

GRACE IN FOCUS

THE TREE

OF

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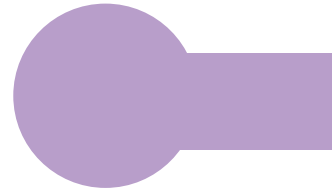


**Don't Take Good
Works for Granted**

**From Doubt
to Assurance**

**The Three Greatest
Events in History**

In This Issue



4 From Doubt to Assurance: A Free Grace Testimony

Tiffany Brown

Decades of doubt in IFB and Calvinist churches led to assurance through Free Grace theology. Tiffany's story is very encouraging. She discovered the wonderful promise of eternal life by believing in Jesus alone.

7 Misinterpreting Scripture Can Have Eternal Consequences: Ephesians 2:1-10 As a Test Case

Bob Wilkin

Wesley Snipes misinterpreted the Constitution and spent three years in federal prison. Misinterpreting Scripture regarding everlasting life is far worse. Ephesians 2:1-10 teaches that everlasting life is the gift of God and is received by faith in Christ, apart from repentance, commitment, obedience, and perseverance.

11 Caleb: A Faithful and Rewarded Old Testament Believer

Ken Yates

Caleb's faithfulness, victories, and rewards in the Promised Land are an example for NT believers of obedience leading to temporal blessings and kingdom inheritance.

14 The Outskirts of Heaven

Kathryn Wright

The popular "hermit's heaven" of rural isolation is unbiblical. Scripture depicts eternity in populated cities like the New Jerusalem. Faithful believers will receive authority over cities as a reward.

17 Another Lordship Salvation Argument That Is Not Logical

David Wyant

Calvinists claim that those who profess faith without showing signs of transformation are unregenerate. MacArthur comes to this conclusion by committing the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent when reading 1 John 2:29.

20 One Way: Before and After the Cross

Barbara Johnson

There is but one unchanging way of salvation—believing in Christ for eternal life—before and after the cross. There is only one way to everlasting life, not many ways.

24 "Dying, You Will Die" Genesis 2:17

Geoff Stevens

Adam lacked eternal life before the Fall. The Tree of Life enhanced physical life. It didn't dispense eternal life. Adam gained eternal life by faith in the promised Seed (Gen 3:15).

27 GES 2026 National Conference

Sharing experiences, receiving wisdom, and refreshed by the love and encouragement of our forever family.

33 Don't Take Good Works for Granted

Zane C. Hodges

Jesus taught the high cost of discipleship in Luke 14:26—total commitment above all else. Yet He also taught that eternal life is the gift of God received by faith alone. Believers are to diligently maintain good works.

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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

35 The Lord Won't Judge Based On Outward Appearance

Ken Yates

Worldly favoritism is based on outward appearance. God's judgment will be impartial at the Bema Seat, where believers are rewarded according to their works, not their looks or status.

38 The Tenth Plague of Egypt

David M. Renfro

The tenth plague—death of Egypt's firstborn—secured Israel's release, protected by Passover blood, and revealed Yahweh's sovereignty over life, death, and human hearts.

41 What's Wrong with Calvinism? Part 3: The Preservation of Those Who Persevere Is Perverse

Bob Wilkin

Calvinism's Perseverance of the Saints is perverse: it ties preservation to ongoing faith and works, destroys assurance, and denies true eternal security by faith alone.

45 The Three Greatest Events in History

Dix Winston, III

The three greatest events in history are Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, which impact eternity and enable everlasting life through believing in Jesus.

Letter from the Editor

The GES Annual National Conference (May 17-21) ended a few hours ago. I am sitting in the office, tired, dazed, and encouraged.



It is a major endeavor to undertake each year. It may only last for five days, but the GES staff works almost all year round to make it happen. It was especially challenging for Dan Strathman to be in charge since this was his first time to oversee it. Dan, Sam, Ken, Kathryn, Danny, Dewey, Don, Brian, Katie, and Micaela were all terrific in making things run smoothly. My wife, Sharon, stayed most nights until 2 AM, visiting with nearly everyone.

It costs quite a bit and is only made possible by our generous donors. So why do we do it? Couldn't we just record the sessions and post them online?

We get more out of hearing a message live and being able to ask questions and discuss with others. And fellowship is a very important part of our conference. The time people spend eating meals together and chatting in the lobby at night is irreplaceable. There is something to be said for gathering in person with like-minded believers. Sharing similar experiences and receiving wisdom from those who have walked the same path is vital.

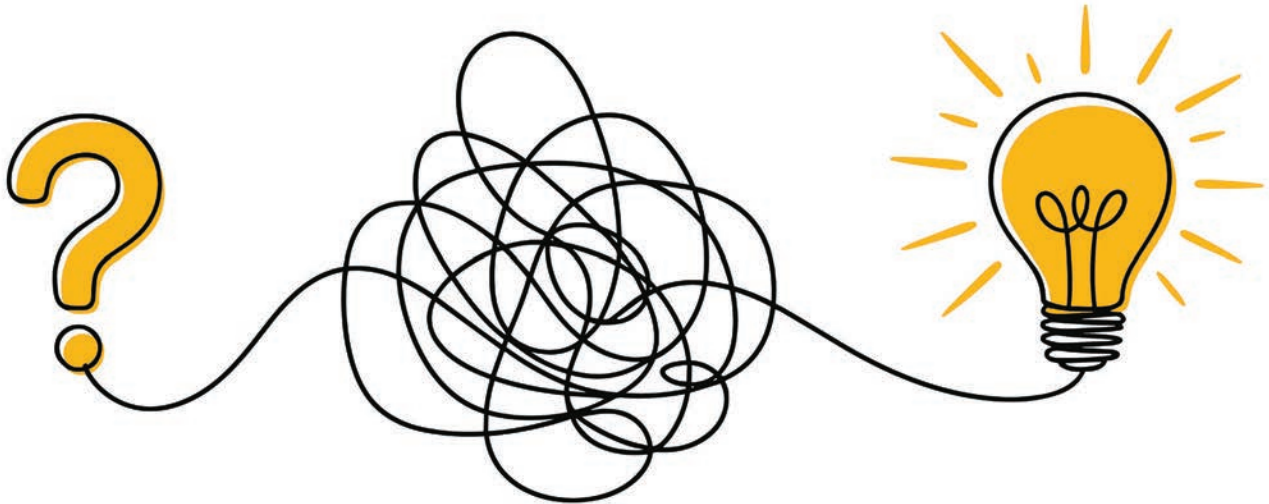
I heard many reports from people who said they were refreshed and encouraged by the teachings and the love and support of our forever family.

One week out of the year doesn't seem like much, but for many people, it has an impact that lasts far longer than a year. ■

Robert N. Wilkin

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

From Doubt to Assurance:



A Free Grace Testimony

By Tiffany Brown

CHILDHOOD CONFUSION

“If you don’t do/feel such and such, then you might not be saved.”

I can’t count the number of times I’ve heard this line or some iteration of it from the pulpit. I spent my childhood and teenage years in an Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) church. As an adult, I spent four years in a Calvinist church

It’s important to know that our works are not a measure of salvation.

and have also attended multiple churches whose soteriological beliefs were unclear. The IFB church I was raised in correctly taught that you couldn’t lose your salvation nor could you do anything to earn it; however, the preaching was riddled with confusing terminology. Though they would say that you don’t earn salvation, their gospel presentations commonly ended with an altar call and invitation to do any number of the following:

- Recite “The Sinner’s Prayer.”
- Ask Jesus into your heart.
- Repent from your sins and make Him Lord of your life.
- Confess Him as Lord.
- Surrender your life to Jesus.

I don’t know when I first believed in Jesus for eternal life. I used to think this was a bad thing and proof I that wasn’t saved, but I’ve since come

to realize that it doesn't matter when I believed; it only matters that I have believed. Most likely, I first believed in Jesus for eternal life at age four, but because of the confusing teaching I sat under, the assurance I had as a small child quickly turned into nearly thirty years of doubt and wondering. While I would have said there was nothing I could do to earn my salvation, and could quote John 3:16, the concern over proving my salvation by my own works indicated deep confusion about the simplicity of believing in Jesus alone for eternal life.

Twice after the age of four, I walked the aisle during an altar call and prayed to accept Jesus and repent of my sins. I was desperate for assurance and thought that maybe if I could just get it right this time, I would be able to move past the doubt.

This was such a common occurrence at the church I attended that the decision card to be filled out at the altar included a check mark for "Assurance of salvation," right next to the "Salvation" option. I was baptized a total of three times following these professions of faith. Given the teaching that I had heard and believed, it's not surprising that this cycle—praying a prayer, getting immediate assurance, then having doubt creep back in—continued, even after the third and final profession and baptism. I carried the doubt and ensuing hopelessness for years and had come to accept that I would likely never have assurance of eternal life.

CONFRONTING MY UNCERTAINTY

Two years ago, I was working remotely and was notified that a team member who lived across the country had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. It was her last day at work, and I felt that I needed to share the gospel with her. The problem was that I had no clue as to how to share the message of life. I couldn't articulate how to have eternal life because the truth was, I wasn't assured I had it myself. During my last meeting with this coworker, I told her I would pray for her, but I avoided mentioning Jesus. In the months that followed, I felt I should find a way to get in touch with her: send her a book,

I had surely denied
Him, and this
meant He would
deny me.

write to her, or share anything about how she could have eternal life. But I kept putting it off. Sadly, last year I received word that my coworker had passed away. I felt that I had disobeyed the Holy Spirit by not reaching out to her, and I was devastated. In the days following her death, I felt despair because of my inaction. I was overcome with sadness that she had passed. My thoughts raced because I was also filled with regret, fear, and confusion about what my inaction meant for me. I kept recalling the teaching I had heard on Matt 10:33:

"But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

I felt that I had failed to confess Christ (Matt 10:32).

I had surely denied Him, and this meant He would deny me. I understood this to mean that He would deny me eternal life. Though I had always had issues with Reformed theology, I reverted to it in my confusion. I believed in eternal security, but ultimately, because of Calvinist teaching on the perseverance of the saints, I didn't have assurance. I started questioning whether I had ever *truly* been saved.

UNTANGLING THE CONFUSION

Desperate to learn from this experience so I could share the gospel in the future, I started searching online for resources. Everything I was finding was from a Calvinist perspective. There were multiple videos saying that it doesn't truly matter if we fail to share the gospel with others; if someone is elect, they will have eternal life regardless of our actions.

Regarding Matt 10:33, the articles I found said that if someone denies Christ, they were never truly saved. After many unhelpful articles and videos, I Googled "Non-Calvinist Interpretations of Matt 10:33." This search led me to GES and a blog written by Bob Wilkin. He argued:

The context clearly shows that Jesus was instructing His disciples about principles

of discipleship, not justification. He warned them that men would persecute and possibly even kill them. Yet, they were not to be afraid. Why? Because, first, as believers (all but Judas) they were bound for heaven no matter what pain they might experience here (cf. Luke 10:20; John 13:10). And because, second, they would be rewarded in heaven for any suffering they endured here for Jesus' sake.

This was the first time I recalled seeing this passage taught as a principle of discipleship and future rewards, rather than as a principle of salvation. The discovery of the GES blog was life-altering. I began spending time every day reading the daily blog posts and searching the website for explanations of Scriptures that had long confused me.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

During this time, my husband accepted a job in another state and found a Free Grace church in our area through the GES church tracker. The first Sunday we were in town, we attended the Free Grace church. That Sunday, the women's leader at church approached me and invited me to the women's Bible study and to a women's retreat happening just two weeks later. I still had many questions, and she reached out. We had multiple conversations during those first few weeks. She explained Free Grace theology and shared many resources, including an incredible *Grace in Focus* article written by two missionaries who had experiences like mine regarding lost assurance. Our conversations and the resources shared helped me to untangle the false doctrines I had believed. The best and most convincing part was that everything was presented with truth from Scripture taken in context, as the writer intended. I attended the women's retreat, and the speaker brought even more clarity. She taught things I had wondered

about for years, and presented them clearly, with Scripture, and in context.

CLARITY AT LAST

Looking back on the experience and journey that led me to Free Grace teaching, I now know that anything I would have shared with my coworker,

had I had the courage, would not have been Biblical and would surely have caused confusion. Now I feel that the next time I have the opportunity to share about Jesus, I am equipped to share the simple message that eternal life is a free gift that can never be taken away, and that we receive it

only by believing in Jesus. There's nothing else we have to do. It really is as simple as believing in Him for the gift He promises, as John 3:15-16 says.

For anyone who is struggling, as I was, with the assurance of eternal life, it's important to know that our works are not a measure of salvation. We don't receive eternal life (nor do we prove our salvation) because of a prayer we've prayed, sorrow for sins, surrendering our life to Jesus, doing good for others, baptism, or anything else we do. We can be assured we have eternal life if we believe in Jesus alone, for He will keep His promise in John 11:26a: "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

It is only by the grace of God that I can share this story. I am eternally grateful for the ministry of GES and the numerous Free Grace friends who have poured into me and helped me understand the truth about Jesus and believing in Him alone for eternal life. ■

It doesn't matter when I believed; it only matters that I have believed.



Tiffany is originally from South Carolina and now lives in Texas with her husband and four dogs. She works in accounting and enjoys planespotting in her free time.

Misinterpreting Scripture

Can Have Eternal Consequences

Ephesians 2:1-10
As a Test Caseⁱ

By Bob Wilkin

INTRODUCTION

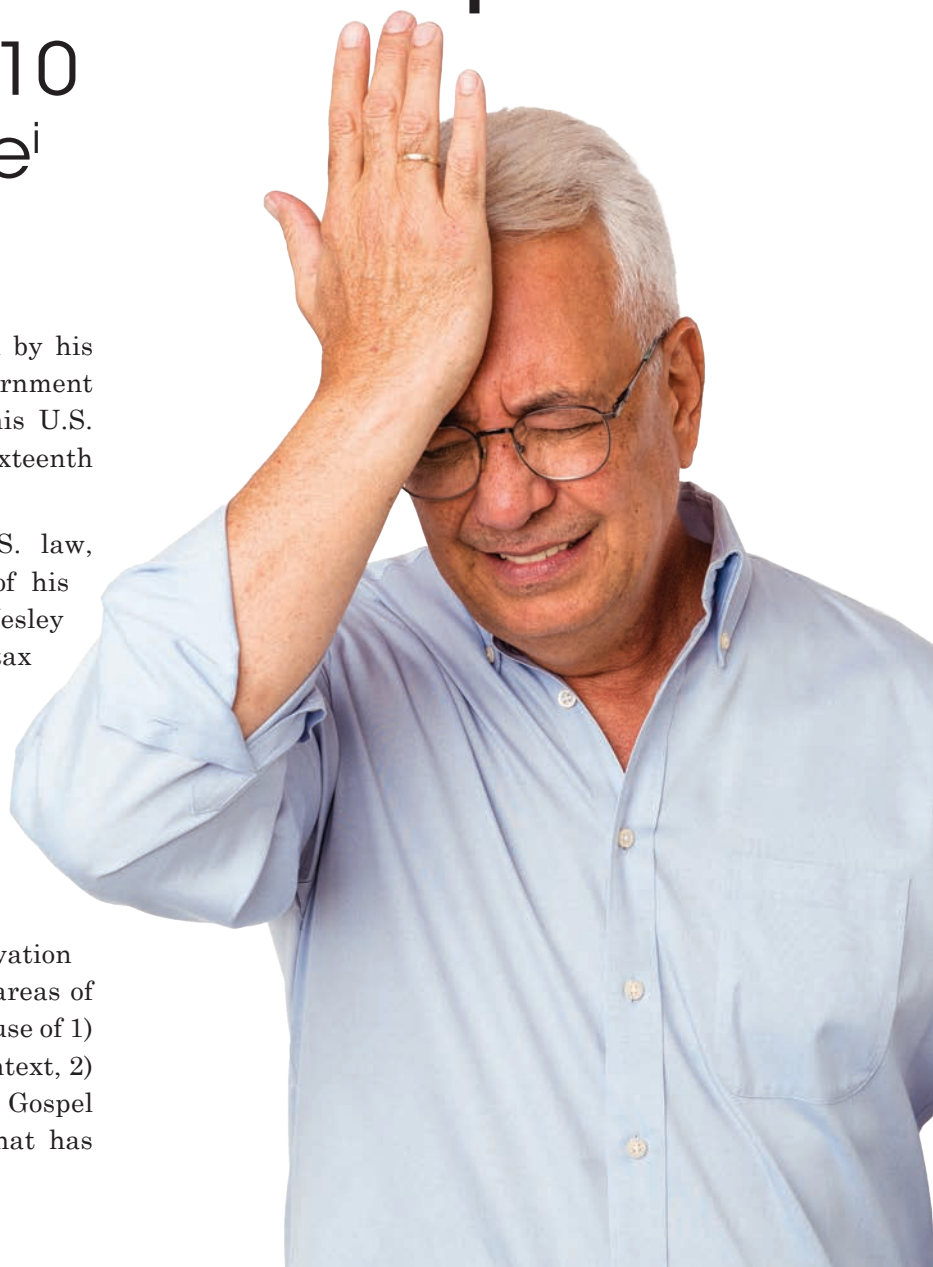
Famous actor Wesley Snipes was told by his financial advisors that the U.S. government had no constitutional authority to tax his U.S. income. He became convinced that the Sixteenth Amendment was never properly ratified.

Because of his interpretation of U.S. law, he stopped paying his taxes. Because of his misinterpretation and misapplication, Wesley Snipes was found guilty of failing to file tax returns for the years 1999 to 2004.

Misinterpreting the Constitution can have serious temporal consequences.

Misinterpreting the Biblical teaching on salvation can have serious eternal consequences.

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a passage about salvation that is widely misinterpreted. Six major areas of confusion arise from these ten verses because of 1) a failure to pay careful attention to the context, 2) a failure to understand the message of the Gospel of John, and 3) a failure to question what has traditionally been taught.



**MISINTERPRETATION #1: DEAD
MEANS TOTAL INABILITY
(EPHESIANS 2:1)**

What did Paul mean by the word *dead*? According to Calvinists, spiritual deadness is total spiritual inability. They understand Paul to be saying that unbelievers are like cadavers. They can't hear, understand, or respond to God.

According to this view, unbelievers cannot believe in Christ.

Why is there so much confusion about the promise?

John MacArthur wrote, "Dead men are absolutely unable to react to any kind of stimulus. They lack the power to act" (*The Doctrines of Grace*, p. 17).

The Calvinist solution to this problem is to say that regeneration precedes faith. Furthermore, this regeneration is conditioned solely upon God's having arbitrarily chosen someone in eternity past, then unilaterally giving that person eternal life.

This misconception stems from a rejection of the saving message taught in the Gospel of John. The Lord Jesus repeatedly said that whoever believes in Him has everlasting life. He conditioned spiritual life solely upon believing in Him.

In John 5:39-40, the Lord Jesus clearly said that a willingness to believe is vital for anyone to come to faith. A willingness to believe contradicts the notion that spiritual death equals spiritual inability.

In Acts 10, Cornelius clearly understood the angel's words. Then, after he sent for Peter, he believed Peter's words as well.

When the Lord Jesus and His apostles spoke of *death* in the spiritual sense, they were clearly referring to the absence of everlasting life. A

person who lacks everlasting life might believe thousands of things the Bible teaches. If he is open to the truth, he can seek God and be born again (Matt 7:7-11; Acts 16:14; 17:27).

Death in the spiritual sense is not spiritual inability. It is the lack of everlasting life.

**MISINTERPRETATION #2: DEAD
BECAUSE OF TRESPASSES AND SINS
(EPHESIANS 2:1)**

The second misconception is that the expression "in trespasses and sins" means *because of* trespasses and sins. Many, if not most, Evangelicals hold this view. F. F. Bruce comments, "Their spiritual death was the result of their 'trespasses and sins'" (*Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, p. 280).

O'Brien agrees, stating, "This wretched and culpable condition has been caused by their transgressions and sins" (Ephesians, p. 157).

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, humans have been spiritually dead at conception. Humans are therefore spiritually dead before they commit even one sin.

Unbelievers are not spiritually dead because of their trespasses and sins. They are spiritually dead *in the sphere of* their trespasses and sins.

Is being persuaded what Paul had in mind?

J. B. Bond comments:

Rather, they were dead in the sphere of trespasses and sins. That is, they were slaves of sin (cf. Rom 6:17, "though you were slaves of sin") (GNTC, p. 867).

Paul was saying what the Lord Jesus said in John 8:21, 24. If we do not believe in Jesus, then we will die *in our sins*. That is, the unbeliever is a slave of sin, and unless he comes to faith in

Christ, he will remain in that condition until he dies (compare John 8:30-32 with John 8:21, 24).

The issue in regeneration is not sin. John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2 make it clear that the Lord Jesus has removed the sin barrier for all of humanity.

The expression
"the gift of God"
always refers to
everlasting life...

Being born again is about the fact that we are dead and need life. If we simply believe in the Lord Jesus for the gift of God—everlasting life (John 4:10; Eph 2:8-9)—we have it.

MISINTERPRETATION #3: SAVED FROM ETERNAL CONDEMNATION, NOT MADE ALIVE (EPHESIANS 2:8)

The third source of confusion regarding Eph 2:1-10 is the meaning of the word *save* in Eph 2:8.

It is commonly held that this verse refers to salvation from eternal condemnation.

But that is not what it is talking about.

Look at Eph 2:5. In both 2:5 and 2:8, *saved* means "He made us alive," that is, He regenerated us.

This is exactly what John 3:16-17 says. In verse 16, the Lord spoke of *everlasting life*. Then, in verse 17, He spoke of *salvation*. While only thirty percent of NT occurrences of *save* and *salvation* refer to regeneration, Eph 2:8 and John 3:16 are two such examples.

MISINTERPRETATION #4: FAITH, NOT SALVATION, IS THE GIFT OF GOD (EPHESIANS 2:8-9)

The fourth area of confusion concerns the word *that* in Eph 2:9. Calvinists suggest that the demonstrative pronoun *that* in the phrase, "and that not of yourselves," refers to the word *faith* in the expression, "By grace you have been saved

through faith." They say that faith, not salvation, is the gift of God.

However, that view is impossible for two reasons. First, the word *faith* is feminine in Greek, but the word *that* is neuter. The neuter refers to the *by grace through faith salvation* (i.e., everlasting life), not to faith. Second, the expression "the gift of God" occurs only five times in the NT and always refers to everlasting life or something accompanying it. It refers to everlasting life in John 4:10, Rom 6:23, and Eph 2:8. (Compare also Rev 22:17.) In the other two occurrences, it refers to the related gift of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts (Acts 8:20; 2 Tim 1:6).

MISINTERPRETATION #5: FAITH IS REPENTANCE, COMMITMENT, AND OBEDIENCE (EPHESIANS 2:8-9)

The fifth area of confusion is over what *faith* is.

Many Evangelicals believe that what is called "saving faith" is a special type of faith that includes turning from sins, commitment, and perseverance in obedience.

Using this definition, Eph 2:8-9 is teaching that "...by grace you have been saved through repentance, commitment, and obedience."

Death in the
spiritual sense
is not spiritual
inability.

Many say that there is a difference between "head faith" and "heart faith." They claim that *being persuaded* is not what Paul had in mind in Eph 2:8 or what the Lord Jesus had in mind in John 3:16.

However, as Zane Hodges wrote in *Absolutely Free*, faith is just that: faith. Faith is being persuaded or convinced that something is true. Saving faith is being persuaded or convinced that Jesus guarantees the gift of God, everlasting life,

to all who simply believe in Him. Jesus' question in John 11:26 shows this clearly.

It is a tragic misunderstanding to think that *faith* means turning from sins, commitment, obedience, and perseverance.

**MISINTERPRETATION #6:
PERSEVERANCE IN GOOD
WORKS IS REQUIRED FOR FINAL
SALVATION (EPHESIANS 2:10)**

The last area of confusion concerns what Paul meant when he said that we are created for good works.

Most Evangelicals understand verse 10 to say that only if a believer perseveres in good works will he enter Christ's kingdom, which they often refer to as *final salvation*.

What few notice is the shift between the second-person plural, *you*, in Eph 2:8-9 and the first-person plural, *we*, in Eph 2:10. Why the shift? Because in Ephesians, the word *we* refers to Jews and Gentiles united in one body, the Church. See Eph 2:11-22.

Paul was speaking corporately of churches. While every church should be a beacon of God's light, we know from 1-2 Corinthians and Revelation 2-3 that not all first-century churches were shining as lights in the darkness. Some churches were carnal, made up of immature, baby Christians. Some churches were in danger of being vomited out of God's mouth and of having their candlesticks removed.

The same is true today. Not all churches are sound in doctrine or practice.

Of course, for a church to produce good works, its people must do good works. But that is not to say that everyone, or even most, in every church is walking in the light and in fellowship with God.

Paul was talking about what God desires local churches to be, not what He guarantees.

CONCLUSION

Wesley Snipes spent three years in prison and had to pay \$9.5 million in back taxes and penalties because advisors misled him about the meaning of U.S. law.

Many pastors and Bible scholars today mislead untold millions of people regarding the Bible's promise of everlasting life. They misinterpret the Gospel of John and, as a result, misinterpret the epistles. Ephesians 2:1-10 is a prime example of a passage that is badly misinterpreted and misapplied by many, if not most, pastors and Bible scholars.

Why is there so much confusion about the promise of everlasting life? It is because people base their understanding of the condition for everlasting life not on the Gospel of John, but on what their tradition says. Misunderstanding the Gospel of John is the

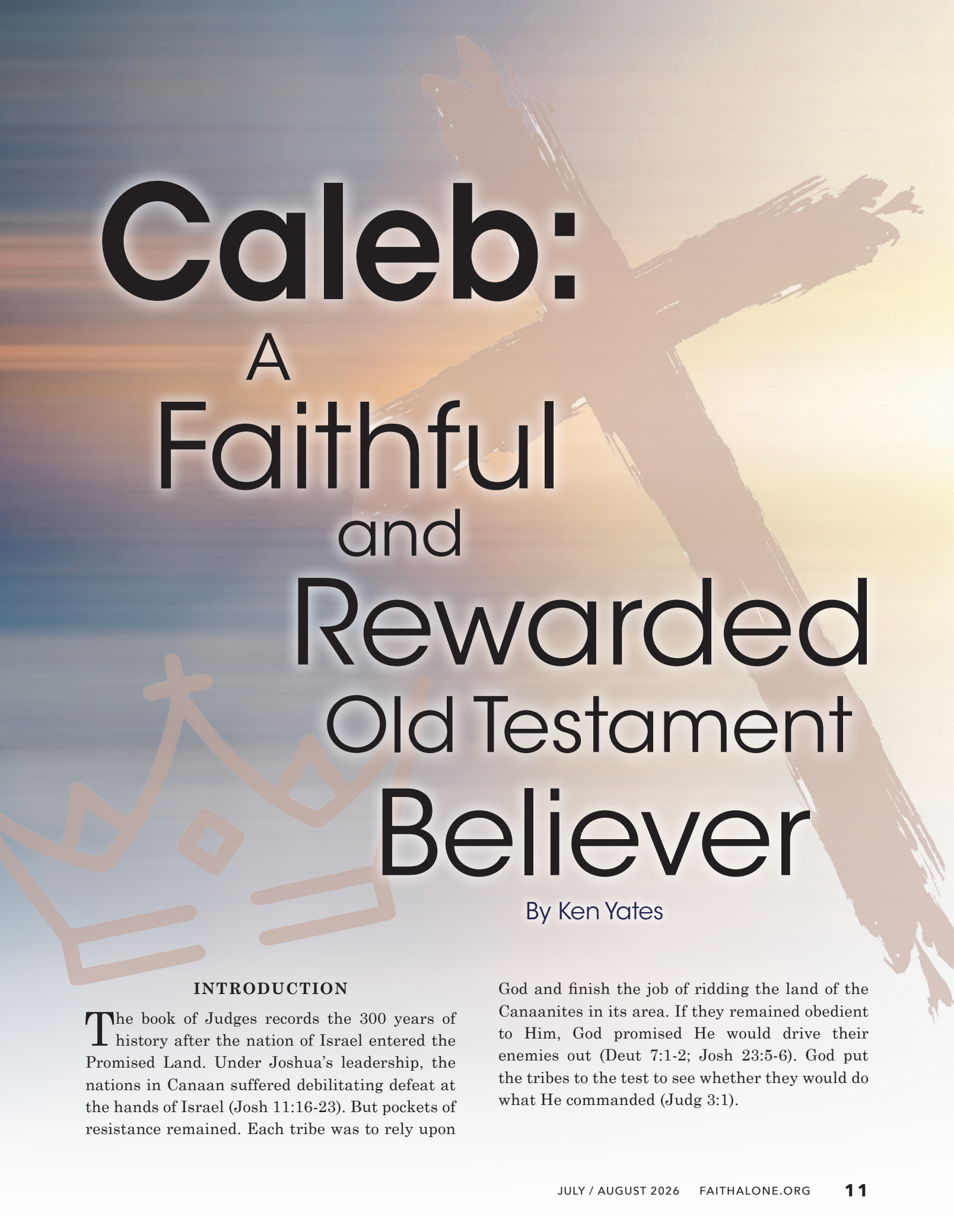
easiest way to misunderstand the rest of the Scriptures. ■

Misinterpretation
can have
serious eternal
consequences.



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

¹ This message was given on May 19 of this year at the GES annual conference.



Caleb: A Faithful and Rewarded Old Testament Believer

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

The book of Judges records the 300 years of history after the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land. Under Joshua's leadership, the nations in Canaan suffered debilitating defeat at the hands of Israel (Josh 11:16-23). But pockets of resistance remained. Each tribe was to rely upon

God and finish the job of ridding the land of the Canaanites in its area. If they remained obedient to Him, God promised He would drive their enemies out (Deut 7:1-2; Josh 23:5-6). God put the tribes to the test to see whether they would do what He commanded (Judg 3:1).

Obedience would lead to the blessings of the covenant God had made with Israel. They would experience peace, prosperity, and the other blessings of the covenant. Disobedience would lead to their being cursed. One curse was oppression by their enemies. The book of Judges shows that Israel did not obey God. It shows the degradation that disobedience and idolatry caused Israel to experience.

Believers (OT and NT) can never lose eternal life.

The book starts off on a positive note. It shows what happened when the nation obeyed. The blessings of God are also experienced by a faithful individual named Caleb. The following is drawn from my commentary on Judges that will be part of Volume 2 of our *Grace Old Testament Commentary: the Prophets*.

CALEB'S ROLE IN THE EARLY CONQUESTS JUDGES 1:1-20

1:1-2. Immediately after Joshua's **death**, Israel trusted in God. They wisely **asked the Lord** for guidance in defeating the **Canaanites** left in the land. Each tribe was to finish the conquest of its territory (Josh 23:5). God responded that **Judah** was to lead the way and promised victory against the enemies in their area.

1:3-7. The tribe of **Simeon** joined Judah in the fight against the Canaanites. The two tribes won the battle, captured King **Adoni-Bezek**, and humiliated him by cutting off his **thumbs and big toes**. He had done the same to his foes in the past. This rendered him useless in battle. He **died**, probably by execution.

1:8-10. Judah and Simeon had success in battle in the south and the west. This included

Jerusalem, which at that time was controlled by the Jebusites, the **mountains**, and the **lowlands**, that comprised the plain leading towards the Mediterranean Sea. They were also able to kill the Canaanite rulers of the important town of **Hebron**.

However, there is a hint of future problems in these victories. Another tribe would later allow the enemy to take control of Jerusalem (v 21).

1:11-15. Judah and Simeon defeated the town of **Debir**. In this battle, **Caleb** (mentioned by name five times between 1:12 and 1:20, and only one other time in the book, 3:9), the faithful spy in Numbers 14, offers his daughter, Achsah, to the man who leads the charge to victory against the town. **Othniel**, who would become a judge (3:9-11), takes the challenge.

Caleb was being a loving and godly father. He knew that the warrior who conquered Debir would be strong, brave, and a man of faith, since God gave success to Judah because of their faith. Achsah, riding on a **donkey**, asks her father for the **blessing of springs of water**. She receives them and the land they were on.

Women play a significant role in the book of Judges. Here, a woman is seen blessed and fulfilling what God had told the nation to do. She would possess a part of the Promised Land. She was part of a godly couple, from a godly family.

The Church is not Israel, but we can learn lessons from the book of Judges.

The next time a woman is seen on a donkey, the outcome will be much different. She will not be cared for, but abused and murdered (19:28). Comparing these two women shows how Israel's

society disintegrated because of their disobedience. This was a lesson for the people of Israel during the time of the kings.

1:16-19. The Kenites, allies of Israel, joined forces with Judah. Judah and Simeon enjoyed other victories because the **Lord was with** them. This was the key to their success. They believed what God had promised about victory over their enemies and obeyed the Lord.

The same is true for the NT believer. God has promised to reward the believer who believes that promise and seeks Him (Heb 11:6). These rewards include intimacy with Christ in this life and eternal rewards in His kingdom.

Amidst the blessings of Judah and Simeon, an ominous sign emerges. Judah could not drive some of the Canaanites out because they had **chariots of iron**. This was Israel's perspective. They thought that their enemy had a military advantage and could not be defeated. But the Lord was testing them to see if they would believe in His promise of victory over their enemies (3:1; Josh 17:18). Their refusal to defeat them pointed to dark days ahead.

1:20. **Caleb** remained faithful to the Lord and had victory over the **three sons of Anak**, who were giants. He also received the reward that Moses had promised him for his past faithfulness (Num 14:24; Josh 14:6-15). He inherited a city in the Promised Land. The NT believer will also receive an inheritance in the kingdom of God if he remains faithful to the Lord (Matt 5:5; Luke 19:15-19).

CONCLUSION

The book of Judges reveals spiritual truths found in both the Old and New Testaments. The Church is not Israel, but we can learn lessons from its 300-year history in the book of Judges.

The Lord places His people in situations to test them. He wants to see if they will believe in His

promises. These situations provide opportunities for us to grow in our faith.

Obedience to God always brings blessings. Disobedience brings chaos and destruction. Not all the Jews during the times of the Judges were believers, but the nation still remained God's chosen people, even when they were disobedient.

Believers (OT and NT) can never lose eternal life. Even if he is disobedient, a believer remains a child of God. But that disobedience will result in the loss of many blessings.

Caleb is an example of the blessings that obedience brings. He experienced victory over his enemies. His daughter was blessed with prosperity and a faithful husband. He received an inheritance in the Promised Land.

The NT believer who is faithful to the Lord will also be blessed. In this life, he will have close communion with the Lord. He will edify those around him. In the world to come, he will receive an inheritance, which means he will be great in Christ's kingdom. The faithful believer will actually rule and have authority over cities in that kingdom.

We can learn much from Caleb's life in Judges.

III



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.



The Outskirts of Heaven

By Kathryn Wright

INTRODUCTION

There are two popular depictions of “heaven” in the modern church. The first is that believers will spend eternity in the third heaven. Rooted in Greek thought, the Church has long adopted an image of heaven in which believers in spirit form float in the clouds and play harps. GES and many others have already debunked this version of heaven. The Bible depicts believers, not in the third heaven, but on the new earth in resurrected bodies for eternity (Rev 21:1-3; John 5:28-29; 1 Cor 15:42-44).

However, there is a second version of eternity that is arguably just as popular. It acknowledges a new creation and resurrected bodies. However, instead of clouds and harps, this version emphasizes meadows and quiet peace. For example, the chorus of Craig Campbell’s song, “Outskirts of Heaven,” describes heaven like this:

Where there's dirt roads for miles,
Hay in the fields, and fish in the river,
Where there's dogwood trees, and
honey bees
And blue skies, and green grass forever.
So Lord, when I die,
***I wanna live on the outskirts of
Heaven*** (emphasis added).

Here, the image isn’t a version of eternity with disembodied spirits and clouds. This concept is a new creation consisting of fish, rivers, and

green grass. However, this picture also includes isolation. Many believers imagine eternity in this way: a retreat, a hermit’s heaven far from the madding crowd. This second version appeals to many believers.

But is it Biblical?

CITY LIFE

In Revelation, as the Apostle John describes the dawn of the eternal kingdom, he prophesies the coming of the New Jerusalem, calling it the *great city* (Rev 21:10). He describes its precious stones, gates, and walls (vv 11-13). In v 14, the city wall bears the names of the Twelve Apostles. In vv 15-17, an angel measures the city. The great detail emphasizes the importance and majesty of this capital. Even the streets are beautiful, made of gold so pure that it’s like transparent glass (Rev 21:10-21).

It’s not just Jerusalem that will be restored. In Jer 33:12-13, the Lord tells the prophet His plans for all of Israel and its future restoration in the millennial kingdom, saying:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: “In this place which is desolate, without man and without beast, and in ***all its cities***, there shall again be a dwelling place of shepherds, causing their flocks to lie down. In the ***cities*** of the mountains, in the ***cities*** of the lowland, in the ***cities***

of the South, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the **cities** of Judah, the flocks shall again pass under the hands of him who counts them,” says the Lord (emphasis added).

Not only will there be the capital city of Jerusalem and the restored cities of Israel, but also other nations and peoples within the kingdom. Isaiah 19 describes five cities in Egypt that will learn the language of the Jews, and one of Egypt’s capital cities, Heliopolis, once associated with pagan worship, will become a city of righteousness (Isa 19:18-25). In Zechariah, we are told that the nations will make pilgrimages to Jerusalem:

Everyone who is left of all the nations... shall go up from year to year to worship the King... (Zech. 14:16; cf. Rev. 21:24-26)

There will be distinct nations whose people dwell in their own regions and cities. They will often travel to Jerusalem, which will function as the center of worship. This implies governance centered in Jerusalem, with populations distributed across the earth (cf. Isa 2:2-4; Isaiah 60).

CITY RULERS

There is no indication in Scripture that believers in the coming kingdom will live in isolation. In fact, the consistent picture is the opposite: communal life, populated cities, shared worship, and social activity. When Scripture describes the coming kingdom—both the millennial reign of Christ and the eternal state—the dominant imagery is civic glory, community, and service, not rural isolation.

This is important for the doctrine of rewards. When the Lord returns, He will evaluate the believer’s life at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 Cor 5:10). Those who are faithful will be rewarded. When discussing this concept, the Bible uses a recurring theme. For example, in

the Parable of the Minas, the faithful servant is commended by the Master, who says:

“Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten **cities**” (Luke 19:17, emphasis added).

The parable illustrates the judgment of a faithful believer at the return of Christ. Good servants are not rewarded with acres of land or a cabin in a meadow. Rather, they are given cities. Following the first servant, a second servant comes before the Lord:

“Master, your mina has earned five minas”... “You also be over **five cities**” (Luke 19:18-19, emphasis added).

Once again, the faithful believer is given cities to rule over, not a cabin out in the woods. In his discussion of the Hall of Faith, the author of Hebrews offers Abraham as an example of one who had great faith, saying:

...for he waited for the **city** which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10, emphasis added).

Abraham wasn’t seeking a hammock under a tree. A few verses later, the author describes the Lord’s approval of such believers:

...Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a **city** for them (Heb 11:16, emphasis added).

Again, in Revelation, when describing the rewards given to the faithful church in Philadelphia, the Lord promises:

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God... and I will write on him...the name of **the city** of My God, the New Jerusalem...” (Rev 3:12, emphasis added).

There is no indication that believers will live in isolation.

Much like the apostles in Rev 21:14, the faithful are given a title—a *name*—affiliated with the capital city. Those who overcome will not only be residents, but also rulers with the Lord in His kingdom. They will have roles in His administration and government (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10). Even the most reclusive believer will want a part in this city.

WHY DO PEOPLE NOT EXPECT A LITERAL KINGDOM?

Despite Scripture's evidence of city life in the coming kingdom, the vision of eternity as a solitary existence persists. For some, living in a city sounds like a nightmare. People would rather have a cabin on the outskirts of heaven than live among others. This raises the question: Why do people reject the Biblical image of the kingdom?

Having an Individualistic Mindset

One reason many believers have this “hermit heaven” mentality is Western culture's strong emphasis on individualism. The pioneer's heart seeks isolation—carving out a space for oneself. The rugged cowboy and his ranch are deeply embedded in the cultural psyche. Though the Bible presents eternity as being corporate, many Americans find this hard to accept due to their deep sense of individual responsibility. In addition, other people—even other believers—can be difficult. Cities often embody violence, corruption, and sin that ruin the appeal of corporate life. Even churches divide over trivial things. Church hurt is real and leads many to isolation. It's easier to worship the Lord alone under a tree rather than among others. However, since we are called to live corporately now and to not forsake the assembly, believers should expect eternity to be one of community.

Not Realizing His Kingdom Will Be Peaceful and Righteous

Solitude is often the only place to find peace. We long to escape chaos, injustice, and war. A quiet cabin, a river, a meadow—these images bring comfort because they offer what life often denies. Our governments are corrupt, cities broken, and people divisive and cruel. We want

to hide away and imagine something similar for eternity. But when a believer longs to live on the outskirts of heaven, it implies that there will still be something to escape from. This misses the scope of the Lord's redemptive work. Citizens of eternity will not need to run from their lives to find peace (Rev 21:4; Isa 65:17-25). The government will be righteous, its cities vibrant, and its people without sin. Even the streets will be beautiful.

HAVE THE MINDSET OF THE KING

Let us also consider the example given by the Lord. Our Savior won't be an isolationist living on a million acres in the country. Jesus is not a hermit King who will retreat to a celestial cabin. Repeatedly, He is described as dwelling *in the midst* of His redeemed community. Consider these words of the prophet:

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and ***I will dwell in your midst,***” says the LORD. “Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And ***I will dwell in your midst...***” (Zech 2:10-11, emphasis added; cf. Zech 8:3; Ezek 37:26-28; Joel 3:17; Isa 24:23; Rev 21:3).

Our Savior doesn't plan to live alone but desires to live among us for all eternity. He won't be an aloof, distant God living on a ranch in Montana, whom we occasionally visit. He is Immanuel, who walks among His people. Those who wish to draw near to Him and have His approval should set aside traditions that fail to reflect Scripture and instead imitate the coming King as we long for His kingdom. ■



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Another Lordship Salvation Argument That Is Not Logical

By David Wyant

INTRODUCTION

The first article in this series critiqued John MacArthur’s argument that 1 John 2:29 supports the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.ⁱ This Calvinistic doctrine asserts that “The mark of true justification is perseverance in righteousness to the very end.”ⁱⁱ First John 2:29 does, in fact, teach that “doing righteousness” is a natural expression of the believer’s new nature: “...everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). However, MacArthur

hijacked 1 John 2:29 to claim that “the regenerated believer necessarily makes a practice of righteousness.”ⁱⁱⁱ The critique demonstrated that by making righteous behavior a *necessary condition* of the new nature, rather than a *natural expression* of it, MacArthur committed the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent, or *affirmatio consequentis*. This article will show that MacArthur’s interpretation of this verse commits another—but related—logical fallacy, known as *denying the antecedent*, or *negatio antecedentis*.

DENYING THE ANTECEDENT

A few sentences after citing 1 John 2:29 as a proof text for his claim that “the regenerated believer necessarily makes a practice of righteousness,” MacArthur says,

Those who profess to be saved but do *not* progress in cultivating patterns of life in obedience to Christ’s commands can make *no* legitimate claim to being true children of God. Whatever they may say with their lips, their lives betray a heart that is still unregenerate.^{iv}

This conclusion is based on this negation of 1 John 2:29: “Everyone who does *not* practice righteousness is *not* born of Him.” It is often expressed by the pithy proverb, “No fruit, no root!”

The Calvinistic claim is that those who say they believe in Jesus for eternal life but do not live up to a certain standard of righteousness are false converts and are, in fact, unregenerate. However, when John MacArthur supported his assertion by negating John the Apostle's statement in 1 John 2:29, he committed the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent.

John is not saying
that those not
doing righteous
deeds are not
born of God.

Denying the antecedent occurs when one infers the negation of the consequent (what follows) from the negation of the antecedent (what precedes) in a conditional statement. It makes the false assumption that since the cause is absent, the effect must also be absent. Here is this argument in the form of a syllogism:

Major Premise: If P, then Q
Minor Premise: Not P
Conclusion: Therefore, not Q

In this argument, P is the antecedent and Q is the consequent. The antecedent, P, is denied in the minor premise, "Not P." This argument commits the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent. It is invalid because the truth of Q is not ruled out by the falsity of P. Just because P isn't true doesn't mean that Q can't still be true for another reason. This argument is invalid because the conclusion does not follow from the premises. The mistake is assuming that the conditional works both ways. Here is an everyday example of this faulty reasoning:

Major Premise: If it is raining, then the ground is wet.
Minor Premise: It is not raining.
Conclusion: Therefore, the ground is not wet.

This is faulty reasoning because the ground could be wet for reasons other than rain. I live in northeastern Ohio, so the ground is frequently wet from melting snow. Someone may be using a lawn sprinkler. Or there could have been heavy dew overnight. Just because the ground is wet doesn't necessarily mean that it is raining. The logic does not flow in the opposite direction.

MACARTHUR'S FAULTY SYLLOGISM

Here is MacArthur's argument from 1 John 2:29 in the form of a syllogism:

Major Premise: Everyone who practices righteousness [antecedent] is born of Him [consequent]
Minor Premise: This person does *not* practice righteousness.
Conclusion: Therefore, this person was not born of Him.

The major premise of this argument is the Apostle John's statement in 1 John 2:29. The antecedent is: "Everyone who practices righteousness." The consequent is: "is born of Him." The minor premise is the negation of the major premise's antecedent: "This person does *not* practice righteousness." The faulty conclusion is that the individual who is not living righteously has *not* been born again because they do *not* practice righteousness. It is a false conclusion because the argument commits the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent.

John says that everyone doing righteous deeds is born of God. He is not saying that those who are not doing righteous deeds are not born of God.

MacArthur's charge that professing believers who do not exhibit a righteous lifestyle are unregenerate is patently false. It would mean that if a professing believer were ever out of fellowship with God, he would prove himself to be a false professor.^v Certainty of one's eternal destiny would be impossible.

The statement "No fruit, no root" makes good works, not the promise of everlasting life to the believer, the basis of assurance. Those who adopt such thinking have the wrong motivation for doing good works.

Calvinists affirm that good works are not *the cause* of salvation, but they are *a necessary/inevitable result*. However, when they commit the logical fallacy of denying the antecedent, they unwittingly make the antecedent (practicing righteousness) a necessary condition *and, therefore, a cause of the consequent* (regeneration).

It is often expressed by the pithy proverb, “No fruit, no root!”

Calvinists believe that they must persevere in abundant good works to avoid eternal condemnation. Therefore, they cannot be sure they are doing enough good works now, or that they will persevere in good works (1 Cor 9:27; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:6-8). They go through life uncertain of their eternal destiny because they do not believe in the promise of life. That uncertainty is a sobering byproduct of misinterpreting Scripture.

CONCLUSION

Scripture clearly and frequently teaches that eternal life is a gift that is received by faith in Christ alone, apart from good works (John 1:12; 3:3, 16; Acts 16:31; Rom 6:23; 4:1-4; Eph 2:8-9). To require good works as evidence of faith or proof of salvation is unbiblical. It is also illogical. The logic shows that requiring good works as evidence of faith or as proof of eternal life makes them a necessary cause of regeneration.

Zane Hodges wrote:

In Reformed thought, good works are a condition for salvation. A deft Reformed thinker, like Samuel Logan, might add that good works are not the *cause* of salvation, while faith is both a *cause* and a *condition* for this. But the bottom line is that, for Reformed Theology, there are

two conditions for [what they call] *final salvation*—faith and works!^{vi}

Theology is the art and science of drawing logical conclusions from the Biblical data. Any theology that uses bad logic to make an invalid argument produces false doctrine and false practice. Reformed theology’s Calvinistic Lordship Salvation is bad theology based on invalid arguments that rely on logical fallacies. So, the next time you hear someone say, “No fruit, no root,”^{vii} you can reply, “That statement is based on the logical fallacy known as denying the antecedent.” ■



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ⁱ David Wyant. “The Logical Fallacy of the Calvinistic Interpretation of 1 John 2:29: Part 1.” *Grace In Focus* (Denton, TX) 41, no. 3 (May 2026).

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur Jr., *Saved without a Doubt*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 149.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 588.

^{iv} Ibid., [https://ref.ly/logosres/bblclcdtrnbtrth?ref=Page.p+588&off=2959&ctx=ess+\(Eph.+4%3a22-24\).+~Those+who+profess+toemphasis+added](https://ref.ly/logosres/bblclcdtrnbtrth?ref=Page.p+588&off=2959&ctx=ess+(Eph.+4%3a22-24).+~Those+who+profess+toemphasis+added).

^v Editor’s note: MacArthur himself, and nearly all Lordship Salvation teachers, say that born-again people may fall for a time and that during this time they are not living righteously. But his syllogism suggests that if a person ever fails to manifest righteousness, he proves he is not born again.

^{vi} Zane C. Hodges, “Calvinism Ex Cathedra: A Review of John H. Gerstner’s *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2023): 66. Then after quoting Rom 11:6 and 4:16, Hodges added, “Reformed theology has created a theological hybrid which abandons the Pauline antinomy between faith and works. From the Pauline perspective, the ‘grace’ of which Reformed thinkers speak is no longer grace at all. Once ‘works’ are part of the definition of faith” [quoting Gerstner], faith has been redefined in non-Pauline terms” (66).

^{vii} Editor’s note: The issue in assurance is precisely the opposite. No root, no salvation. To determine if someone is born again, see if they have the root. Do they believe in the Giver for the gift of everlasting life (John 4:10, 14, 25-26)?

One Way

Before and After the Cross

By Barbara E. Johnson



INTRODUCTION

The iconic symbol of the Jesus Movement was a hand with its index finger pointed upward, signifying “One Way: Jesus.” It was everywhere—on bumper stickers, dashboards, and flashed between like-minded people. However, it may surprise some to learn that many think the Bible presents *more than one way* to gain eternal life.

Some theologians unabashedly support this view. Famed NT scholar James D. G. Dunn shared his position in his book *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*. He examined the NT, searching for commonalities among what he calls the “proclamation of the gospel.” In the chapter titled “Kerugma or Kerugmata?” he concluded that there is a variety of “gospels” to fit different situations.ⁱ

God’s Word is clear: There is one saving message.

DISPENSATIONALISM AND SALVATION

Dispensationalists have often been accused of teaching more than one way of salvation, especially when discussing Law and grace in the OT. Frequently, the discussion first focuses on C.

I. Scofield and his Reference Bible notes on John 1:17. He said that in the dispensation of grace, “the point of testing was no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation.”ⁱⁱ

Charles Ryrie defended this by saying that Covenant theologians made similar statements and that those “who seize on one unguarded statement of Scofield’s ought to have the same consideration and not leave people with the wrong impression.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Feinberg, dealing with the same accusation, commented, “Certainly, such a statement would appear to be problematic,” but then pointed out that later Scofield notes state that the Law does not justify a sinner.^{iv}

Ryrie said, “Nothing could seemingly preserve the unity of the Bible better than to say that all people are saved in exactly the same way during all ages.”^v But what did he mean?

DISPENSATIONALISM AND THE CONTENT OF SAVING FAITH

In his discussion of the relationship between grace and Law, Ryrie made this oft-quoted but rarely clarified statement:

The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations [italics his].^{vi}

Ryrie continued:

It is this last point, of course, that distinguishes dispensationalists from covenant theology; but it is not a point to which the charge of teaching two ways of salvation can be attached. It simply recognizes the obvious fact of progressive revelation.^{vii}

People have
always been
saved on the
basis of Christ's
death.

What, then, is the OT saving message, according to Ryrie? That is not clear. Feinberg provides a more detailed explanation of Ryrie's view: "On the basis of the believer's trust in the revealed content of faith for his particular age, God could and did subjectively apply salvation and forgiveness to the repentant sinner."^{viii} As a result, since the content of faith is always changing, it appears to be difficult for the dispensationalist to answer the question, "Faith in what or in whom?" prior to the cross.

Ryrie holds that the content of saving faith has changed over time:

If by ways of salvation is meant different content of faith, then dispensationalism does teach various "ways" because the Scriptures reveal differing contents for faith in the progressive nature of God's revelation to mankind.^{ix}

Unfortunately, he does not name those differing contents.

One explanation for this position may lie in how these theologians define the NT saving message. For instance, in *So Great Salvation*, Ryrie said,

But Paul wrote clearly that the Gospel that saves is believing that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. This is the complete Gospel, and if so, it is also the true full Gospel and the true whole Gospel. Nothing else is needed for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.^x

Feinberg's observation is revealing:

Although I would not want to deny that God revealed as early as Genesis 3:15 that One would come to take care of the sin problem, I find it very hard to accept the notion that the promise of redemption through Jesus Christ was so clearly understood or so exclusively held to be the sole revealed content of God's method for handling sin.^{xi}

In other words, since these theologians define the saving message as faith in the finished work of Christ, or in His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-4), it becomes necessary for them to find some other way to frame the content of saving faith prior to the cross.

FREE GRACE THEOLOGY AND THE CONTENT OF SAVING FAITH

Within Free Grace circles, support for Ryrie's concept of the changing content of faith as a necessary result of progressive revelation may also underlie disagreements regarding the saving message. For example, one Free Grace theologian states that while the content of the gospel has not changed, it has been "expanded" through progressive revelation. He offers three ways people were saved: 1) before the birth of Christ, by believing in the coming Savior; 2) during Our Lord's life, by believing in Him as the living, divine

Savior; and 3) after His death and resurrection, by believing in the crucified and risen Savior.^{xii}

Did the content of the saving message change after the cross? No. People have always been saved *on the basis of Christ's death*, both before and after He died (Isa 53:6; Rev 13:8; Rom 3:25).^{xiii} However, Scripture also shows that mankind has always been saved *by believing in the Christ for His promise of*

Many think the Bible presents more than one way to gain eternal life.

eternal life (Gen 3:15; 15:6; John 8:56; Rom 4:1-5; Gal 3:6-14); the content has not changed.

The OT mentions eternal life in Dan 12:2, implying belief in the Messiah, and other OT passages speak of believers spending eternity with Him (Gen 15:6; Job 19:25-26).


John the Baptist, ministering prior to the cross, was an OT prophet. The Apostle Paul told John's disciples in Ephesus that the Baptist preached "to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:4; cf. John 1:7; 3:36).

But the testimony of the final OT prophet, Jesus Christ, provides the best and clearest evidence that the saving message has never changed. The Gospel of John, written to tell people how to be born again (John 20:30-31), was composed during the Church Age about events prior to it. Jesus told the Pharisees in John 8:56, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day." Compare Heb 11:9-10, "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city [the New Jerusalem] which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." What Abraham believed was what Jesus promised: "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

The saving message for the Church Age is the same in every age.

CONCLUSION

God revealed various aspects of His will and overall plan for humanity over different periods. But to use the concept of progressive revelation to legitimize changing the content of the saving message is, in essence, denying the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. An examination of the dispensational system in light of Free Grace theology seems warranted.

God's Word is clear: There is one saving message. Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Our Lord Jesus Christ guarantees everlasting life to all who believe in Him for it, before and after the cross. 



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ⁱ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 32.

ⁱⁱ C.I. Scofield, ed., *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1115.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 124.

^{iv} John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 43.

^v Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 131.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 134.

^{vii} *Ibid.*

^{viii} Feinberg, *Salvation*, 73.

^{ix} Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 140.

^x Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 40.

^{xi} Feinberg, *Salvation*, 51.

^{xii} Charles Bing, "GraceNotes—no. 82: How Were People Saved Before Christ's Death and Resurrection?" *Grace Notes*, <https://gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=82&lang=eng>. Editor's note: In GraceNotes—No. 79, Bing listed three different propositions we can believe in order to be born again today: 1) believing that God the Father sent Jesus (John 5:24); 2) believing that Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 6:35); and 3) believing that Jesus died for our sins and rose again (John 1:29; 3:14-15; 11:25-26; 12:32-33).

^{xiii} Bob Bryant, "How Were People Saved Before Jesus Came?" *In What is Dispensationalism?* Paul Miles, ed., (Wynnewood, OK: Grace Abroad Ministries, 2018), 166.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



OT Volume 2 Editors meeting April 14



Bob with Dr Tony Evans April 16



Ken with Cheri and Flip and C. W. and Rebecca in Indy



These are the speakers at the regional in Tallahassee. Starting the third from the left: Kathryn Wright, Loren Faul, Marino Martinez Sr., Ken Yates, Ken White, Marino Martinez Jr.



Mission-Vision Brainstorming Session March 10 2026



Seminary meeting to discuss new the Fall 26 semester



THE TREE OF LIFE

"Dying, You Will Die"

If you have Jesus,
you have
eternal life.

INTRODUCTION

Did Adam possess eternal life before the Fall? Did eating from the tree of life grant him eternal life? If he had eaten the fruit after the Fall, would he have had eternal life? Six days after time began, roughly 6,200 years ago, God created Adam and gave him one prohibition: "... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,

By Geoff Stevens

for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17).

"Dying you shall die," *môt tāmût*, is an infinitive absolute, meaning, "Certainly, you will start dying and continue dying until you are completely dead."

DID ADAM POSSESS ETERNAL LIFE BEFORE THE FALL?

Even after the Fall, the body has many built-in mechanisms for self-healing. Before the Fall, these mechanisms would have been even more robust. Though sickness and disease did not arise until after the Fall, the leaves might have been used to heal injuries or the 'wear and tear' of everyday life, just as the nations (sinless people in natural bodies) in the new earth (Rev 22:2) will do. One of these

mechanisms is our telomeres. At the ends of our chromosomes, telomeres help the body replenish damaged or dying cells. If replenishment continued indefinitely, no aging would occur. Telomeres have a built-in limit on how many times most cells can divide (and thus replenish tissues). Once the telomere "clock" runs down, the body's ability to replace dying cells fades. This is why telomere biology is a major focus of aging research. Scientists do not yet understand why this happens, even though they recognize that the body was designed to live forever.

Before sin, Adam's telomere "clock" would have had no limit; he wouldn't age, he would live forever.ⁱ Eating from the tree of life would have enhanced life, and the leaves would have healed any injury. My speculation is that if Adam had stubbed his toe, he could have used the leaves from the tree of life to heal any injury instantly.

Adam did not possess eternal life before the Fall because he did not need it; he had not sinned, and his telomere clock had no limit. Furthermore, if he had possessed it before the Fall, he could not have lost it after the Fall, because, by definition, it is eternal, never-ending life, not temporary or conditional.

Before the Fall, Adam did not possess the "knowledge of good and evil." Young children lack it (Deut 1:39), as do those who have become senile (2 Sam 19:35). Therefore, before the Fall, Adam and Eve were in a soteriological state similar to that of those after the fall under the age of accountability, such as David's son, who died and went to the believing part of Sheol, even though he did not possess eternal life (2 Sam 12:23; Luke 16:19-31).

DID EATING FROM THE TREE OF LIFE GRANT ETERNAL LIFE BEFORE THE FALL?

Life is a continuum. In other words, there are degrees of being alive. Those who are physically healthy, work out regularly, have boundless energy, and maintain a positive outlook enjoy

Adam received eternal life when he believed the promise.

life quantitatively more than those confined to a hospital bed. They can swim in the ocean, hike to a mountain peak, savor the forest's scent after an afternoon thunderstorm, and sleep well at night. Likewise, if a believer is walking in fellowship with the Lord, he enjoys the abundant life, love, and joy the Spirit provides; in other words, we could say he has fullness of life. On the other hand, a believer living under God's wrath misses out on the great joys of fellowship,

blessing, and closeness with the Lord. Fullness of life is marked by victory, is not beset by anxiety and depression, and doesn't rely on coping and escape mechanisms to make it through the day; one is fully alive. Paul's argument in Romans is just that: Those justified by faith can be fully alive by the Spirit's power, in contrast to believers defeated by sin (Rom 1:16-17).

Just as there are degrees of physical and spiritual life, the tree of life was available to give fullness and to restore life. This aligns with the tree of life in the eternal state. Revelation 22 tells us that its leaves are "for the healing of the nations," and Rev 2:7 says that only overcomers will be able to eat its fruit. This fruit will enhance life in the eternal state—that is, it will give life a greater degree of enjoyment and vitality.

When Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he died physically, not spiritually. His cells would have begun to die immediately. After the Fall, in addition to the problems caused by thorns and thistles, fangs, and venom, his telomeres had a built-in limit. In Romans 8, the Apostle Paul explains this as nature's being, "subjected to futility." Scientists tell us that the moment a baby is born, its cells begin to die. Aging is a process in which more cells die than are replenished. Thus, eating from the tree of life did not grant eternal life but allowed man to live forever physically.

Only overcomers will be able to eat its fruit.

IF ADAM HAD EATEN FROM THE TREE OF LIFE AFTER THE FALL, WOULD HE HAVE GAINED ETERNAL LIFE?

I believe Adam received eternal life in Gen 3:20, when he believed the promise of Gen 3:15, and consequently “...called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.” Although God had said they would die, He also promised that through her lineage she would one day bear the Messiah, the “seed of the woman” who would bring eternal life. Obviously, God’s discussion with Adam and Eve recorded in chapter 3 was part of a larger conversation, but chapter 3 provides the essentials.

Genesis 4:1 testifies to Eve’s saving faith: She names her firstborn *Cain*, meaning “I have acquired,” with the added explanation, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” Translators were uncomfortable translating the Hebrew literally and have added *from* to smooth out the English. But here, the Hebrew word *’ēt* functions as a direct object marker; thus, the literal translation yields, “I have acquired a manchild, the LORD.”ⁱⁱ Furthermore, Eve used the word *’iš*, “man, or husband,” a term for an adult male rather than a word typically used of an infant (such as *yeled* or *na’ar*). The literal rendering of this word choice reflects Eve’s faith in the promise of the *seed* in 3:15, thus demonstrating that she gained eternal life either at this point or at some time prior.

If Adam already had eternal life before he was expelled from the Garden, as I suggest above, then he couldn’t gain it again by eating the fruit or by any other method.

Some think that Gen 3:22 indicates Adam would have gained eternal life by eating from the tree. God said, “...lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” To prevent this, God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden. Thus, as the Hebrew verb tenses indicate,

had man *habitually eaten* of the fruit, he would have lived forever *physically*. In other words, eating the fruit would have repaired any cellular damage, mutation, or injuries he sustained, and his telomeres would continue to reverse aging. This does not equate to having eternal life. God wanted them to live forever physically, but in glorified bodies, not in their sinful bodies. Resurrection is necessary to be freed from the corruptible body (1 Cor 15:53). At the time of expulsion, Adam and Eve had already received eternal life (3:20), but they needed new bodies that are impervious to sin to fully experience eternal life; death and resurrection were therefore required (Heb 9:27). Throughout all dispensations, eternal life has been gained by believing in the Messiah for it, and this dispensation was no exception.ⁱⁱⁱ

CONCLUSION

Believers today, when walking by the Spirit, can live in holiness, and that, in and of itself, is an experience of eternal life (Rom 6:22). The Apostle John refers to Jesus Himself as eternal life (1 John 1:1-2; 5:11-12, 20). If you have Jesus, you have eternal life. In other words, if you have believed in His promise, you have Him, and you therefore have eternal life. Eating from the tree of life did not give Jesus to those who partook. The tree of life will return to the new earth (Rev 22:2), and its fruit will be a reward that will enhance the lives and abilities of overcomers (Rev 2:7; 22:14). ■



For seven years Geoff (BS Physics, Th.M DTS) has been the teaching pastor at Grace Bible Church in Kamiah, ID. He has taught theology and apologetics at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He is also part of the GES OT commentary team.

ⁱ Unfallen angels will live forever with the Lord Jesus, but they do not have eternal life since Jesus did not die for angels.

ⁱⁱ BDB acknowledges both uses of *’ēt* but treats the “with the help of” sense in Gen 4:1 as exceptional.

ⁱⁱⁱ Editor’s note: Most Dispensationalists call the first dispensation the dispensation of innocence. This is typically thought to have ended when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden at the end of Genesis 3. Therefore, while Adam and Eve did not need everlasting life before the fall, they did after it, and they believed in the Messiah for everlasting life before the dispensation of innocence ended.

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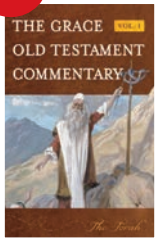


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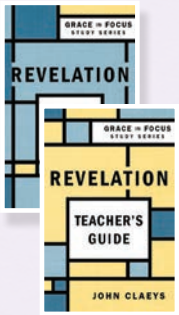


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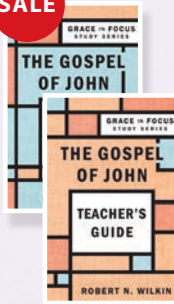
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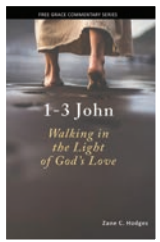


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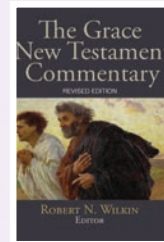


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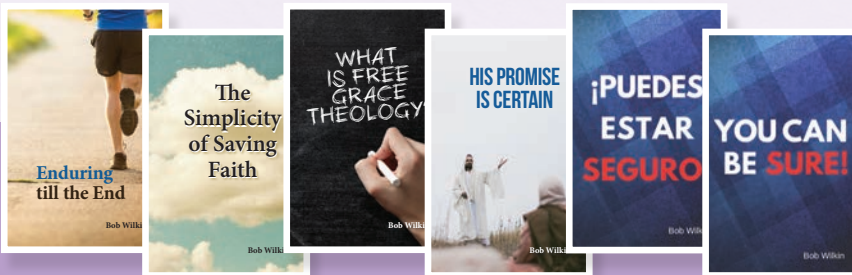


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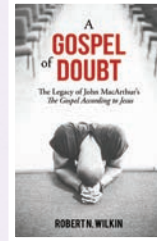


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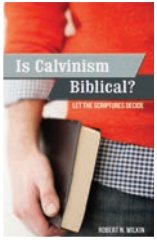


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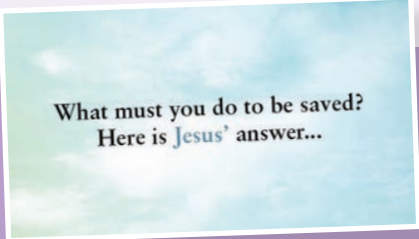


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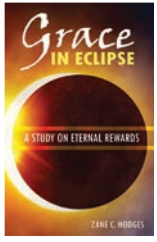
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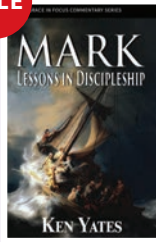
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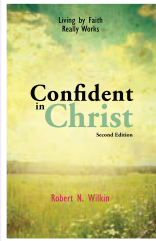


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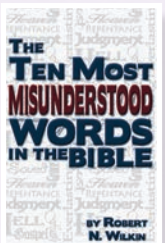


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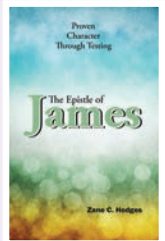


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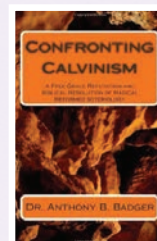


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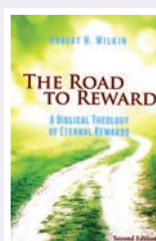


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Don't Take Good Works for Grantedⁱ

By Zane C. Hodges

Few words that Jesus spoke are more profound or challenging than those He delivered one day to the multitudes about discipleship. According to Luke, our Lord said the following to these crowds: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Of course, Jesus was a traveling rabbi—an itinerant teacher. The ancient Greco-Roman world was quite familiar with this type of person. Even outside Palestine, specialists in philosophy, rhetoric, or other branches of knowledge traveled from place to place, earning their livelihoods by dispensing information.

No one expected such instruction to be free. After all, the teacher or philosopher had to eat too. So, the price of the training he offered was always a relevant question. What would it cost to become his pupil?

That, of course, was exactly what a disciple was. The original Greek word translated as *disciple* (*mathētēs*) meant neither more nor less than a pupil, a learner. The heavy religious overtones that the word *disciple* has today in English did not exist for the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke the words we are discussing.

Of course, Jesus did teach religion or, more precisely, a way of life. But the issue that His words addressed was a simple one: “What will My instruction cost you?”

The Lord’s answer to their question was startling: “If you don’t hate your family,” He said, “and even your own life, too, you cannot possibly be My pupil.”

It is at once clear that these words set a high price for discipleship. To suggest otherwise is to evade their obvious point.

But equally, it should be clear that they have *nothing* to do with the terms on which we receive eternal life. In fact, it is one of the major errors of Lordship theology that it reads the words of Jesus about discipleship as if they were basically no different from the words He spoke to the woman from Sychar about the water of life.

We are lavishly
endowed for
effective Christian
living.

The theology of Lordship Salvation on the subject of faith and works is a hopelessly confused and unbiblical system of thought.

The language that the Bible does speak is plain for all willing to hear: “but to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5).

This principle, applied here to justification, is precisely the same for regeneration as well:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

And who could forget the marvelous declaration found in the second chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians? In that famous text he says: “For

by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph 2:8-9). Paul assures us that works play no role whatsoever in salvation. The saving experience is by grace through faith alone. It is God’s gift to us.

Yet works do have a role in the Christian’s experience after spiritual birth and justification. In the passage cited above, Paul goes on to say so: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

Sometimes this text is misunderstood. Sometimes it is read as though it meant that the believer will most certainly walk in the good works God has prepared for him. *But Paul does not say that at all.*

Instead, Paul declares God’s *purpose* for us. God wants us to walk in good works. Whether we do so depends on the many Biblical factors relevant to spiritual development.

In a classic Pauline text on spiritual education, the apostle writes as follows:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age (Titus 2:11-12).

The original word Paul uses here for *teaching* is a word especially applied in Greek usage to the education and training of a child. The message of God’s saving grace is for *all men*, but the education it brings is for *us*, God’s born-again children.

But Paul was very far from assuming that the educational process would inevitably be effective for all believers. As he demonstrates throughout his epistles, he was a down-to-earth realist about the spiritual dangers confronting his converts and the possibility of failure.

Thus, Paul never took good works for granted in the believer’s life. Instead, he felt constrained to tell Titus:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men (Titus 3:8).

“Don’t let down your guard, Titus,” Paul is saying. “Good works are something you constantly need to remind believers about. They must be extremely careful about maintaining such works, and it is part of your job to see that they are.”

So, this is the true Biblical picture of Christian experience. At our spiritual birth, we are lavishly endowed with all the necessary potentials for effective Christian living. But we must be energetic in cultivating these potentials, and if we are producing good works, we must be most careful to maintain them.

Or, to put it another way, we need to be fully committed to the goal toward which our spiritual education is leading us. No other goal can be allowed to interfere. Indeed, we must be so dedicated to our Lord that our love for Him excels all other loves. By comparison with our devotion to Him, every secondary love must seem like hatred.

“That’s what it will cost you to be My pupil,” Jesus was saying to the crowds (Luke 14:26). “My curriculum is so demanding that it is not possible for you to be my student without ‘hating’ your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and, yes, even your very own life.”

“Before you enroll, think about it!” 



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.

¹ This article presents excerpts from Chapter 6 (pp. 59-72) of the book *Absolutely Free*. Excerpts have been slightly edited.



The Lord Won't Judge Based on Outward Appearance

By Ken Yates

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

INTRODUCTION

My first job was in the military. My peers and I soon learned a valuable lesson. We noticed that often, promotions and privileges did not go to the most qualified or deserving person. Other

They will be promoted to positions of honor because they were faithful servants of the King.

factors were at play. We started using a phrase. I don't know if we stole it from someone else or invented it ourselves. It was: "It's not what you do. It's who you are."

Believers will stand
before Christ,
where He will
determine their
reward.

What we meant by that phrase was that in many situations, it is not the most productive person who is rewarded. The powers that be are often looking for a particular *kind* of person. Promotions and raises are given based on who someone is, not on what they have done. Unqualified people are often rewarded over more qualified people.

Coming to this conclusion can lead to cynicism. Why should a person work hard if it does not make a difference? It is difficult to remain motivated if you believe the work environment to be unfair.

Even though a cynical attitude can lead to a lack of motivation and hard work, the phrase my buddies and I used contains a lot of truth. We are not the only ones to have noticed it.

THE WORLD IS UNFAIR

Every adult in the workforce has experienced it. Some people have a favored status over others. A company decides it needs to hire more of a particular gender. If you are the other gender, you need not apply. We have all been exposed to DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). Some groups need to be promoted because they are "underrepresented." If we belong to the sought-after groups, we are favored. If not, we will not get the job, raise, or promotion being offered.

In the world, the favored ones can include those with certain sexual orientations, those from foreign

countries, or those who experienced economic deprivations growing up.

In my younger days, the most common type of favoritism was nepotism. It still occurs today. A person is given a job or promotion because they are related to the boss or are a good friend of the person offering the job. If the job seeker is close to a relative of the boss, it certainly doesn't hurt his chances if that relative "puts in a good word" for him.

In my late 20s, I sought a position with an organization. I was turned down. I received a letter from the office. It said that I was qualified and that they might consider hiring me "in seven years." They said they would hire me immediately if I could show that I was a different race. They would also have hired me if I had been a woman. Maybe they thought some parents had named their daughter *Kenneth*, and that was the case with me?

A friend applied for a teaching job. The man who interviewed him said he would be honest. He told my friend that he could apply, but he was wasting his time. The school was not seeking the most qualified person or the best teacher. It needed to hire someone with a degree from a prestigious foreign university to help the school's accreditation process. They were looking for that kind of person to come walking through the door.

When handing
out rewards, the
workplace often
looks first at
appearance.

All these examples show the truth of the saying, "It's not what you do. It's who you are." Even if we don't want to become cynical, it accurately describes many of our experiences. The workplace is not always fair. When handing out rewards, the workplace often looks first at a person's outward

appearance. Who is he or she (or *they/them* if the individual prefers plural pronouns)? Does the workplace recognize in this person what it's looking for? It does not look at his accomplishments. Figuratively, we could say the workplace looks at his "face."

THE LORD DOES NOT LOOK AT THE FACE

In Eph 6:9, Paul says that "there is no partiality" with Christ. The word for *partiality* is made up of two parts that, put together, mean the Lord does not "receive the face." In other words, He doesn't look at a person's face. God does not show favoritism. Paul reminds his readers that one day believers will receive rewards from the Lord based upon "whatever good" they have done. Rewards will not be given because the Judge is looking at the face of the person before Him.

Paul says the same thing and uses the same word in Col 3:25: Believers will one day stand before Christ, where He will determine their reward. We serve Him, and in Him "there is no partiality."

The contexts of both Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 concern the workplace. In Ephesians 6, masters are to treat their slaves well (v 9). In Colossians, after saying that Christ does not show favoritism, Paul immediately says that masters are to treat those under them in a "just and fair" manner (4:1). Christ is the Master of all of us, and that is how He treats us.

The master/slave relationship in the NT is parallel in many respects to the boss/worker relationship in our culture. Paul acknowledges that partiality, or favoritism, can occur in the workplace. We might say it is the rule instead of the exception. Paul would probably have approved of the saying my buddies and I used!

But the Lord is not like that.

One day, believers will stand before the Lord to give an account of what we have done, not who we are. Not only does Paul say this in Eph 6:9 and Col 3:25, but also in 2 Cor 5:10. The Lord Jesus said

He will reward each of us "according to his work" (Rev 22:12).

It is easy to become cynical about the way riches and promotions are often handed out in our world. But when Christ "promotes" those believers who will exercise authority in His kingdom, nobody will be cynical. He will not "look at the face." The most qualified—based upon what they did for the King—will rule with Him.

Why should a person work hard if it doesn't make a difference?

CONCLUSION


I do not know what the Lord will say to me at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Like all believers, I cannot lose eternal life. But on that day, I will find out what position the King will give me in His eternal kingdom.

I know that many will have greater authority than I will have. But the great news is that I will also know that they deserve it. They will not be rewarded because they attended the right school, had the right ethnicity, were the right gender, or knew the right people. They will be promoted to positions of honor because they were faithful servants of the King.

Whatever He says to me will be just, and I will know it. I will not come up with some cynical saying. I will have a new motto. All my buddies (fellow believers) and I will recognize the same thing the crowds in Mark 7:37 did: "And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well.'" ■



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The Tenth Plague of Egypt

By David M. Renfro

As we have seen in previous articles, the first nine plagues can be viewed as three cycles, each containing three plagues. All of them had now been inflicted upon Egypt, yet Pharaoh continued to block the Israelites from leaving Egypt. The land of Egypt had been devastated, and the Egyptian lifestyle had been ruined. Yahweh now told Moses that there would be one more plague—the plague of death.

THE PLAN

Yahweh's final plague upon the Egyptian people was designed to finally break through Pharaoh's stubbornness and force him to release the Israelites on His terms. Not only would Pharaoh release them, but the Egyptian people would also begin to look upon the Israelites favorably. Even Moses was becoming a favorite of the Egyptians.

But the plague itself would have to be crushingly

tragic. Yahweh told Moses that He would cause the firstborn of both humans and animals to die.

THE PLOT

The description of the tenth plague can be found in Exodus 11:1-11, and its implementation in Exodus 12:29-36. Between these two passages is a description of the Passover celebration (Exodus 12:1-28).

Exodus 11:1-3. Yahweh announced the tenth plague to Moses. He told him that this time Pharaoh would let the Israelites go unconditionally.

Moses was then to tell the Israelites what was about to happen, and he encouraged them to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver (v 2). In addition, Yahweh showed His people grace by changing the Egyptians' hearts so they would act favorably toward the Israelites (v 3). This was an incredible act of grace

There is deliverance for God's covenant people.

because it would result in His people's exiting Egypt and not going out empty-handed.

When Yahweh saw the blood, He would pass over.

Exodus 11:4-8. Yahweh outlined what He was about to do. He told Moses (who relayed it to Pharaoh) that at about midnight, He would go through Egypt (v 4) and cause the *firstborn* of both humans and animals to die (v 5). This would be the worst tragedy ever to befall Egypt (v 6).

The firstborn of a family symbolized both strength and a continuation of the family line. Pharaoh's firstborn was even considered divine. The reason for Yahweh's targeting the firstborn was to show that no one and no force rules over Him. He is the Sovereign of this world—even the most powerful of this world.

The Israelites would not experience this plague (v 7). There would be no grief, no wailing, and no fear in the Israelite camp because Yahweh wanted to demonstrate that He treated His covenant people with grace, which was very different from the way He treated His enemies.

Moses then told Pharaoh that, because of this plague, the pharaoh's own servants would speak out, demanding that the Israelites leave Egypt (v 8). This implied that Pharaoh's servants would be convinced that the power of Israel's God was infinitely greater than anything they worshipped.ⁱ

Exodus 12:1-28. This passage is a parenthesis in the story. In these verses, Yahweh established the celebration of the Passover (vv 1-14). This feast would remind the Israelites of their deliverance from Egypt by Yahweh and how He went through Egypt to strike down Egypt's firstborn (v 12).

It would also remind them of why they did not suffer the same fate. When Yahweh saw the blood on the Israelites' houses, He would *pass over* them and not inflict the plague (v 13). The fact that the

blood was on the house of each Israelite family meant that Passover was a family feast, not a feast for the congregation.

Verses 15-20 contain instructions about how to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Verses 21-27 describe Moses' gathering Israel's leaders and commanding them to tell the people what they were to do in order to avoid being affected by this plague. The instructions included killing a lamb, then taking its blood and smearing it on the doorposts of their houses (v 22). The blood on the doorposts would prevent the *destroyer* (v 23) from inflicting the plague on that house. The *destroyer* could refer to either Yahweh or an angel.

Stuart commented, concerning vv 24-27:

From the point of view of the greater sweep of biblical revelation, the practice of teaching each new generation the meaning of the Passover helped guarantee the transmission of the proto evangelium throughout the historical continuum of the people of Israel until New Testament times, when the human-divine Lamb was slain once for all as part of the divine plan of redemption set in place before the earth as we know it existed. In other words, every Israelite properly instructed about the Passover should have been also partly prepared to expect a dying Messiah whose shed blood would provide a means of escape from death. It also contains something of a model of the biblical emphasis on the importance of parents' teaching children—a responsibility well understood before the advent of universal education but often neglected in present times in favor of professionalized education (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, Vol. 2, p. 290).

Verse 28. After worshipping Yahweh (v 27), the Israelites returned home and did what Moses commanded (v 28).

The record of the tenth plague is found in Exodus 12:29-30. Yahweh did what He said He would do.

Yahweh told Moses He would cause the firstborn to die.



He “struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt” at midnight (v 29). Many significant Biblical events have occurred at midnight (Judg 16:3; Ruth 3:8; Matt 25:5-6ⁱⁱ; Acts 16:25; 20:7; 27:27).

As a result, the firstborn in every family in every level of Egyptian society—as well as the firstborn of their livestock—was killed. Pharaoh, his servants, and the Egyptian people arose from their beds in the middle of the night because of this. Sudden death of the firstborn, without an obvious cause, must have been extremely frightening to the Egyptians, and it caused “a great cry in Egypt” (v 30).

The account of Israel’s exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land begins in v 31. Finally, the goal of all ten plagues—the release of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt—had been accomplished. Yahweh had demonstrated that He was Ruler over the Egyptians (and the rest of the world), not just over His chosen people, Israel.

THE PURPOSE

This plague demonstrated to both Egypt and Israel that Yahweh is sovereign over life and death. He controls who dies and who lives.

Because He changed the Egyptians’ hearts toward the Israelites, He showed that He was also

sovereign over human hearts. He can change them at His will.

It is also an example of talionic justice, which holds that the penalty for a crime must be equivalent to the harm it caused. The familiar phrase “eye for an eye” illustrates this concept.ⁱⁱⁱ Here, Yahweh was saying to Pharaoh, “Let my son [Israel] go, or I will kill your son.”

Even in the deepest darkness, there is deliverance for God’s covenant people. ■



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ⁱ In Exodus 11:9-10, Moses looked back to Pharaoh’s response to the previous nine plagues. Pharaoh had not let the Jewish people go. The result had been that God’s wonders were multiplied.

ⁱⁱ In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, *midnight* is symbolic of the midpoint of the Tribulation, when the Abomination of Desolation will occur.

ⁱⁱⁱ The king of Egypt had ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male babies born (Exod 1:16). However, they disobeyed: “But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive” (Exod 1:17). Even so, the king had commanded the murder of all the male babies of the Hebrews.

What's Wrong with

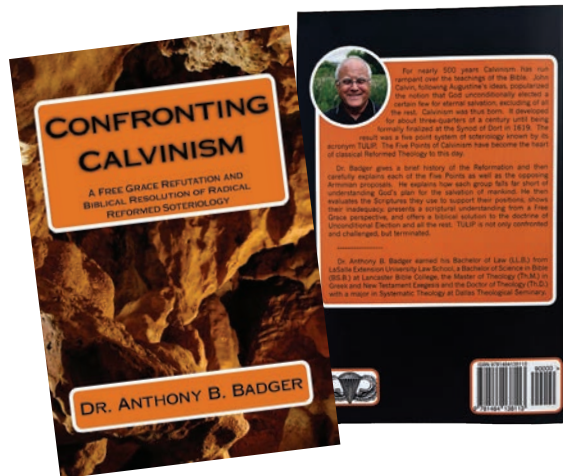
Calvinism?

Part 3: The Preservation of Those Who Persevere Is Perverse

By Bob Wilkin

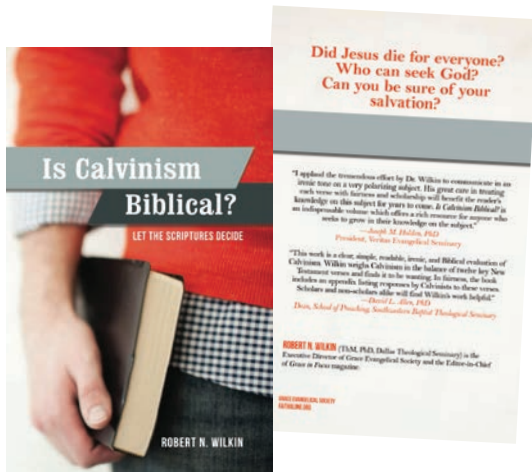
THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS IS PERVERSE

Dr. Tony Badger, author of *Confronting Calvinism*, says that no Scripture teaches the Perseverance of the Saints and that “the Bible is replete with examples of regenerate people failing in both doctrine and morals” (p. 283).



Badger's point is that eternal security is true whether a believer perseveres or not.

In my book, *Is Calvinism Biblical?* I consider two passages that disprove the Perseverance of the Saints: Revelation 20:11-15 and John 11:25-27.



Revelation 20:11-15. According to these verses, all unbelievers of all time will be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books [of deeds]” (v 12). Their works will determine the degree of tolerable torment (Matt 10:15; 11:22) each one has earned. However, no one will be cast into the lake of fire because of his works. Instead, “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). One gets into the Book of Life by believing in the Lord Jesus for the everlasting life He promises. Perseverance is not an issue at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev 20:11-15.

Calvinism and Arminianism are essentially saying the same thing.

On page 120 of *Is Calvinism Biblical?* I wrote:

If Calvinism were true, Rev 20:15 would read, “And anyone whose works failed to prove that he had genuinely believed in Jesus was cast into the lake of fire.” The issue would be what was found in the

books, not what was found or not found in the Book of Life.

Instead, according to Rev 20:15, the basis of eternal condemnation is not being found in the Book of Life. Works have nothing to do with that. The Book of Life contains a list of all who have everlasting life. All who lack everlasting life are cast into the lake of fire. All with everlasting life get into Christ’s eternal kingdom...

Dave Hunt accurately comments, “Anyone who will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14) has sent himself there by rejecting the salvation God has provided for him as a free gift of His grace” (*What Love Is This? Calvinism’s Misrepresentation of God*, p. 312).

John 11:25-27. The assurance of being glorified to live with the Lord forever in His kingdom comes by faith alone, apart from works (John 11:25). Assurance that one “will never die [spiritually]” is based solely on one’s believing in Him (“He who believes in Me will never die”). There is no mention or hint of perseverance in John 11:25-27.

Calvinists interpret these verses to mean that whoever *continuously believes until the very end of his life* will be glorified and will never die spiritually. But that is an impossible interpretation for three reasons. First, it would mean that a person would not be born again until he persevered in faith to the end of his life. There would not be a single born-again person living on earth, since no living person has as yet “persevered,” according to Calvinism’s definition. Second, it would mean that the Lord misled people when He used illustrations such as drinking the water of life *and never thirsting again*, and eating the bread of life and *never hungering again* (John 4:10-14; 6:35). Third, the present tense in the indicative mood does not refer to continuous action. The context indicates what sort of action is involved. The contexts of John 3:16; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:35-47, and 11:25-27 all show that one is eternally secure the moment he believes in Jesus.

The Perseverance of the Saints is a Trojan horse. It allows someone to claim that they believe in eternal security while also saying that if you fail to persevere, you will end up in the lake of fire. There is no assurance of everlasting life for someone who believes that he must persevere in order to avoid eternal condemnation and enter Christ's kingdom.

Even those who
fall away remain
eternally secure.

PRESERVATION BASED ON PERSEVERANCE IS WORKS SALVATION

For years, I thought that Calvinists believed in eternal security, while Arminians did not. I thought that the doctrine of eternal security was the heart of Calvinism. As a result, after graduating from seminary, I called myself a Calvinist even though I did not believe in Calvinism's other points.

I came to see, however, that most Calvinists do not actually believe in eternal security. Most Calvinists believe what Arminians believe: If you fail to persevere in faith and good works, you will be eternally condemned.

Of course, Calvinists *say* they believe in the Preservation of the Saints, which is wrongly thought to be a synonym for *eternal security*. In truth, for Calvinists, *only some believers* will be preserved by God. It is those believers who persevere.

Are you scratching your head? If so, you haven't yet grasped the *P* in TULIP. It stands for *both* the Preservation of the Saints and the Perseverance of the Saints. But they say you can't have one without the other. If you fail to persevere, you will not be preserved.

In their book *The Five Points of Calvinism*, Second Edition, Steele, Thomas, and Quinn write:

One could almost speak of the six points of Calvinism, the *fifth* point being the

preservation of the saints and the *sixth* point being the *perseverance* of the saints. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes both sides of this wonderful doctrine (pp. 148-49, italics theirs).

They add, "We have a responsibility to persevere in the faith to the end (striving after holiness), and if we do not hold out, we have no basis for assurance that God is preserving us." They then favorably quote A. N. Martin, who says, "The only proof I have that he preserves me is that by his grace, I am enabled to persevere" (p. 149).

If only those who persevere are eternally secure, is it really eternal security? Wouldn't it be eternal *insecurity* until we die? If our only proof that we are eternally secure is that we have persevered to the end, then we would have to live in doubt until the very end of our lives.

Most Calvinists say there are two types of believers—true professors and false professors. Both are convinced of the same set of doctrines. What sets the true professor apart is not what he believes, but his perseverance in both faith and good works.

According to Calvinism, a person can have temporary faith and temporary good works. The temporary faith and good works can last for years or even decades. Ultimately, most Calvinists, like most Arminians, go to their deathbeds wondering where they will spend eternity.

If only those who
persevere are
eternally secure,
is it really eternal
security?

In *Is Calvinism Biblical?* I cite two texts that disprove the Calvinist understanding of the Preservation of the Saints: Luke 8:12-13 and John 4:13-15.

Luke 8:12-13. In the Parable of the Four Soils, the first soil represents people who hear the word; however, Satan snatches it away, “lest they should

One gets into the
Book of Life by
believing in the
Lord Jesus.

believe and be saved” (v 12). Satan believes that when a person believes in Christ, he is saved forever. The devil believes in “once saved, always saved.”

Verse 13 speaks of people who “believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.” Remember what v 12 said of those represented by stony soil: “lest they should believe and be saved” (*lest* indicating that they didn’t believe and were therefore not saved). The people of v 13 are saved. The fact that they later fall away cannot undo their salvation. It is important to note that the word *believe* does not occur in vv 14 or 15 concerning the third and fourth soils. It is understood that each soil is better than the previous one, and that those represented by the third and fourth soils both believe and persevere.

Luke 8:12 proves that even those who fall away remain eternally secure.

John 4:13-15. The Lord Jesus offered the woman at the well something that He called *living water*. It was better than the water she was drawing from Jacob’s well. That water required continuous drawing and drinking to quench one’s thirst. But one drink of the living water that Jesus promised, and one would never thirst again. That water would spring up into everlasting life (v 14).

The woman understood that one drink of the living water would result in permanent quenching of thirst. But she was thinking in terms of physical water and physical thirst. That is why she said, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (John 4:15). In John 6:35,

the Lord reiterated that drinking the living water refers to believing in Him and that the result is being eternally secure: “He who believes in Me shall never thirst.” In Greek, the words translated “never thirst” actually mean *never thirst!* You don’t have to know Greek to believe in eternal security.

Beware of the Calvinist understanding of the Preservation of the Saints. It is not an antinomy as Steele, Thomas, and Quinn suggest. They say that preservation for those who persevere is “an antinomy (two teachings which appear contradictory to the human mind, but which in God’s mind are not in tension)” (p. 149, parenthetical material theirs). No. These two teachings are *contradictory*. One is either eternally secure apart from perseverance, or one is not yet eternally secure.

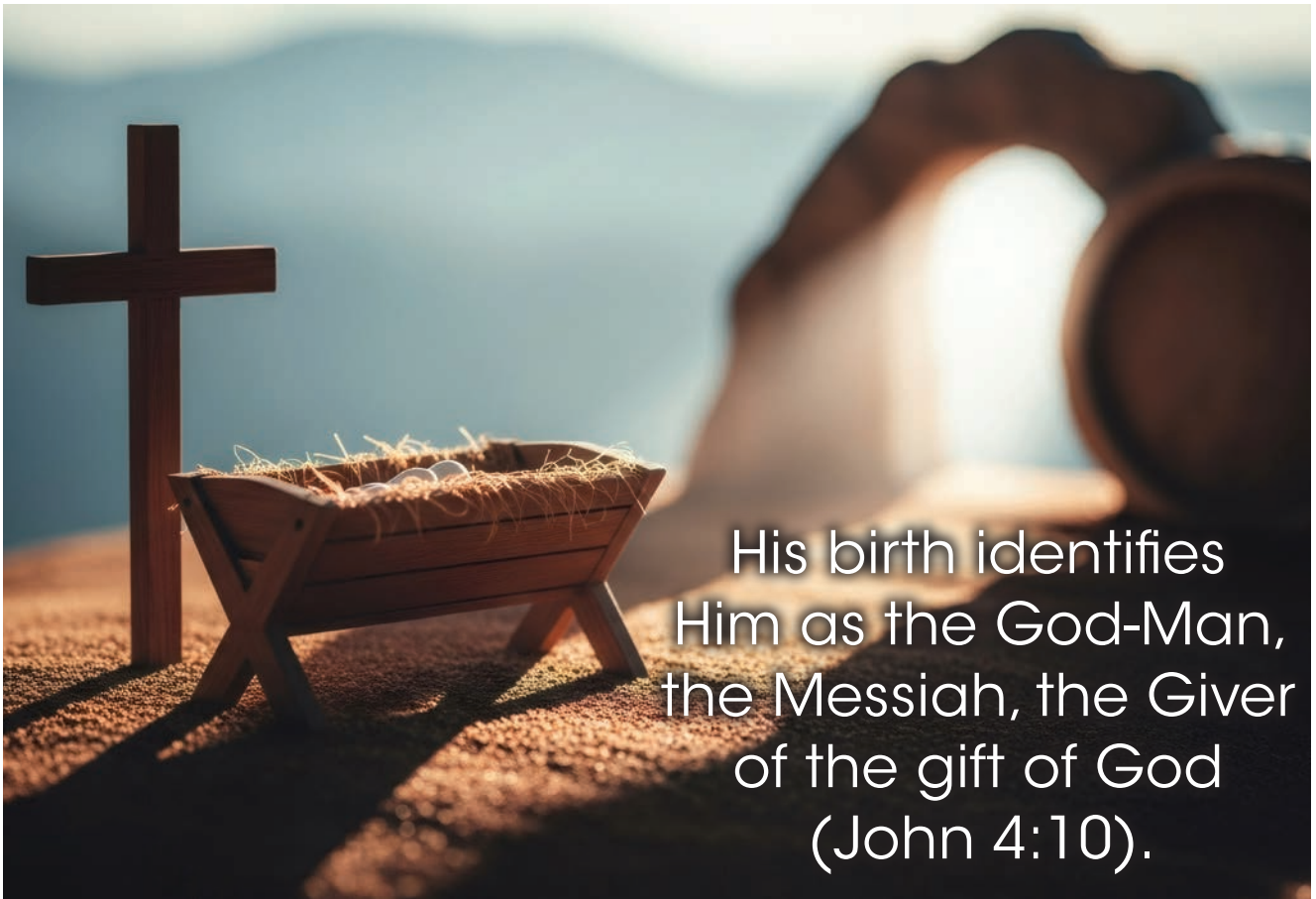
Eternal security
is true whether
a believer
perseveres or not.

CONCLUSION

Calvinism and Arminianism are essentially saying the same thing when it comes to eternal security, or the Preservation of the Saints. They both say that only those who persevere in faith and good works until death will make it into Christ’s kingdom. Since both groups believe you can’t be sure you will persevere, they both live their entire lives uncertain of their eternal destiny. Finding out where you will spend eternity after you die is a bit late to do anything about it. ■



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His birth identifies Him as the God-Man, the Messiah, the Giver of the gift of God (John 4:10).

The Three Greatest Events in History

By Dix Winston, III

According to some, the three most important events in human history are: (1) the mastery of fire, (2) the Neolithic Revolution, and (3) the Industrial Revolution. While these events undoubtedly changed our history, they had no impact on our eternity. To find events that influence eternity, we must look to the Scriptures. In the Bible, we discover three great events that changed not only history but eternity: the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection.

THE FIRST EVENT: THE BIRTH OF CHRIST— HIS INCARNATION

Today, when a child is born, people send birth announcements that describe the baby's gender, height, weight, name, and often include a picture. But did you know that God began sending the Messiah's birth announcement thousands of years before His birth? God the Father announced His Son's arrival through a series of prophetic promises

spanning millennia, providing a “picture” of the Messiah.

History is His-story.

The prophecies begin in Gen 3:15, following Adam and Eve’s sin:

1. The Messiah must be of the seed of Eve: He must be **human**, a **man** (Gen 3:15).
2. He must come through the **lineage of Shem** (Gen 10:1, 21; 11:10), thereby focusing on one familial line following the Flood.
3. He must be of the **seed of Abraham**—**Hebrew**, not Gentile (Gen 12:1-3; 18:18). Abraham’s line would bring blessing to all people.
4. The blessing would pass through **Isaac and Jacob**, not Ishmael or Esau (Gen 17:19; 28:13-15).
5. From Jacob’s twelve sons, God chose **Judah** for the Messianic line (Gen 49:8-10).
6. From Judah, He chose the **line of Jesse** (Isa 11:1-5).
7. From Jesse’s sons, He chose **David** (2 Sam 7:12-16).
8. He must be **born of a virgin** (Isa 7:14)—a unique event in history.
9. The city of His birth was chosen, **Bethlehem** (Micah 5:2).
10. He will be called **Immanuel**, meaning “God with us”—God and man united (Isa 7:14).

How can this be—the God-Man, the Messiah, the uniquely begotten Son? Where in history is such a Child found? In a manger in Bethlehem almost 2,000 years ago. As the beloved Apostle John says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The birth of Christ—the Incarnation—is one of the most important events in history. The second is His death.

THE SECOND EVENT: THE DEATH OF CHRIST— HIS CRUCIFIXION

Just as Christ’s birth was foretold, His death was announced in advance. John the Baptist proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). This is a clear reference to the Passover lamb, which symbolically dealt with Israel’s sins. Jesus, however, would deal with the sin of the entire world.

Christ died because we sinned. It was a debt no mere human being could have covered. We are born spiritually bankrupt, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Zane Hodges brilliantly puts it this way:

The sense of the phrase *the glory of God* must not be separated from Paul’s thought in the immediate context. To sin is to flagrantly miss the lofty moral standard of that glorious righteousness. But by implication, if one is granted *God’s* righteousness, one is raised thereby to a level consistent with His glory. Man’s plight is hopeless unless or until he can receive a righteousness compatible with *the glory of God*.¹

Christ’s death does
not save anyone,
but it makes
everyone savable.

He paid the penalty that we could not. “He Himself is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Christ’s death covered every sin ever committed—past, present, and future. No repentance or sorrow is needed.

This act, known as *reconciliation*, is described in 2 Cor 5:18-19. *The Grace New Testament Commentary* notes: “Reconciliation means that the

God began sending the Messiah’s birth announcement thousands of years before His birth.

enmity between a person and God is removed by Jesus’ death on the cross.”ⁱⁱ Christ’s death does not save anyone, but it makes everyone savable.

This brings us to the last event.

THE THIRD GREAT EVENT: THE RAISING OF CHRIST— HIS RESURRECTION

The third great event is God’s raising Christ from the dead. Jesus openly spoke of His resurrection (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 18:33; 24:7). He staked His message on it. When asked for a sign, He referred to “the sign of Jonah,” meaning that just as Jonah was three days in the fish, Jesus would rise after three days.

Lewis Sperry Chafer gave seven reasons for Jesus’ Resurrection:


(a) because of what or who He is (Acts 2:24), (b) to fulfill prophecy (Acts 2:25-31; Rom. 1:4...), (c) to become the Bestower of life (Rom. 7:4; 1 Cor. 15:45; cf. John 20:22), (d) to impart power (Eph. 1:19-20; cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:4), (e) to be Head over all things to the Church (Eph. 1:22-23), (f) on account of a justification ground being accomplished by His death (Rom. 4:25), and (g) to be the First-Fruits (Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22-23).ⁱⁱⁱ

The Resurrection has been called the “Super Sign.” In raising Jesus, God the Father “declared Him the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness—Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 1:4).

CONCLUSION

History is His-story. All of eternity centers around three crucial events in the life of Christ: His birth, His death, and His resurrection.

These three events confirm that the Messiah was born, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead. Yet simply believing that these events happened will not grant everlasting life.^{iv} They show that salvation is possible and Jesus’ promise is true. To receive everlasting life, one must believe His promise of everlasting life to everyone who believes in Him (John 3:15-16; 5:24; 6:40; 11:25-27).

Fire, the Neolithic Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution are indeed profound events that have impacted our lives. Yet none of them compares to the eternal impact of Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection. 



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ⁱ Zane C. Hodges, “Romans” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), 311.

ⁱⁱ Dwight Hunt, “2 Corinthians” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, 387.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. VII (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 267.

^{iv} His birth identifies Him as the God-Man, the Messiah, the Giver of the gift of God (John 4:10). His death removes the sin barrier and makes everyone savable (John 1:29). And His resurrection verifies that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Giver of everlasting life. By these events, He certifies that all who believe His promise of everlasting life gain it: “This is the promise which He Himself made to us—eternal life” (1 John 2:25).

BELIEVE IN HIM FOR LIFE



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