You must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ. By contrast, John writes in his Gospel that Jesus Himself said that whoever believes in Him "has everlasting life" (John 3:16) and is "saved through Him" (John 3:17). Self-denial, taking up

But the Lord and His apostles also clearly taught that only if we follow Christ faithfully will we experience fullness of life now and forever.

one's cross, and following Christ is far different from believing in Him.

A cluster of ideas comes out of John 3:1-18. The concept of birth implies the ideas of *child* and *life*, hence the theological term *regeneration*. If one is born, then he is a child and has life. If one is born of God, one is a child of God and has the life of God, which, by definition, is everlasting. The doctrine of regeneration therefore carries within it the doctrine of assurance.

The basic point to emphasize for now is that those who believe in Jesus have—present tense—eternal life. Note that the first four chapters of John record the earliest episodes in the ministry of our Lord.¹ Jesus laid down a firm foundation regarding truths about eternal life before going on to the more difficult truths about discipleship.

Now, let's turn to the passage in Luke. The context of Luke 9:22-26 is Jesus' description of His career path as Messiah. Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is nearing the end of His earthly ministry. He is on His way to Jerusalem and is preparing His disciples for what is about to happen to Him. It is necessary for Him to suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed ... and to rise on the third day (v 22). This is His career path.

Having given them notice regarding His career path, he issues an invitation to all who are willing to follow Him on that path. The invitation is to follow Him all the way to death: "If anyone wants

to come after Me"—that is, if anyone wants to go to Jerusalem with Me to die, to lose one's life for My sake—"let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (v 23).

This passage is dealing with discipleship truth. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the distinction between the offer of life through faith in His name and the invitation given here to follow Him. It is foolish in the extreme to confuse what our Lord says here with what he said to Nicodemus in John 3. It vitiates the power of both invitations if we garble the messages as though they were somehow the same. And it vitiates the power of the doctrine of assurance if we say that Luke 9:23 is a necessary consequence of John 3:16.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the distinction between the offer of life through faith in His name and the invitation given here to follow Him.

In Luke 9:24, the Lord says that there are two responses to His invitation to follow Him as His disciple: Save your life by not suffering for Christ, thereby losing your life (losing fullness of it), or lose your life by suffering for Christ, thereby saving it (gaining fullness of life).

What do you suppose our Lord is talking about when He says, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it"? To "save one's life" here means *not* denying oneself, *not* taking up one's cross, and *not* following Christ. We must then conclude that "whoever loses his life for My sake" also refers back to verse 23 and therefore means denying self, taking up one's cross, and following Him to death. What is the *life* that verse 24 is talking about? This earthly life. Verse 24 is teaching discipleship truth, not the truth concerning everlasting life, which we

receive from Christ when we believe in Him. In this passage, the one who loses the life he wanted to save is not an unbeliever.

Verse 25 elaborates on the idea of losing the life we save. What profit is there if one gains the whole world but loses (or forfeits) himself? Christ's temptation comes to mind. Christ is suggesting that as His followers, we might experience similar temptations to those He faced, and that in those temptations, believers face the very real danger of forfeiting their testimony for Christ.

Verse 26 is Jesus' concluding statement about those who seek to save their earthly lives: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels." This cannot be referring to unbelievers because when Jesus comes in His glory and judges us at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the only humans who will be there will be believers.

What is not said in these verses? If "desiring to save one's life" ultimately brings shame when one stands before the Father, the Son, and the angels, then saving one's life by losing it for the sake of Christ will bring the opposite of shame—glory and honor at the Bema (cf. 1 Pet 1:7).

Note that we take an active part in the salvation the Lord speaks of here; we can act to either save or lose our own lives.

Saving one's life is a concept that applies even to the Lord Jesus. He saved His life by dying on the cross, as His Father willed (Phil 2:5-11).

The basic point to emphasize is that those who believe in Jesus have—present tense—eternal life.

We have seen that John teaches that we receive the gift of eternal life when we believe in Jesus, while Luke teaches the extremely difficult path of discipleship that calls for even more than obedience. A question we should consider is whether Luke and John teach the same doctrine of eternal salvation. Consider Acts 10:43, 15:7-11, and 16:30-31, as well as Luke 8:12-13.

Both Luke and John teach that we are saved simply by faith in the Lord Jesus. So did Paul. Look at 1 Tim 1:16: "However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." See also Gal 2:16 and Eph 2:8-9.

Paul, Luke, and John all teach the same doctrine about how one receives eternal life: It is by faith in Christ, apart from works. But the Lord and His apostles also clearly taught that only if we follow Christ faithfully will we experience fullness of life now and forever. ■



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¹See John 3:24, where John tells us that John the Baptist had not yet been arrested.

Making Promises

You Shouldn't Keep

By Ken Yates

We don't have to be great theologians to understand that God was not pleased with these events.



INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, a wise Bible teacher explained the essence of legalism to me. I knew that legalism was bad, but nobody had ever explained it to me. He said that legalism involves a fixation on commandments. It can apply to an unbeliever who believes he must keep specific commandments to be saved from hell. This changes the gospel of grace into a gospel of works. Such a gospel cannot save anybody

But believers can be legalistic as well if they focus on keeping specific commandments to ensure spiritual growth. Such a life relies on the power of the flesh to keep those commandments. It breeds pride and leads to spiritual failure, not spiritual maturity.

An unhealthy fixation on commandments can lead to ruin. Recently, I noted an example of this in the book of Judges.

MAKING AN IMPULSIVE PROMISE

Israel was in the middle of a civil war. The tribe of Benjamin had committed grave sins. The other twelve tribes of Israel gathered to remove the tribe

of Benjamin from the earth. In battle, they killed all the Benjamite soldiers, except for 600 men who fled into the wilderness. Israel also burned the Benjamite cities to the ground, killing all the women. The book makes it evident that the Lord disapproved of many of their actions.

The men of Israel had made a vow. They had sworn that none of them would give their daughters in marriage to any Benjamite who lived (Judg 21:1). Their motives seem somewhat righteous. The men of Benjamin were evil and needed to be judged.

But after the war, the other tribes realized that their vow had been rash. The war had left one tribe on the brink of extinction. There were no Benjamite women with whom the few surviving men could marry and have children. In one generation, the tribe of Benjamin would no longer exist.

The Lord had not told them to make such a rash vow, but they were determined to keep it, anyway.

MAKING ANOTHER IMPETUOUS PROMISE

The men of Israel had made another vow. When the war started, they promised to kill anybody who did not join them in the battle against Benjamin (Judg 21:5). After the hostilities, they learned that the city of Jabesh Gilead had not participated. They decided to kill the entire populace, including women and children. Once again, they did not first seek the will of God.

The men kept eighty percent of this promise. They killed all the men and children and most of the women of Jabesh Gilead. But they made an exception. In order to keep their vow to withhold their daughters from marrying Benjamite men, they spared the 400 virgins who were found in Jabesh Gilead. These women would provide wives for 400 of the Benjamite soldiers living in the wilderness.

What a convenient exception! It was also a loophole. Because the fathers of the virgins from Jabesh Gilead had been killed, there was no man to give these women in marriage to the Benjamites. There was therefore no one to object to these marriages! The men of Israel were thus able to fulfill their vow of not giving any of their own daughters in marriage.

But what about the other 200 surviving Benjamites? They needed wives, too. So the loophole got bigger.

ANYTHING GOES

The men of Israel knew that the area of the country known as Shiloh held a religious festival during which virgin women would engage in a dance. The 200 men who still needed wives could hide in the fields, kidnap 200 of these women (one each) when they came out to dance and force them to be their wives.

Since the fathers of these women had not consented to the marriages, they did not violate the oath to not give their daughters in marriage

to these Benjamites. Technically, they were not involved in what happened. Their daughters were kidnapped and taken in marriage, but at least they didn't break the promise they had made!

Problem solved.

CRAZY

How crazy is this story? How arbitrary were the actions of the men of Israel? These men had determined to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. They killed almost all the men. However, they allowed 600 to live.

Then they vowed that all the people of Jabesh Gilead would be put to death. But because of the results of their first vow, they made an exception. They let a group of 400 women survive.

But another vow they had made was nonnegotiable. They wouldn't *let* any of their daughters marry the surviving Benjamites.

To avoid breaking a promise, they had killed the families of the 400 women in Jabesh Gilead. To keep another promise, they had allowed 200 of the women from Shiloh to be kidnapped and taken as brides. There were loopholes all around, but technically, the men had kept their vows!

We don't have to be great theologians to understand that God was not pleased with these events. In case the reader has missed it, the author of Judges states it clearly. The book ends with this statement about what happened: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25).

KEEPING UNREASONABLE PROMISES?

A legalist might object. One of the Ten Commandments is that God's people should not lie. The men of Israel certainly focused on that commandment. They had vowed not to give any of their daughters to the Benjamites. Shouldn't they keep their word?

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No. The story shows the dangers of legalism. Families were destroyed. Women were forced into sexual unions against their will. A commandment said that they shouldn't lie. But the promises these men had made were not pleasing to God. Innocent people were severely harmed because of these men's insistence on technically keeping that commandment.

There was a better option. They could have confessed their sin of making such rash vows and asked God for forgiveness. Jabesh Gilead, including the children in it, would not have been destroyed. Four hundred women would still have had their parents. Two hundred girls from Shiloh would not have had to be taken from their families to enter marriage with men neither they nor their parents had never met.¹

Appealing to God's grace and mercy would have been quite an improvement over fixating on a couple of dumb promises and insisting that one shouldn't lie, no matter the consequences.

JESUS TAUGHT THE SAME THING

Our Lord taught the same principles. He spoke of a Jewish practice of His day that involved a man's taking an oath, then keeping it, no matter what. A man could swear to give all his money to the Lord (Mark 7:11). I am sure that those who did this appealed to another commandment: A man should love the Lord. Once the vow was made, the man had to keep his word.

The problem was that the man's parents might need help in their old age. The money he had vowed to give the Lord could be used to meet those needs. But no. The man had to remember the promise he had made.

The first-century Pharisees promoted this kind of focus on the commandments. These men epitomized legalism. They loved to focus on keeping commandments. The Lord summarized their problem. They vowed to keep the commandments, which they distorted to cover keeping a vow to

give money to God, no matter what. Jesus rebuked them:

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God” (Luke 11:42).

They sure kept their promises. They tithed to the Lord. It did not matter if people were hurt. Sounds like the men in Judges 21. None of them looked at the Lord and considered His love, grace, and justice.

That is the problem with legalism. That old teacher of mine put it succinctly: Legalism focuses on the commandments, not on the One who gave them.

CONCLUSION

Obedying the Lord is important. But obeying commandments has never given anybody eternal life. Keeping a rigid list of commandments in our own power will not make us more like Christ.

If keeping a commandment means that we do not love others, we should reconsider. The men in Judges 21 and the Pharisees in the New Testament were sure that God was impressed with their integrity. But their focus on keeping their word hurt families, women, parents, and other vulnerable people. Their legalistic mindset was destructive. It always is. ■



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 Arranged marriages were very common during the time of the Judges. The young woman might have little or no familiarity with the young man she was marrying. But her parents did.

Continuous BELIEF in Jesus Is Not Required to Be Saved¹

By Zane Hodges

The exchange that took place at Sychar's well has as its basic premise the discussion of a gift. According to Jesus, it is one that He would be glad to give the woman upon request (John 4:10).

But it is in the nature of gift-giving that, once the gift is bestowed, it is in the possession of the recipient. A single transaction consisting of giving plus receiving suffices to bring the exchange to pass.

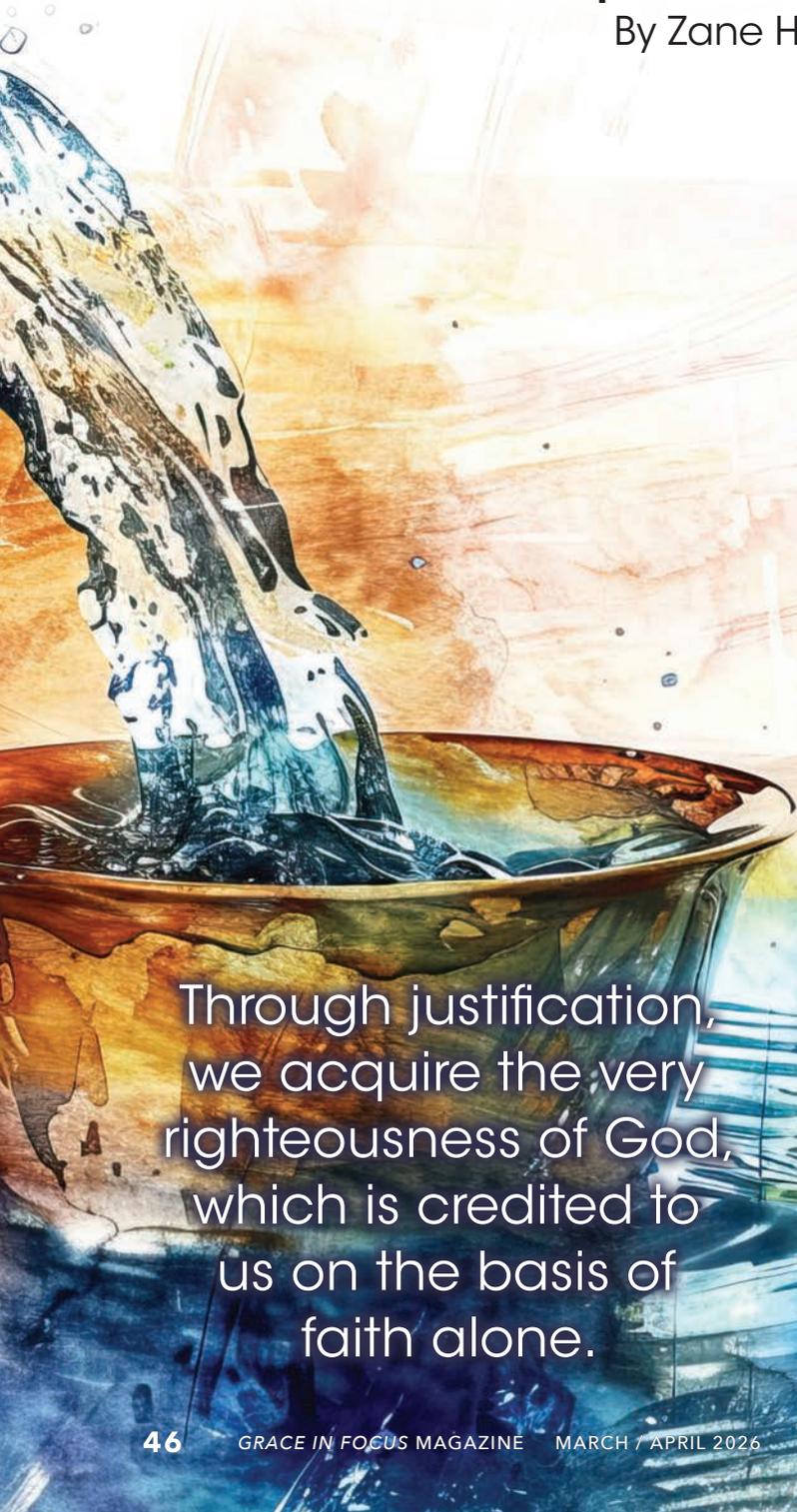
That is why the imagery of a drink of water is so pointedly clear in the Biblical story. Jesus possesses the water. He gives a drink of it to the Samaritan woman, and it is hers forever. Indeed, it transforms her inwardly. From then on, she will possess an inward fountain, or "spring," whose supply of water is as unending as eternity itself.

Here again we meet the miracle of regeneration. The life-bearing Word of God accomplishes an inner transformation when it is received in faith. The reception takes place at a point in time—it is like taking a drink of water. But the effects of that drink are unending.

Or to put it another way, the water of life is received once and it is possessed forever. It is a forever gift!

The Biblical picture of the saving experience is masterful in its clarity and simplicity. A single, one-time appropriation of God's gift results in a miraculous inward transformation that can never be reversed.

Since this is true, we miss the point if we insist that true saving faith must necessarily continue. Of course, our faith in Christ *should* continue. But



Through justification,
we acquire the very
righteousness of God,
which is credited to
us on the basis of
faith alone.

The Bible predicates salvation on an act of faith, not on the continuity of faith.

the claim that it absolutely must, or necessarily does, has no support at all in the Bible.

In a book called *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*, a leading New Testament scholarⁱⁱⁱ argued that faith must be continuous to be saving:

By far the most common way to summarize the proper response to the gospel is to talk about *faith* [italics his]. The simple definition of faith is trust. The idea is so fundamental to Christianity that we often refer to Christianity as “the faith.” Faith is an idea worth probing. For one thing, *it is not static*. That is, we do not have faith in a moment; *it is an ongoing state*. That is part of what tells us that the gospel is about more than a transaction. An act of faith initiates our new relationship with God, *but faith is not a one-time act; it keeps going* [italics added]. When we equate faith with belief, we are talking about an ongoing faith, *not merely a moment of intellect assent*. That is why trust, or reliance, is better a synonym than belief. *This faith means that we are open to God and responsive to Him. Without that responsiveness, faith is not faith.*ⁱⁱⁱ

But the Bible predicates salvation on an act of faith, not on the continuity of faith. Just as surely as regeneration occurs at a point in time, so surely does saving faith.

That is why, in the case of Abraham, the moment of his justification is historically fixed. It is in the precise historical circumstances described by the context of Genesis 15 that we read: “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

So, according to the Biblical record, it was on this occasion—and on this occasion only—that

Abraham was justified by faith. The statement of Gen 15:6 is utterly unique in the Scriptural account. Nothing like it is to be found anywhere else in the inspired narrative of the patriarch’s life.

Nor should we expect there to be. After all, both justification and new birth are unrepeatable events, just as is the faith that appropriates them. Both events occur at the same point in time for every Christian, and that particular historical moment is also the moment of saving faith.

Through justification, we acquire *the very righteousness of God*, which is credited to us on the basis of faith alone (Rom 3:21-22). Through regeneration we acquire the very life of God, which is likewise imparted to us on the basis of faith alone. Therefore, in a moment of time we obtain both perfect acceptance before the bar of God’s justice and full membership in His family.

And all of this is absolutely free and absolutely permanent. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29).

Continuous faith in Christ is not required for regeneration. Nor is it required to remain regenerated. Faith may fail. But everlasting life cannot fail. Once one drinks the water of life, his membership in God’s family is secure. ■



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 The start of this article about the woman at the well is from Chapter 5 (p. 48) of the book *Absolutely Free*. The remainder of the article, other than the block quote, is drawn from the conclusion of Chapter 5 (pp. 56-57). It has been slightly edited.

ⁱⁱ Editor’s note: Zane Hodges taught in the NT Department at DTS with Dr. Bock from 1982 until he retired in 1986.

ⁱⁱⁱ Darrell L. Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel: Reclaiming the Gospel As Good News* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), p. 98, italics added except where noted. Editor’s note: this quote was added to the conclusion of Hodges as a concrete example of his concern.

**BELIEVE IN HIM
FOR LIFE →**



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