

**A reply to Bob Wilkin’s review of the book *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2015), which appeared in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 28 (Autumn 2015): 86-91.**

I have had many opportunities over the last several years to do missionary work in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Since I am not fluent in Spanish, I utilize each time translators to communicate the teaching of God’s Word from English to Spanish. In doing so, I have become keenly aware that I am at the mercy of my translator. For though I may have clearly and accurately explained a biblical principle or doctrine, how the audience hears and understands it totally depends upon my translator’s ability and accuracy. Unfortunately, since I do not know Spanish I am ignorant of whether the translation was accurate or not, unless someone else in the audience who knows both English and Spanish can tell me.

In a similar way, the same holds true for a book review. Since many people have not read the book itself, and will actually determine whether they purchase the book based upon the review, the author is somewhat at the mercy of the reviewer. The reviewer may give an accurate representation of the contents of the book, and even though they may disagree with some of the contents, nevertheless, the review is still fair and accurate. On the other hand, a book review may be filled with misrepresentations and inaccuracies. In fact, the reviewer may not have even read carefully the entire book but simply have given it a casual reading at best. Yet, those who do not read the book will never know the truth of the matter—unless they read the book for themselves to discern its accuracy. And unfortunately, there is not a venue in many cases to respond to the misrepresentations and inaccuracies conveyed through the book review in order to set the record straight. This is my estimation of Bob Wilkin’s reviews of several books published by Grace Gospel Press over the last few years, which contain dozens of inaccurate statements and misrepresentations, particularly reviews of the following books:

- *Getting the Gospel Wrong: The Evangelical Crisis No One Is Talking About* by J. B. Hixson (Wilkin reviewed the original edition of this book by another publisher, but his comments on the contents of the book still apply to the revised edition published by Grace Gospel Press)
- *The Gospel of the Christ: A Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith* by Thomas L. Stegall
- *Freely by His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology* by 14 different authors and edited by J. B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire, and Roy B. Zuck
- *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* by Dennis Rokser, Tom Stegall, and Kurt Witzig

In light of this, I have asked Tom Stegall to utilize the venues available to us to allow the readers of Bob Wilkin’s book reviews to decide for themselves the accuracy and fairness of these reviews, and carefully conclude whether we did bad exegesis of the biblical text as he alleges or whether Wilkin did bad exegesis of our book. I pray and hope that you’ll find the following interactions eye-opening, clarifying, and helpful.

— Dennis Rokser

The following is a reply to Bob Wilkin’s review of the book, *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* co-authored by Dennis Rokser, Kurt Witzig, and me. This reply gives over a dozen examples of Wilkin’s claims about our book, followed by our response, consisting mainly of quotations and highlighted segments from our book, with limited editorial comment on our part. This way you can quickly compare what is claimed about the book and what it actually says.

— Tom Stegall

**CLAIM #1:** “Thus they [i.e., the authors] seem to believe that all believers will endure in faith and good works, though at times they deny that.” (Wilkin, p. 88) “It is disturbing that some of the views in this book are exactly the views of Lordship Salvation. All believers are overcomers. . . . While I understand that they are not arguing for Lordship Salvation, their views in places are consistent with Lordship Salvation and people who buy their views may be more open to the Lordship Salvation position.” (Wilkin, p. 90). “I cannot recommend this book. . . . it leads readers in the direction of Lordship Salvation.” (Wilkin, p. 91).

**RESPONSE #1:** This is the first time in any of our lives and ministries that we can recall ever being accused of holding to a pro-Lordship Salvation position (though Wilkin implied this in his review of *The Gospel of the Christ*). Our book frequently quotes and cites other grace-oriented, dispensational authors of the past in support of our interpretations and doctrinal position, men such as C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. Vernon McGee, Charles Ryrie, Robert Lightner, Stanley Toussaint (who taught at the 2012 Grace Evangelical Society National Conference), and others. Have the teachings of these men led people in the direction of Lordship Salvation over the years? Hardly. To show that the views presented in our book (views shared by the godly Bible teachers above) actually oppose Lordship Salvation and are far from being “exactly the views of Lordship Salvation,” read the portions of our book quoted below:

There are essentially four main interpretations today on the identity of the overcomer. The first view holds that an overcomer is one who believes in Christ for justification and perseveres in faith and holiness to the end of life in order to *maintain* eternal salvation. This is the normal Arminian interpretation. Thus, according to the first view, all true believers practically overcome sin, Satan, and the world in their lives and are considered to be overcomers by their faith and good works.

The second view is similar. It also holds that overcomers are true believers whose lives are characterized by a consistent pattern of practical holiness that overcomes sin, Satan, and the world. But this view is distinguished from the first view in the sense that perseverance to the end of one’s life does not maintain salvation but *proves* or *demonstrates* the genuineness of one’s initial faith. This second view is commonly held by adherents of Lordship Salvation and Reformed theology who hold to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. And like the first view, it also concludes that all true believers are overcomers by virtue of their faith and good works with perseverance and good works being the necessary result of salvation by grace through faith.

The third main view of the overcomer is commonly held by those who rightly reject the works-based, perseverance soteriology of the previous two

views. This third interpretation acknowledges that the lives of genuine believers are not always characterized by a consistent, persevering pattern of practical holiness. But this view errs by going on to teach that the overcomers are a “select company” of Christians—only those obedient believers who practically overcome sin, Satan, and the world—in distinction to disobedient, carnal believers. This view disagrees with the previous two views that all believers are overcomers, but it agrees with them that overcomers are believers who persevere to the end of their lives in faith and good works. Historically this third view originated with partial rapturists of the 1800–1900s and it has increasingly been embraced by those in the modern Free Grace movement.

The fourth main view—the view espoused in this chapter—is rarely even acknowledged today by advocates of the first three views. It maintains that all believers in Christ are overcomers not by their practice but by God’s grace and their position in and identification with Christ as the overcoming One. This view has been advocated by the majority of classical, grace-oriented dispensationalists. There are at least a dozen exegetical and theological reasons to support this last view as the correct, biblical view. (pp. 418-19)

But if being an overcomer is a status or reward only for diligent, deserving believers yet to be determined at Christ’s future judgment seat, then how can God already view all believers as overcomers throughout the New Testament? Not only does the Lord already view all believers as overcomers, He even views us as “superovercomers”! According to Romans 8:37, all believers are already considered “superovercomers” or “more than conquerors” (*hypernikōmen*): “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” This status of being a superconqueror or superovercomer is not merited by believers since Romans 8:37 states that we are overcomers “through (*dia*) Him who loved us.” We are superovercomers through Christ who loved us, not through our works. The fact that all believers are overcomers positionally, even if not practically, finds support in the subsequent verses, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus” (vv. 38-39). The reason why every believer is an overcomer is because we are positionally “in (*en*) Christ Jesus” (v. 39) and eternally secure in Him. According to Romans 8:37-39, all believers are overcomers by (*dia*, v. 37) Christ and in (*en*, v. 39) Him. This speaks of the believer’s position in Christ solely because of God’s grace rather than our own merit.

But simply because a believer is an overcomer positionally in Christ (Rom. 8:37) does not mean he or she practically overcomes sin. The book of Romans goes on to teach that a believer can still be overcome practically by evil in his or her earthly life: “Do not be overcome (*nikō*) by evil, but overcome (*nika*) evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). It would be pointless to command believers to “not be overcome by evil” if every believer automatically and necessarily overcame evil in their practical, daily walk, as the Reformed, Lordship Salvation view teaches. A comparison of Romans 8:37-39 with Romans 12:21 demonstrates that all

believers are overcomers (even superovercomers) in position but not necessarily in practice.

First Corinthians 1:2; 3:1-4; and 15:57 also demonstrate that all believers are overcomers positionally in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul explains the spiritual position of the Corinthian Christians, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” These believers were positionally “sanctified in Christ” and literally “called saints.” However, in their present spiritual state or walk, they were anything but saintly, for in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, Paul repeatedly calls them carnal, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal. . . . for you are still carnal. . . . are you not carnal and walking like mere men? . . . are you not carnal?” Yet, despite their evident carnality, the Corinthians were still considered to be spiritual victors, for Paul goes on to write in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57:

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory [*nikos*].” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory [*nikos*]?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory [*nikos*] through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Corinthians were carnal in their present walk with God and even faced the prospect of divine chastening to the point of death for their persistent carnality (1 Cor. 11:28-32). But they were also guaranteed future bodily glorification and victory over sin and death because of Christ’s victory over the grave (1 Cor. 15:57). This is attributable only to the grace of God, not the believer’s own worthiness, dedication, and good works.

Taken together, these passages in Romans and 1 Corinthians demonstrate that “every church saint is an overcomer in standing even if not in practice.” These passages by themselves refute the entire Lordship Salvation, perseverance-of-the-saints position, which teaches that all believers are overcomers both positionally in Christ and practically in daily life. (pp. 423-24)

A second reason why the “overcomer” is simply a “believer” is that the grammatical form of the phrase “he who overcomes” (*ho nikōn*) functions as a person’s title without necessarily describing that person’s continual pattern of life. Just as a person may forever be known negatively as a “murderer” for a one-time act of murder or positively as a “benefactor” for a one-time donation, so the New Testament uses “overcomer” for the “believer” to refer to those who place their faith in Christ at a point in time and are born again (1 John 5:1-5).

However, many interpreters still wrongly assume that the present tense, articular participle *ho nikōn* indicates a pattern of life in which the believer experiences continual, practical victory over sin. The present tense is often

misinterpreted as indicating the participle's *Aktionsart* or kind of action, namely, that it is continual. James Rosscup holds this view, explaining,

[1 John 5:5] goes on to utilize present tenses, quite plausibly customary or iterative presents, to denote the general overall pattern of overcoming for the Christian who believes in an ongoing sense (v 1, *pisteuō*, present tense) that Jesus is the Son of God. Later, in Revelation 2–3, “he who overcomes” is virtually the same as “he who believes.” As Robertson says: “. . . *nikaō* [is] a common Johannine verb. . . . Faith is dominant in Paul, victory in John, faith is victory (1 John 5:4).” John also uses the present tense of *nikaō* in Revelation 2–3, suggesting that continuing victory is characteristic of the saved just as continuing faith is (1 John 5:1).

But do present tense participles with definite articles necessarily indicate a pattern of action that is “continuing”? Such a conclusion represents a fundamental misunderstanding of Greek tenses, which do not inherently signify *kind* of action (*Aktionsart*) but verbal *aspect*, which expresses either proximity (e.g., present tense) or remoteness (e.g., aorist tense) to an action as subjectively portrayed by the writer. In Greek, the present tense, articular participle is commonly used as an atemporal, substantival noun or descriptive title, so that a phrase such as “he who believes” (*ho pisteuōn*) simply means “the believer,” without denoting anything about the nature of believing or its duration. (pp. 425-26)

In the last example from John 11:25-27, the phrase “he who believes” occurs twice and is a significant Johannine parallel construction to “he who overcomes” (*ho nikōn*). John frequently uses the same grammatical construction for “he who believes” or “whoever believes” (*ho pisteuōn*). (See John 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 7:38; 11:25, 26; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 1 John 5:1, 5, 10.) In answer to the Lordship Salvation position, advocates of Free Grace theology often note that this grammatical construction does not indicate ongoing, persevering belief. Instead, it functions timelessly as a substantival noun, describing one who either has believed in the past, or who believes in the present, or who will believe in the future.

Nor does this construction describe the kind of action as either linear (continual) or punctiliar (momentary). Thus, it is very inconsistent for Free Grace proponents to argue that the Johannine construction “he who believes” (*ho pisteuōn*) does not denote continual, persevering faith and good works, while simultaneously claiming that the exact same grammatical construction, “he who overcomes” (*ho nikōn*), refers to present, ongoing, practical victory.

There is no evidence, whether grammatical, lexical, or contextual, proving that the phrase “he who overcomes” (*ho nikōn*) in Revelation 2–3 refers to continual, practical victory over sin as a Christian. Instead, the Bible teaches that the moment a person fulfills the one condition for being an overcomer, namely, believing in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:4-5), that person is viewed by God as being positionally in Christ (Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 1:2; 15:57), the victorious One, even if

that believer does not thereafter walk in practical victory over sin (Rom. 12:21; 1 Cor. 3:1-4). (pp. 430-31)

An eighth reason why all believers are overcomers in Revelation 2–3 is because the language and syntax of overcomer verses **do not establish that doing good works is inherent to being an overcomer.** A few key overcomer references, such as Revelation 2:26, 3:4-5, and 12:11, are often cited as proof texts to support the idea that all overcomers are persevering, obedient believers. (451) (We go on to show exegetically on pp. 451-61 why Revelation 2:26; 3:4-5; and 12:11 really do not support the overcomer = persevering, obedient believer view.)

Regarding Revelation 2:26 (“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations”), we write:

However, there is nothing contextually or grammatically, including the presence of the conjunction *kai* (“and”), that requires “he who overcomes” (*ho nikōn*) and “[he who] keeps” (*ho tērōn*) to be synonymous or inseparable concepts. **What this passage is teaching is that a person must first be an overcomer/believer (one who possesses eternal life), and second, he must persevere in good works (to receive a reward).** This appears to correspond well with the promises in the passage. To the one who is an overcomer/believer, he will receive the promise of reigning with Christ (v. 27). **In addition, if he fulfills a second condition, namely, perseverance in good works, he will receive the reward of the morning star (v. 28).** (p. 452)

There are only three constructions in the entire New Testament that are syntactically parallel to Revelation 2:26. These three examples demonstrate that an article preceding each participle of the same tense, case, gender, and number, separated by *kai*, does not make equal or exegetical the two entities described by the participles or the two activities of the participles. This means that **there are no examples in the New Testament to support the conclusion that the two acts of overcoming and keeping/persevering are equivalent to one another or that overcoming is parenthetically modified and defined by keeping Christ’s works to the end.** Rather, the three parallel examples from Mark’s Gospel demonstrate just the opposite, namely, that the two participles separated by *kai* are distinct from one another. The second articular participle does not necessarily follow the first, just like **the one who keeps Christ’s works to the end does not necessarily follow being an overcomer.** (pp. 456-57)

**CLAIM #2:** “The main points of this book are clear enough, though it takes a lot of reading to get down to them. They include: . . . all believers will hear, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ (e.g., p. 481).” (Wilkin, pp. 86-87). “It is disturbing that some of the views in this book are exactly the views of Lordship Salvation. All believers are overcomers. All believers will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Wilkin, p. 90)

**RESPONSE #2:** Nowhere in the book does it actually say that all believers are considered faithful and will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The following quotation is from page 481 of the book, the page Wilkin references to claim that our book supposedly teaches that all believers will hear Christ say to them at the Bema, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This quote on page 481 comes from the personal testimony of Vince Cullen, which is an appendix to the rest of the book. As you read the statement about “Well done, good and faithful servant,” note the context in which it occurs:

Our church’s new doctrinal position on rewards ultimately led me down a steep path of increasing legalism. The driving force and motivation for the Christian walk became the threat that, unless we were ultra-holy, we would be excluded from the Millennial Kingdom, cast into outer darkness with great emotional regret and weeping for 1,000 years, and we would lose the reward of being married to Christ as His bride, and ultimately be excluded from entering into the Holy City—the New Jerusalem. This type of legalism always leads to despair. With this theology, one always has to wonder if he is doing enough to gain these supposed “rewards” and hear “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . enter into the *joy* of the Lord” (Matt. 25:23). I always wondered if I would make it, if I would hear those words and have such joy. I knew in my heart that I was not always walking faithfully; after all, Christ was 100-percent righteous and holy, and He Himself was the standard of judgment. Who was I by comparison? Even though I knew I was God’s child, I also knew deep down that compared to Christ’s holiness, I was probably doomed. (Testimony of Vince Cullen, p. 481)

In its context, the reference to Matthew 25:23 above never says what Wilkin attributes to Cullen (and the authors of the rest of the book), namely, that all believers are faithful. The context of Cullen’s quotation of Matthew 25:23 shows that he is saying that he was formerly taught that the standard for hearing Christ’s words “Well done, good and faithful servant” was a legalistic, ultra-holiness, that was virtually unattainable since he fell far short of Christ’s 100-percent righteousness and holiness. Now, he no longer fears living up to this “ultra-holy,” legalistic standard in order to hear the Lord say one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This is a far cry from claiming that every believer is faithful and will hear Christ say this, as the Lordship Salvation view maintains. In fact, our book teaches just the opposite. Consider these quotes:

The Scriptures make very clear that the outcome of the Judgment Seat of Christ will be a reward for the faithful Christian or the loss of a reward that the unfaithful believer could have received, but never condemnation or punishment.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. (1 Cor. 3:11-15)

What are the possible outcomes from this divine evaluation of Church-age believers?

Option #1: If anyone's work which he has built on the foundation of Christ endures, *he will receive a reward*.

Option #2: If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss [of reward]; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

First Corinthians 3:10-15 is a parallel passage to 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, where Paul uses the imagery of athletic contests in the context of gaining a reward. Thus, he likely has in mind in chapter 3 the analogy of the Corinthian Games, which were similar to our present-day Olympic Games. We have all watched the reward ceremony at the winter or summer Olympics. The gold-, silver-, and bronze-medal winners stand on a platform and are rewarded for winning or placing in their event, and others failed to receive a reward or medal. This is the "reward" or "no reward" concept Paul has in mind regarding the outcome at the Judgment Seat of Christ. (p. 49)

Again we see that this judgment [in Matthew 25:31-46] involves either believers (sheep) or unbelievers (goats), not a threefold distinction of unbelievers, spiritual believers, or carnal believers like in 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4. We have repeatedly observed throughout Matthew this distinction between the truly righteous versus the religious hypocrites, and now we see it again in the sheep and goat judgment. This important observation should factor into one's interpretation of these parables in Matthew 24-25, for the contrast being highlighted by our Lord is not between faithful versus unfaithful believers, or rewarded versus unrewarded believers, which is what will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ for Church-age believers (1 Cor. 3:13-14). Instead, the contrast throughout Matthew is between believers versus unbelievers, righteous versus hypocrites, prepared versus unprepared, for which final judgment will occur when Christ returns to earth to establish His everlasting Kingdom. (p. 142)

Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians give special emphasis to Christ's future judgment of believers to determine eternal rewards for good deeds (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:1-5; 9:24-27). To these same readers Paul makes specific reference to the bema of Christ (2 Cor. 5:9-10). Paul also refers repeatedly in his writings, and particularly in 1 Corinthians 9, to the athletic games of his day. Since the Isthmian games were hosted biennially just outside the city of Corinth, Paul readily employed the motif of athletics current in his day to convey several spiritual principles to his readers. These included running the race of the Christian life in order to obtain a prize (1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:14), and the need for faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2), discipline, following the rules (1 Cor. 9:25-27; 2 Tim. 2:5), and perseverance to the end (1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul also vividly portrayed



the possibility of an athlete being disqualified and thereby failing to earn a reward in the form of a crown or prize (1 Cor. 3:15; 9:27). (p. 178)

Is there anything that can motivate the Christian from the negative side? Yes, instead of punishment, there is shame. Shame is the feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior. It includes dishonor. That a Christian can experience shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ is evident in 1 John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at His coming.” This is not something that Jesus Christ scoldingly rubs our noses in. It is something that is internally realized as you stand before your God, knowing you squandered many opportunities to know Him better and to walk with Him. Though your sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west, you are fully aware of how you ignored Him many times in your life. **Not only could you have shame but you also could receive no reward. The absence of a reward would rightly correspond to your unfaithful life.** (p. 402)

**CLAIM #3:** “The authors assert, ‘All believers will reign with Christ in the Kingdom (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4, 6; 22:5)’ (p. 200). A bit later they add, ‘Faithful believers can also expect to receive from Christ diverse positions of privileged service and rulership in the Kingdom (Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4, 5; 22:3, 5)’ (p. 220). Since all believers will reign and they say only faithful believers will reign, they clearly believe that all believers are faithful believers to some degree (though see pp. 55-57 and pp. 223-26, which seem to contradict the idea that all believers will rule and will be found faithful).” (Wilkin, p. 87)

**RESPONSE #3:** Wilkin does not seem to understand, or perhaps accept, our view which distinguishes the fact of reigning (as a grace-blessing to all church-age believers) from potentially greater degrees of that reign (as a reward for faithful believers). According to our view, all believers (including carnal, unfaithful ones like the Corinthians) will still reign with Christ in the Kingdom based on their position in Him as His corporate bride and because of God’s unmerited favor, not because of their own worthiness. Yet, as we also explain in the book, there are degrees of faithfulness to Christ among believers (starting with no faithfulness), and thus there will be varying degrees of reward in the form of greater positions of service and rulership in the Kingdom. There is no need to see in this some sort of inherent contradiction—that we supposedly “clearly believe that all believers are faithful believers to some degree” or that we are really saying that there is no such thing as an unfaithful believer. We do not hold that all believers will reign with Christ in the Kingdom *as a reward* supposedly because all believers are faithful. Rather, our book teaches that all believers (including the unfaithful Corinthians) will reign with Christ, but among believers there will be varying degrees of reign corresponding to the degree to which each was faithful to the Lord. The following quotes make this clear:

**Though all who possess salvation will enter the Kingdom, not all will enter it “abundantly” (*plousiōs*) or richly (2 Peter 1:11). According to 2 Peter 1:5, believers who “add” (*epichorēgēsate*) or supply in their faith the positive character traits listed in verses 5-7 will also be “supplied” (*epichorēgēthēsetai*) an**

entrance by God “abundantly” into His eternal kingdom (v. 11). Faith alone results in entrance into the Kingdom, but adding to one’s faith will result in an entrance coupled with great reward. All believers one day will graduate to Heaven, but some will graduate with honors. Though all believers will reign with Christ in the Kingdom (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4, 6; 22:5), one’s faithfulness as a servant of Christ in this earthly life will determine the degree of reward and privileged service in the Kingdom. (pp. 199-200)

Just as faith without works in the Christian life is “dead faith” (James 2:14-26), so works done without faith are “dead works” (Heb. 9:14). When the believer walks with the Lord in yielded dependence on Him in light of his position in Christ (Rom. 6:11-13), the result is the filling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4; 15:13) for the ability to do truly Christ-honoring good deeds that will be rewarded. Without the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, the believer’s works have no eternal value (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Phil. 1:14-18). “The gold, silver and precious stones are the fruit of the Spirit; the wood, hay and stubble are the works of the flesh.”

Since God sees behind the action to the inner motives and counsels of the heart, truly good works that will merit reward must begin inside the believer and flow outward to his actions. For this reason, the overriding criterion at the Judgment Seat will be the believer’s faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Christ will be looking first of all for a walk of faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:35) that results in Spirit-wrought works. This explains why the word “faithful” recurs in various rewards passages (Matt. 24:25; 25:21; Luke 16:10-12; 19:17; Rev. 2:10). There will also be the internal criteria of each believer’s varying knowledge of God’s Word and will (Luke 12:48; James 3:1; 2 John 7) and the opportunities he has had to serve the Lord (2 Cor. 8:12; Gal. 6:9-10). Scripture reveals that, if the preceding inward factors are true, the Lord Jesus will also bestow rewards for a variety of good works, including . . . Perseverance in trials, persecution (Matt. 5:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 10:34-36; James 1:12); sound doctrine (2 John 7-8).” (pp. 217-18)

If a believer’s works are determined to be truly “good” by the Lord at the Bema, what kind of reward can he expect? Rewards in Scripture can be viewed broadly in two categories—the crown rewards and the non-crown rewards. A great variety of rewards will be awaiting faithful believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ. These will come in the form of praise from God (Matt. 25:21, 23; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Peter 1:7), honor (John 12:26; 1 Peter 1:7), and glory (Matt. 13:43; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Peter 1:7; 5:4). God also promises believers an abundant entrance into Christ’s kingdom (2 Peter 1:5-11) if they have added to their faith a godly character and good works. In addition, believers who were poor on earth but rich in good works will have great treasure in store for them in Heaven (Matt. 6:19-21; Heb. 10:34-35) and a great inheritance with Christ (Matt. 5:5; Heb. 6:12; 11:8-9; 12:17). If this were not enough, faithful believers can also expect to receive from Christ diverse positions of privileged service and rulership in the

Kingdom (Matt. 19:28; 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17, 19; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4, 6; 22:3, 5). (pp. 219-20)

Scripture teaches that all believers, regardless of their walk, will reign with Christ in some capacity by virtue of being positionally in Christ and being His corporate bride (1 Cor. 3:1-4, 21-23; 4:8; 6:2-3; Rev. 3:21; 19:7-9). But the promise of Revelation 2:28, “and I will give to him the morning star,” although somewhat enigmatic and subject to various interpretations, seems to promise something additional to salvation. Since Revelation 22:16 explicitly states that the morning star is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, it seems best to follow this same interpretation in 2:28. Other passages confirm this interpretation (Num. 24:17; Mal. 4:2; 2 Peter 1:19). But this raises an important question. If every believer already has Christ (1 John 5:12a), yet in Revelation 2:28 Christ promises that He “will give” (in the future) persevering overcomers/believers the morning star (i.e., Himself), in what sense will He give Himself to believers if they already have Him? He promises in Revelation 2:26-28 that He will give Himself as the bright morning star in a special way, as a reward, to persevering, deserving believers. (This is similar to the twofold promise of Revelation 3:4-5 explained below.) To the believer who seeks to glorify Christ through an abiding walk of personal intimacy with his Savior and perseverance in faith and good works, Christ will reward that believer with a special reflection of His own glory—with an increased capacity to glorify the Lord (Dan. 12:3; 1 Cor. 15:41-42; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16-18)—a capacity that reflects the degree to which that believer sought to glorify the Lord in his earthly life. In this sense, although the believer already has Christ (1 John 5:12a), Christ also promises Himself to the abiding, obedient believer as a reward (Rev. 2:28). (pp. 452-53)

**CLAIM #4:** “The relation of the shed blood of Christ and the cross of Christ to the Bema receives almost no attention (only on p. 47 when they discuss 2 Cor 5:14), though it is clearly a vital Bema issue in passages like Rom 8:31-39; 1 Cor 11:17-34; 15:1-11; 2 Cor 5:14; Heb 10:1-39; 1 John 3:16; and many other texts. Note: the death of Christ is briefly considered in relation to redemption on pp. 269-95, but not in relation to the Bema.” (Wilkin, p. 88)

**RESPONSE #4:** Wilkin gives the impression that several passages about the death of Christ are not dealt with in the book in relationship to the Bema when, in fact, they are. For Romans 8:33-39, see pp. 125-26, 225, 421, and 423. For 1 Corinthians 11:20-34, see pp. 42-44, 232, 284-85, 379-81, 424, and 462. Hebrews 10 is dealt with on many pages, but especially pages 366-72.

Furthermore, Wilkin ignores the fact that 2 Corinthians 5:14 is also used throughout the book in reference to Christ’s sacrificial love being a primary motivation for serving Him now in light of the Bema (pp. 58; 288; 340; 416; 476). It is simply false to claim that the death of Christ is not dealt with in relation to the Bema anywhere in the book except p. 47. Pages 26-31 cover this very topic under the heading, “The Propitiatory Sacrifice of Christ.” These pages are too long to cite here in full, but the opening paragraph of this section quotes Romans 3:23-25 and says, “The scriptural truth of propitiation underscores for us the blessed reality that God’s holy wrath and just demands against all our sins were satisfactorily met and fully paid through the

redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This Godward aspect of the death of Christ was “by His blood”—the sacrificial death of Christ at Calvary.” (p. 26) This is discussed directly in relation to the Bema, as pages 27-28 go on to say, “Now if the unbeliever’s sins do not ultimately condemn him to Hell (only his rejection of the Savior does through unbelief), how can the sins of the believer ultimately condemn him, either in this life or at the Judgment Seat of Christ? They can’t. Does the possibility of punitive damages for the believer in Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ harmonize with the truth of the Gospel and the propitiatory work of Jesus Christ? No, it insults it. Dear believer in Christ, must there be a double payment or punishment for our sins—one by Christ on the cross, and then another by you and me at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Are Christ’s words in John 19:30, “It is finished,” true or not? Or must our sins be paid for twice? No, no, no—a thousand times—NO! *Tetelestai!*”

In addition, pages 252-67 explain how Christ’s propitiatory death delivers believers from all of God’s wrath and condemnation, including any ostensible wrath at the Bema. This is why we conclude on pages 263-64:

All of this exposes the central problem with today’s punitive judgment of believers’ view, namely, that it diminishes the accomplishment of Christ’s propitiatory work. Biblically, Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross is applicable to all sin and its wages. This means that complete satisfaction for sin is found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ and is *not* found in, or the result of, any work or deeds done by believers. Even a martyr’s death cannot make God any more “satisfied” with respect to the penalty of sin than He already is with His Son’s death. Thus, neither suffering in this life, nor physical death, nor punishment in outer darkness, nor purgatory, can possibly achieve further propitiation for believers beyond what Jesus Christ has already accomplished.

**CLAIM #5:** “The main points of this book are clear enough. . . . They include: . . . the only negative consequences at the Bema will be shame and loss of reward, which the authors regard as something to be avoided, but not something to be concerned about” (Wilkin, pp. 86-87)

**RESPONSE #5:** We neither say nor imply that shame and loss of reward at the Bema is “not something to be concerned about.” Once again, we say just the opposite.

Yet, amazingly, the King of kings now fixes His majestic gaze on you and concerns Himself not with His own work for you but with the works you have done for Him. The scope of your entire Christian life on earth comes under the searching judgment of His perfect and exhaustive knowledge. Your every thought, word, and deed done in His name is put to the test and turned inside-out so that its true spiritual quality is revealed. He exposes many of your deeds as having emanated from a sinful, stubborn, self-reliant, and self-glorifying heart. They are deemed utterly worthless and consumed by the flames, incinerated, and lost forever as opportunities to glorify Him. You are overcome with a sense of shame before the presence of your Lord and Savior as you realize what a great, permanent loss has just occurred. (pp. 171-72)

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a vital teaching of the New Testament and for every believer's Christian life. The Bible is clear that eternal life is a free gift from God given to all who place their faith in His Son Jesus Christ and His work alone rather than their own human goodness and achievements. But with such a free salvation, the question naturally arises, what role do good works have in the Christian life? If salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then what difference does it make how a believer lives his life after he receives the gift of eternal life? If believers are guaranteed deliverance from Hell to Heaven, why not indulge in selfish, sinful living now? Why should believers serve God rather than themselves?

The biblical truth of the approaching judgment seat of Christ provides a powerful impetus for godly living in the lives of all true believers in Jesus Christ. God places such a premium on the lives and good works of Christians that He has reserved a special day of judgment, accounting, and recognition for them. There is an awesome moment coming when believers' lives will be thoroughly and minutely examined by the Lord to determine the kind and degree of reward each one will receive based on the quality of the works done for Him after each believer was born again. The evaluation made by Christ on that day will be absolute, unchangeable, and eternal. For believers seeking to reverse course and change how they lived their earthly lives, it will be too late. And for those who have served Christ at great personal cost, every faithful deed will be richly rewarded by the God of all grace. Thus it pays to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ now and later. (p. 172)

Knowing who the Judge will be at the Bema, and who the recipients of this judgment will be, and when and where this judgment will take place, and what the nature of this judgment will entail, all constitute the basic facts God wants every believer in Jesus Christ to know and anticipate. May the reality of Jesus Christ's imminent coming for His Church and the Bema to follow have a truly life-transforming effect upon every Christian reading this book. (p. 188)

**CLAIM #6:** *"It is also odd that nowhere in the book do they clearly lay out what one must believe to be born again. In another work Stegall lays out five essentials that one must believe. Yet those five essentials are not laid out anywhere in this work. The closest they come is by giving one essential, saying that 'entrance into the Kingdom' is gained 'through faith alone in Christ's finished work' (p. 201; see also pp. 44, 189, 194)." (Wilkin, 89, emphasis original)*

**RESPONSE #6:** First, the book under review (*Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?*) deals primarily with eschatology and the Christian life. Soteriology also plays a significant role when considering the nature of God's future judgment of believers at the Bema, and this includes such soteriological subjects as the propitiatory death of Christ, the nature of God's saving grace, the believer's positional sanctification, and so forth. But the particular soteriological question about the contents of saving faith is normally not even considered when it comes to the topic of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Nevertheless, even this subject is directly addressed in the book as subsequent quotes from the book below will show.

Second, the subject of what one must believe in order to receive eternal life has already been thoroughly treated in a previous Grace Gospel Press book of over 800 pages. See Tom Stegall's book, *The Gospel of the Christ: A Biblical Reply to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith*, which is available free online as a downloadable pdf at: [www.duluthbible.org/filerequest/11863](http://www.duluthbible.org/filerequest/11863). This book summarizes what a lost, unregenerate person must believe to receive eternal life. Two sample statements are provided below:

There is a definite correspondence in Scripture between the grounds of our redemption, the elements of the gospel of Christ, and the meaning of Jesus being "the Christ" in John's Gospel and many other evangelistic passages in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts. This cord of three strands testifies harmoniously to the truth that the content of saving faith consists of Jesus Christ's deity, humanity, death for sin, resurrection, and God's gift of salvation solely by grace through faith in Him. (Stegall, *Gospel of the Christ*, 288).

A person must simply believe the gospel of Christ, which is the message that, as "*the Christ, the Son of God*," Jesus is both God and man, and the One who died for all our sins and rose from the dead in order to provide salvation by grace through faith in Him (John 3:13-18; 5:24; 6:32-53; 8:24, 28; 20:30-31; Acts 16:30-31; 1 Cor. 1:17-21; 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:6-10). (ibid., 17)

In contrast to these "five essentials," Wilkin and many members of the Grace Evangelical Society teach that a lost, unregenerate person does not need to believe in Jesus Christ's deity, death for sin, or resurrection in order to be born again. Instead, they say someone needs only to believe in three elements—the name "Jesus," eternal life, and believing. This is thoroughly documented in the book, *The Gospel of the Christ*. But Wilkin claims with respect to *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* that only "one essential" is stated in the book. This is also inaccurate as the following quotes demonstrate:

The fact that God so loved the world and Christ died for all makes everyone savable. But it is only the one who "believes in Him" who actually receives the promise that he or she "should not perish" but instead "have everlasting life." Since Christ paid for all sin and God the Father is already satisfied with the substitutionary work of His Son, the issue today before the unbeliever is not ultimately the "sin" question, but the "Son" question; namely, what do you believe about Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He is God who became a man (1 Tim. 3:16)? Do you believe that He died as the substitutionary sacrifice for your sins and then rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3-4)? Are you willing to trust in Him and His propitiatory work alone, rather than your own good works, for eternal life (Eph. 2:8-9)? There are only two options before every person in this world:

Option #1: He who believes in Him is not condemned but has been saved and presently possesses eternal life forever.

Option #2: He who does not believe in Christ is condemned already.

In the latter case, why does God consider someone already “condemned”? Is it because Christ did not die for them? No. Is it because God does not love them? No. Is it because God does not want to save them? No. Is it because their sins are too great or too many? No. Is it because they are beyond the outstretched hand and forgiveness of God? No. God’s reason is plainly stated: it is “because he *has not believed* in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” So which of these two options describe you? Are you saved or do you stand already condemned in the sight of God? Do you have everlasting life or will you perish one day? **Have you ever simply put your trust in Jesus Christ alone who died for you and arose again?** Dear reader, whether or not you have believed in Christ for your eternal life is the bottom-line issue and million-dollar question that will determine where you spend eternity.

Now if the unbeliever’s sins do not ultimately condemn him to Hell (only his rejection of the Savior does through unbelief), how can the sins of the believer ultimately condemn him, either in this life or at the Judgment Seat of Christ? They can’t. (p. 27)

Besides the imbalanced views of limited atonement regarding propitiation, another imbalance has developed within the Free Grace movement **related to sin and Christ’s work in the content of the saving message.** It is quite typical today to hear reasoning that sounds something like this: “Since God is now satisfied with Christ’s death for all sin and the sin barrier between God and man has been removed, this means that the only real issue facing the unregenerate is one of life, which they can receive simply by believing in Jesus for everlasting life, without even needing to know about sin or the death of Christ which resolved their sin problem.” This view is reflected in the following statements by leading Free Grace teachers:

Jesus Christ in His role as Mediator bestows everlasting life on the believer, thus introducing him/her to God. God in response accepts the believing person and pronounces him/her justified. The issue is not believing in the payment for sin but believing in Jesus Christ for the free gift of everlasting life based on Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.

It is an insult to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross to make our sins the issue in evangelism. In light of the fact that Jesus has taken away the sin barrier by His death on the cross, all who merely believe in Him have everlasting life.

The first statement contains a false dichotomy by claiming that the “issue is not believing in the payment for sin but believing in Jesus Christ.” **Although Christ removed the sin barrier between God and man, does this necessarily mean belief in Christ as the Sin-bearer is no longer required for regeneration? Since Christ personally *is* our propitiation, and He presently *is* (not just *was*) the risen, crucified**

Lamb of God (John 20:24-31; Rev. 5:6), it is not possible to separate belief in His person from belief in His finished work, for “the person and work of Jesus interpenetrate.” This is why in the New Testament following Christ’s death, He is routinely referred to as “Christ crucified” (Matt. 28:5; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1; Rev. 5:6, 12), using the Greek perfect tense in each case to show that He not only *was* crucified but He *remains* the Crucified One. To believe in the person of Christ for eternal life is to believe in no One less than the crucified, living Savior. These facts also explain why many passages explicitly require for eternal salvation belief in Christ’s work or the Gospel message about His finished work (John 6:51-53; Acts 13:41; Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:17-21; 4:15; 15:1-11; Eph. 1:13; 2 Thess. 1:8-10 cf. Acts 17:1-5).

The second quotation above about sin and the sin barrier also assumes that since Christ’s death satisfied God’s wrath toward sin, unbelievers no longer even need to know about sin in order to believe in Jesus for everlasting life. While it is true that believing in Christ rather than turning from sin is *the* sole condition for eternal life, this does not mean that knowledge of sin is extraneous to belief in Christ as one’s Savior or Guarantor of eternal life. Commenting on the statement that it is an “insult to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross to make our sins the issue in evangelism,” Michael Stallard offers this fair and balanced response regarding the implications of this statement:

The writer seems to tie this to the thought that because sin is no longer a barrier to anyone (on account of Christ’s work), then all one has to do is merely believe in Him to have everlasting life. However, the absolutist nature of the statement must be rejected. True, one’s sins are not *the* issue. Nonetheless God Himself makes sins *an* issue on the cross. That is the point of Jesus’ work. There is nothing wrong with communicating that fact when presenting the gospel.

Lewis Sperry Chafer was a strong proponent of God’s free grace for salvation in all three tenses—justification, sanctification, and glorification. He understood clearly that neither the freeness of God’s grace nor the satisfactory work of Christ nullified the necessity for sinners to know about their sin and the Savior’s propitiatory death. He certainly did not believe in a sinless, crossless saving message, as demonstrated by what he wrote on the subject:

The conclusion from these revelations is that by the cross God has declared our sin, His own righteousness and His own unmeasured love. He has spoken to us through His Son. The reasonable requirement is that we believe that message. This is the only condition given in the Bible on which one may enter into God’s saving grace.

The Bible teaches that both eternal life (John 1:4; 5:26; 14:6; 20:31; 1 John 5:11) and the propitiation of God’s wrath (1 John 2:2; 4:10) are in the Son. But just



because these salvation blessings have already been procured for believers and are now located positionally in Christ does not make them somehow unnecessary for the lost to know and believe to be eternally saved. It would be wrong to reason that since Christ's death procured eternal life for the unregenerate, therefore eternal life must not be the issue in evangelism and that the unregenerate no longer even need to know about it or believe in it. Similarly, it is a fallacy to reason that since Christ's death provided satisfaction for sin, sin and propitiation must not be the issue in evangelism and the unregenerate no longer even need to know about these truths or believe them to be born again. (pp. 282-84)

**CLAIM #7:** "The key arguments that show that those cast into the outer darkness are believers were not mentioned or discussed in this book. For example, the expression, 'the sons of the kingdom' only occurs twice in Matthew, once in Matt 8:12, 'the sons of the kingdom will be cast into the outer darkness,' and once in Matt 13:38, 'the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom,' that is, 'the righteous who will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (Matt 13:43). If in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares the sons of the kingdom are believers, why are the sons of the kingdom unbelievers in the only other use in Matthew? In two short sentences they say, without defense or explanation, that while in Matt 8:12 the expression 'the sons of the kingdom' refers to unbelievers, in Matt 13:38 it refers to believers (p. 100)." (Wilkin, 89)

**RESPONSE #7:** In response, it should first be noted that two occurrences of a phrase in Matthew's Gospel is hardly a sufficient sample size to claim that the "sons of the kingdom" must have the same meaning each time it occurs in a book as long as Matthew. Sound hermeneutics requires that each usage be interpreted by its context, which our book does. Second, Wilkin rightly states that our book concludes that "the sons of the kingdom" in Matthew 8:12 refer to Jewish unbelievers while in Matthew 13:38 they refer to believers, but he wrongly says we conclude this "without defense or explanation." In fact, the reasons for making this conclusion are stated clearly on pages 99-101. One reason given comes from the parallel passage to Matthew 8:12 in Luke 13:27-29, where Jesus says He does not know those who are thrust out of the Kingdom, which the Lord would never say to one who is a child of God (as was previously explained on pp. 78-79). The book states on page 99:

This conclusion regarding entire millennial exclusion is reinforced by Christ's teaching in a parallel passage in Luke 13:

27 But He will say, "I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity." 28 *There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets *in the kingdom of God*, and *yourselves thrust out*. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. (Luke 13:27-29)

In addition, the book states that there is a difference between the Matthew 8:12 use of “the sons of the kingdom” and the Matthew 13:38 use based on each context. This is hardly the “two short sentences . . . without defense or explanation” that Wilkin claims. Pages 100-101 say:

The historical context involves Jesus Christ’s teaching of the parables of the Kingdom after the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the offer of the setting up of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth no longer being “at hand.” Christ explains to His disciples that the setting up of His Kingdom on earth will be delayed till the end of the age. In the meantime, the good seeds and the tares will exist together till He returns and His angels are used to separate the wheat from the tares. Who are these referring to? The Lord makes their identification abundantly clear.

The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom [believing Jews], but the tares are the sons of the wicked one [unsaved]. (Matt. 13:38)

Jesus Christ identified “the sons of the kingdom” in Matthew 8:12 as the original people group to whom were offered the Kingdom of Heaven, namely the nation of Israel. But unlike Matthew 8, the “good” “sons of the kingdom” in this passage are contrasted with the “bad” “sons of the wicked one,” who is the Devil (13:39).

Furthermore, the “sons of the kingdom” are described as “the righteous” who will “shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (13:43) in contrast to those who will be “cast . . . into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (13:42). Again it is clear that those who will experience wailing and gnashing of teeth are *unbelievers* or the *unrighteous*, not believers or the righteous.

In addition, the result of their faith versus unbelief is not a simple contrast between entering the wedding feast or not, but entrance at all into the future Kingdom of God versus “the furnace of fire,” which appears to be a clear reference to Hell. Who are gathered by the angels of God and burned like chaff in the furnace of fire at the end of the age—unbelievers or unfaithful believers? *Unbelievers* or the *unrighteous*—not unfaithful believers! For all believers have been “born again” (John 3:3, 5) through faith in Jesus Christ alone (John 3:15-16) and have the imputed, divine righteousness (Matt. 5:20; 2 Cor. 5:21) needed to enter the future Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven.

**CLAIM #8:** “The authors say that the third servant in the Parable of Talents is sent to eternal condemnation. Yet they do not explain how it is that the third servant was a servant of Christ in this life and that he had been given a stewardship by the Lord and yet he was unregenerate.” (Wilkin, p. 89)

**RESPONSE #8:** On the contrary, this point is explained quite clearly in the book. In reference to Matthew 24:45-51, the word “servant” is explained as a reference to each Israelite since Israel as nation is called the Lord’s “servant” in Scripture:

Some argue that the “servant” in Matthew 24:45-51 must be a reference to a believer, because only believers are in a position to serve the Lord. But this is not necessarily so. While it is true that only one who has been regenerated can serve the Lord acceptably (Rom. 8:8), the nation of Israel, made up of saved and unsaved, was given the privilege of being God’s national representatives to the world (Ex. 19:5-6). Consequently, the nation of Israel corporately is called the servant of the Lord. This is exactly what Mary praised God for in the Magnificat:

54 He has helped *His servant Israel*, in remembrance of His mercy, 55 as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever. (Luke 1:54-55)

Mary’s prayer was based upon her understanding of the Old Testament prophets in passages such as the following:

But you, *Israel*, are *My servant*, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. (Isa. 41:8)

Yet hear now, *O Jacob My servant*, and Israel whom I have chosen. (Isa. 44:1)

Remember these, *O Jacob*, and *Israel*, for you are *My servant*; I have formed you, you are *My servant*; *O Israel*, you will not be forgotten by Me! (Isa. 44:21)

And He said to me, “*You are My servant, O Israel*, in whom I will be glorified.” (Isa. 49:3)

“And fear not, *O Jacob My servant*,” declares the Lord, “And do not be dismayed, *O Israel*; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. And Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and no one shall make him afraid.” (Jer. 30:10)

Matthew’s Gospel is a thoroughly Jewish book that explains the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah and His promise to return to fulfill His covenantal promises to Israel. So, it should not surprise us to read a parable that distinguishes the saved from the lost: faithful and wise servants versus “evil servants,” those servants who were prepared and watching (for they believed in the Messiah and anticipated His return) versus those servants who were unprepared and not watching (i.e., unbelievers or unrighteous). (pp. 118-19)

Then, on pages 130-31, it says specifically in reference to the unprofitable “servant” in the Parable of the Talents:

Remember that “servants” was used earlier in Matthew 24 of the nation of Israel, not necessarily of believers, for Israel was the servant of the Lord. Toussaint writes,

The interpretation of this parable, like the preceding, deals with the judgment of Israel at the close of the tribulation period.

It must be remembered that the slaves are not Christians of the church age but Jews in the tribulation period.

Pentecost adds,

Christ in this parable revealed that the nation Israel, which had been set aside as God’s servant (Exod. 19:5-6), received responsibility for which they were answerable.

**CLAIM #9:** “The key arguments that show that those cast into the outer darkness are believers were not mentioned or discussed in this book. . . . Why is the improperly dressed guest in the Parable of the Wedding Feast at the feast at all? How did he get in? All kinds of people were invited, but rejected the invitation to come. This man accepted the invitation. He is even called ‘Friend’ (Matt 22:12). Their explanation seems to be that ‘to attend without having on a wedding garment was an act of utter refusal of the king’s gracious gift (of a wedding garment)’ (p. 109). But then are there two types of unbelievers, those who accept the invitation and attend the wedding and those who do not accept or attend? Why did some unbelievers get into the wedding feast at all?” (Wilkin, 89-90)

**RESPONSE #9:** The Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14 is covered thoroughly in the book on pages 102-15. These pages actually do address the arguments for the improperly dressed guest in this parable supposedly representing an unfaithful believer at the Bema who is bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth. While Wilkin claims these arguments are “not mentioned or discussed in this book,” the quotes below show otherwise. For example, the King’s address of the improperly dressed guest as “Friend” is discussed and explained on pages 111-12, which is highlighted below:

Some commentators have pointed to the use of the word “friend” in Matthew 22:12 to marshal the argument that this improperly dressed man was actually a believer in Christ but somehow unworthy to attend. But we have already shown that attendance was not on the basis of personal merit (22:10) but willingness to accept a gracious offer. Furthermore, the greeting “friend” would be used by our Lord later in Matthew of unsaved Judas coming to betray Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But Jesus said to him, “Friend, why have you come?” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. (Matt. 26:50)

In addition, though Wilkin claims our book does not discuss or explain the question of how the improperly dressed guest got into the Kingdom Wedding Feast, this is also directly addressed in the book on pages 111-12, which says:

Huber, like Hodges, also claims that the wedding garment represents the reward for good works given at the Bema rather than the robe of imputed righteousness given to all believers. He writes, “The question must be answered as to how the maldressed [sic] man got into the Millennium without this garment of righteousness. For the premillennialist, this robe cannot be symbolic of righteousness imputed through saving faith. For there will be *no unbelievers* entering the Millennial Kingdom, yet this maldressed [sic] man does so!” (ibid., 19). But Huber’s view is also inconsistent if we were to follow a strict chronology of the passage. If the Bema occurs after the Rapture but before Christ’s return to the earth to set up His Kingdom (as nearly all pretribulational premillennialists hold), and the Marriage Feast is at the start of the Kingdom, then that person who is punitively judged will be cast into outer darkness *at the Bema* and thus will never even arrive at the Marriage Feast at the start of the kingdom! It should be apparent that Christ’s point in the parable of Matthew 22 was not to provide an exact chronology for every detail in the parable, but instead to warn the chief priests and Pharisees about being excluded from the Kingdom because they lacked sufficient righteousness to enter, even though they thought they were good enough.

Wilkin claims that the improperly dressed man who was not wearing a wedding garment must be a believer because: “All kinds of people were invited, but rejected the invitation to come. This man accepted the invitation.” However, Wilkin merely assumes that the improperly dressed man accepted an invitation to get into the Kingdom. The parable never tells us how he got in. Wilkin goes on to pose the question that, if the improperly dressed man were an unbeliever who lacked the imputed righteousness of Christ as we claim in the book, “then are there two types of unbelievers, those who accept the invitation and attend the wedding and those who do not accept or attend? Why did some unbelievers get into the wedding feast at all?” By asking this, Wilkin fails to realize that the same argument can be made against his view that the improperly dressed man represents an unfaithful believer. We could just as well ask, Are there two types of unfaithful believers who are improperly attired at the start of the Kingdom, namely, (1) unfaithful believers who are punitively judged at the Bema but present at the wedding feast at the start of the Kingdom, and (2) unfaithful believers who are punitively judged at the Bema but are cast into outer darkness so as not to be present at the wedding feast at the start of the Kingdom?

It is clear from Scripture that the improperly dressed man in the parable represents an unbeliever who lacked the garment of God’s imputed righteousness (he was not justified in God’s sight) and thus he did not belong in the Kingdom. On pages 108-11 of the book, we explain this important point as follows:

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. (Matt. 22:11)

It is helpful to understand culturally that to have on a wedding garment was not merely nice but absolutely necessary to be presentable at the wedding of the king's son. However, it is imperative to realize that these wedding garments were provided by the king as a gift to all who were in need and attended the wedding. Therefore, to attend without having on a wedding garment was an act of utter refusal of the king's gracious gift. Thus the king confronts the man dressed in the wrong attire.

So he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. (Matt. 22:12)

He was speechless because there was no valid excuse to be uttered. If he had to have purchased or bought his wedding garment himself, he may have had an excuse. But he had no excuse for not being properly dressed, for the wedding garment was a gift offered and provided solely by the king's grace. This has allusions to Isaiah 61:10:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)

Isaiah and the rest of the Old Testament declare, consistent with the New Testament, that justifying righteousness is lacking in man (Ps. 130:3; 143:2) and must come from the Lord Himself (Isa. 45:24-25; 46:12-13; 51:5-6; 54:17; 61:10), who is our righteousness (Jer. 23:5; 33:15-16). From these passages, we observe once again that the requirement for Kingdom inclusion was to have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, an imputed righteousness which is a gift of God's grace received simply through faith and not of works or human righteousness. This "righteousness" cannot mean a "personal" righteousness because both "bad" and "good" were not only invited but entered the wedding feast with the needed wedding garment on—the provided robe of God's righteousness. Zane Hodges rejects this interpretation when he writes,

Naturally, some have thought that the garment lacked by the man in question was a "robe of righteousness" which the king would have given him freely. But the parable itself does not suggest this. Indeed, it seems not to have been the custom in those days. The invitation to attend was freely given, but the one who accepted the call took it upon himself to obtain and wear suitable attire.

This man, then, had failed to carry out an obligation which his acceptance of the King's invitation placed upon him. It is surely not hard for the Christian reader to detect in the appearances of the king, who then "observes" the assembled guests, another clear reference to the day of accounting which lies ahead for every

Christian. In that day our garments—our life and its works—will come under God’s scrutiny and evaluation.

Keathley challenges this assertion by writing,

Hodges says, providing wedding garments for guests “seems not to have been the custom in those days.” But, unless Gower, who has no axe to grind, is just plain wrong, wedding clothes were often provided by wealthy hosts. If this is true, then it may be that the man who showed up at the marriage feast without the proper attire refused to wear those provided. He thought his own clothes (i.e., deeds) were good enough. This fits the preceding context of the parable of the two sons. The son who said he would work and didn’t was symbolic of the Pharisees who thought they were doing enough already. Therefore, the wedding clothes provided by the host symbolize the righteousness of Christ provided by God.

Toussaint adds to this point, saying,

Another very significant fact is seen in this parable: God provides the means of entrance into the kingdom for those who desire it. The participle “dressed” (*endedumenon*) in verse eleven is passive. It may be inferred, therefore, that the king provided the guests with the proper garments. Although it is disputed whether this was an Oriental custom or not, it seems evident from certain Old Testament passages that it was common enough (Genesis 45:22; Judges 14:12, 19; 2 Kings 5:22; 10:22; Esther 6:8; 8:15). It pictures perfectly the fact that God attires everyone who turns to Him with the proper garments for His presence and His kingdom.

Ryrie also agrees with the view of Toussaint and Keathley: “This assumes that the guests would have been supplied with robes by the king’s servants, since all the guests came in a hurry and most were unsuitably attired.” Whether it was a cultural custom for wealthy wedding hosts to supply their guests with special garments is really secondary to the fact that, in this parable, this was no ordinary rich patron hosting a wedding. This was none other than the King; and it was the King’s own Son getting married. Certainly the King of all people would have the means to provide special garments for such a unique, splendid occasion. Therefore, in the context of this parable, the lack of a wedding garment on this occasion showed not only willful disregard for the Son, who was the reason for the occasion, but even presumption that one’s own clothes were sufficient. This point of Jesus’ parable would have been particularly poignant with the religious authorities since this first-century Jewish audience was part of an honor and shame society where the wealthy (James 2:1-16) and self-righteous (Matt. 23:5) prided themselves in their distinctive clothing. In Matthew’s parable of the wedding feast, it was the man’s distinctive clothing that got him in trouble,

drawing the attention and ire of the King and marking him as an unbeliever in the Groom (Christ) among the rest of the believing guests.

**CLAIM #10:** “Philippians 2:12, which speaks of working out your own salvation ‘with fear and trembling’ receives no discussion (though the verse is mentioned in a list on pp. 31-32). Since it mentions fear and trembling, something believers supposedly do not experience now nor will experience at the Bema, one would think this verse must be discussed.” (Wilkin, p. 88)

**RESPONSE #10:** This is a minor point, but Wilkin speaks of “a list” in the singular, leaving the impression that there is only one reference to Philippians 2:12 in the entire book. The verse reference actually occurs twice, in two separate lists of verses on the present tense of salvation (practical sanctification)—one in a list of verses by Lewis Sperry Chafer on page 31 and one in a list by Dennis Rokser on page 32. Second, and more importantly, nowhere do we say or imply that “believers . . . do not experience” “fear and trembling” as a legitimate and healthy part of the Christian life “now.” We actually state the opposite (though we emphasize that believers are not to fear *God’s condemnation or punishment for sin* since Christ bore that fully at Calvary).

But even with such a qualification, many are still puzzled by what follows in 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Knowing, therefore, the terror [*phobos*] of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” Does this verse teach that Paul was terrified of the Lord in light of the approaching judgment seat? If so, does “the terror of the Lord” indicate that believers will possibly experience punishment, chastisement, and condemnation at the Bema because of their post-justification sins? Many have been wrongly taught from this verse to look on Christ’s coming with dreadful anticipation, as if Paul himself was terrified by the thought of the Bema and every believer should be too. Several points clarify this common misconception.

First, the translation “terror” (KJV, NKJV) has created needless confusion. The Greek word *phobos* is more accurately translated “fear” in this verse in most English Bibles (and in most other verses in the KJV and NKJV). The word “terror” carries a stronger semantic connotation in the English language than the word “fear” does since it shares the same root as the words “terrify,” “terrorize,” and “terrorist.” As a result, some readers are left with the skewed perspective that the Bema is designed by God to induce terror in believers above and beyond simple reverential awe for the Lord.

Second, if Paul was supposedly terrified to stand before Christ’s Bema, then why did he state just a few verses earlier that he was “confident” and “well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (vv. 6, 8)? Paul should have been exceedingly reluctant to die and stand before the Lord, fearing Christ’s wrath and displeasure over his post-justification sins. In contrast, Paul looked forward to being in the presence of the Lord to such an extent that he was torn between his desire to stay in the body to serve others and his “desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23).

Third, when Paul says in the opening clause of verse 11, “Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord,” he has in mind more than the prospect of the



Judgment Seat. This clause points back to the preceding content in verses 6-10, which includes both the Bema (v. 10) and a description of Paul's walk with the Lord (vv. 6-9). While Paul undoubtedly had some fear and apprehension about the possibility of suffering loss of reward and being ashamed before the Lord at the Judgment Seat (1 Cor. 9:24-27), his healthy fear of the Lord also encompassed the positive aspects of his walk of faith (v. 7), his desire to depart and be with Christ (vv. 6, 8), and his ambition to please the Lord in everything (v. 9). The context of verse 11 demonstrates that for the believer, the fear of the Lord is essentially a manner of relating to the Lord that is characterized by dependence, obedience, and reverence. There is no hint of condemnation, rejection, or divine wrath anywhere in the context.

Fourth, when Paul says in verse 11, "Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men," he was not indicating that believers and unbelievers should fear the Lord in exactly the same way and for the same reasons. While unbelievers would do well to fear God's righteous wrath, condemnation, and penal retribution (John 3:36; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Thess. 1:8-10), the child of God should fear none of these since he has peace with God through Christ (Rom. 5:1; 10:15; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 1:20) and is promised deliverance from God's future wrath (Rom. 5:9-10). Instead, the context of 2 Corinthians 5:11 reveals that Paul's fear of the Lord consisted of a reverential awe of the Lord that motivated him to maintain a clear conscience in his ministry (v. 11) so as to be well pleasing to God (v. 9), and for the sake of his hearers' consciences (v. 11), and in view of his works being judged at the future Bema (v. 10). When Paul says in verse 11, "Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord, we persuade men," he had in mind primarily his own fear of the Lord that motivated him to serve Christ with such sincerity and integrity that he would commend himself to his hearers' consciences—whether they were unsaved hearers (2 Cor. 4:2-4; 5:20-21; 6:3-4) or the saved Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:12; 3:1; 10:12; 12:11). On many occasions Paul sought to "persuade men" to believe the gospel (Acts 17:4-5; 18:4; 19:26; 26:28; 28:23-24) since all men ought to fear God in light of His coming punitive judgment on unbelievers (Mal. 3:5; Rom. 3:18; Rev. 14:7; 15:4). But the point of the passage is not Paul's persuading others to fear the Lord; rather it is Paul persuading others that he has feared the Lord and conducted himself sincerely in his ministry.

Fifth, other biblical passages on the fear of the Lord support the conclusion that a person can fear the Lord without the prospect of possible condemnation or punishment looming overhead. According to Acts 9:31, a believer can fear the Lord and experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit at the same time. In Psalm 130:4, a person is led to fear the Lord not based on the threat of God withholding forgiveness (v. 3) but because of His willingness and ability to forgive. In Hosea 3:5, the goodness of the Lord causes people to fear Him, just as Romans 2:4 teaches that the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering lead people to repentance. Finally in Jeremiah 33:9, the Lord promises, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide." While the prospect of standing before Jesus Christ as the all-powerful, sovereign Lord of the universe and experiencing shame (1 John 2:28) and loss of eternal reward (1

Cor. 3:15) ought to fill every believer with greater reverence for Christ, so should the awesome goodness and grace of God and the prospect of a positive reward. (pp. 214-17)

Should we as believers ever fear God's chastening hand? Of course we should. Does not a child sometimes fear discipline from his father? Fear is what causes the young boy to be careful not to sass back to his dad because he knows if he does, he will receive a painful spanking. This kind of fear is healthy because it reflects an appropriate humility on our part and helps create a strong bond in our relationship with the Father. It would be unbiblical to promote fearlessness of God. As His children, we should have the "fear of the Lord." This fear is a continuous reverential fear based on awe of His power and His total sovereignty over our life. He is the potter and we are the clay and He can do with us as He pleases. So of course believers should have fear of the Lord. He is our final authority in all things. He is the one to Whom we all must give an account. But this fear is also tempered by the knowledge of His love, His grace, His mercy, His goodness, His patience, and His faithfulness. Yes, we fear Him but we know He will always be our heavenly Father. We know He would never afflict our lives without it being for our profit. We do not fear becoming His punching bag, receiving relentless blows of anger. The believer should not fear His angry wrath. His chastening, yes, but not His wrath. (p. 365)

**CLAIM #11:** "I was surprised at what was not discussed in this book of over 500 pages. There is almost no discussion of the Lord's approval or disapproval (*dokimos* and *adokimos*). The concept is only briefly mentioned on just three pages (pp. 198, 199, and 215)." (Wilkin, p. 88)

**RESPONSE #11:** The concept of approval or disapproval does not occur "on just three pages." Wilkin omits the following references:

Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians give special emphasis to Christ's future judgment of believers to determine eternal rewards for good deeds (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:1-5; 9:24-27). To these same readers Paul makes specific reference to the bema of Christ (2 Cor. 5:9-10). Paul also refers repeatedly in his writings, and particularly in 1 Corinthians 9, to the athletic games of his day. Since the Isthmian games were hosted biennially just outside the city of Corinth, Paul readily employed the motif of athletics current in his day to convey several spiritual principles to his readers. These included running the race of the Christian life in order to obtain a prize (1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:14), and the need for faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2), discipline, following the rules (1 Cor. 9:25-27; 2 Tim. 2:5), and perseverance to the end (1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul also vividly portrayed the possibility of an athlete being disqualified and thereby failing to earn a reward in the form of a crown or prize (1 Cor. 3:15; 9:27). (p. 178)

The word for "test" (*dokimazō*) in 1 Corinthians 3:13 means to test something for the purpose of determining its worth, quality, or genuineness; to

**prove or approve.** Here it refers to testing each believer's "work" to manifest its quality—whether the work is of the combustible "sort" (v. 12, "wood, hay, straw") or the incombustible "sort" (v. 12, "gold, silver, precious stones"). Whatever work passes through the fire and "endures" will be **proven to have lasting, eternal value** that will bring glory to Jesus Christ. For such work, the believer "will receive a reward" (v. 14). When this test is finished, **the value of each believer's work** will be made evident throughout eternity. For believers who receive a reward on that day, the possession and degree of that reward will stand as a lasting testament to the true quality of each one's ministry and work for the Lord during their earthly lifetimes.

**Conversely, work that does not bring glory to Christ has no eternal value.** According to 1 Corinthians 3:15, such work will be "burned" at the Bema and the believer "will suffer loss" (*zēmioō*). This is not a loss of salvation since the passage promises that though the believer's works may be burned "he himself will be saved" (v. 15). The believer's eternal salvation will remain secure since the foundation of Jesus Christ will still stand in that day. However, the potential for seeing a large portion of one's Christian life and ministry go up in smoke should have a profoundly sobering impact on all believers. (pp. 206-207)

**CLAIM #12:** "The AWANA verse, 2 Tim 2:15, . . . receives no consideration." (Wilkin, p. 88)

**RESPONSE #12:** Actually, this verse does receive consideration, but perhaps not with the interpretation or application that Wilkin holds. Second Timothy 2:15 is quoted in full on page 25. It is also quoted in full on pages 162 and 166 in a chapter ironically titled, "*Considering Some Crucial Applications.*" The second crucial application of the chapter to be "considered" is stated on page 162, which says, "**Second, you must be careful to *rightly divide the Word of truth and measure all teaching in light of the Gospel, the Grace of God, and your wonderful identity in Christ* (1 Tim. 1:10-11; 2 Tim. 2:15).**" We understand the presenting (*paristēmi*) of oneself to God as workman that does not need to be ashamed in 2 Timothy 2:15 as something done in this earthly Christian life, not at the Judgment Seat, which may be Wilkin's interpretation of the verse. Paul uses this term in several present, sanctification contexts on the Christian life (Rom. 6:13, 16, 19; 12:1; 16:2; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 11:2; Col. 1:22, 28; 2 Tim. 4:17).

**CLAIM #13:** "If believers never experience God's wrath (pp. 241-51, esp. 250), then why are there so many verses that warn the believing readers of that very fact? A concordance study of the word *wrath* (*orgē*) in the NT shows many verses which do not fit their [i.e., the authors'] view (e.g., Rom 1:18; 5:9-10; 13:4-5; Heb 3:11; 4:3; Jude 21)." (Wilkin, 90)

**RESPONSE #13:** Wilkin's statement gives the impression that certain verses on wrath which supposedly don't fit with our view are not covered in the book but may be found by doing a simple check of a concordance. But instead of being skipped or overlooked, the verses Wilkin lists are all covered and explained extensively and exegetically in the chapters in the book dealing specifically with the subject of God's wrath, e.g., Romans 1:16-18 (pp. 306-14); 5:9-10

(pp. 317-25); 13:4-5 (pp. 325-27); Heb. 3:11 and 4:3 (292-93); Jude 21 (uses the word “mercy,” not “wrath” or *orgē*; however, the concept of mercy at the Bema is addressed on p. 219).

**CLAIM #14:** “The main points of this book are clear enough, though it takes a lot of reading to get down to them. They include . . .” (Wilkin, pp. 86-87). This statement by Wilkin is followed by fourteen bullet-pointed summary statements in his review about what he interprets to be our book’s “main points.” One of the supposed main points of our book according to Wilkin is that “the right to eat of the fruits of the tree of life is for all believers (e.g., pp. 438-45).” (Wilkin, 87)

**RESPONSE #14:** The interpretation of what the “main points” of a book are about should be based on what is repeatedly taught and emphasized throughout the book, or what receives its own chapter or the most amount of space. Wilkin’s review and his bulleted list of our book’s fourteen “main points” omit any mention of the fact that there are separate chapters in our book on the meaning of the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” and inheriting the kingdom. In addition, several subjects are emphasized throughout the book that Wilkin never mentions, such as: (1) the overall argument, themes, and flow of the Gospel of Matthew so as to explain the context for the “outer darkness” references (pp. 61-94); (2) Christ already being punished for all the believer’s sins so that we will not be punished for them, either in this lifetime or in the next (pp. 26-31; 235-67; 353-60); (3) how God deals with Church-age believers today and in the future on the basis of our position in Christ versus our practice (pp. 34; 268-95; 343-46; 420-25); (4) the grace of God as the basis upon which God deals with believers both in this life and after glorification, in contrast to the legalism of a fear-of-punishment approach to motivating believers to serve the Lord (pp. 31-40; 162-65; 341-42; 383-84; 468-69; 471-77; 479-87).

Each of these subjects receives far more coverage than some of the less important items Wilkin considers to be our book’s “main points” in his bulleted list. In Wilkin’s list of “main points,” he includes such items as all believers having the right to eat from the tree of life in Revelation 2:7 and 22:2, 14, 19. Yet, this topic is only a subpoint of one chapter on the overcomer and it only covers six pages in that chapter. Why Wilkin considers this a “main point” of the book seems strange, especially considering that other subpoints within the same chapter cover just as many or more pages and they occur before the discussion of Revelation 2:7 and are even foundational to it. For instance, the first point of the chapter also covers six pages and lays out the evidence for the foundational principle that being an overcomer is positional rather than being based on the believer’s ongoing practice (pp. 420-25). The second point of the chapter covers seven pages (pp. 425-31) and shows from Greek grammar and syntax why the phrase “he who overcomes” does not necessarily indicate ongoing, practical victory over sin, Satan, and the world as the Lordship Salvation position teaches. In addition, the explanation of Revelation 2:26 (“he who overcomes and keeps My works until the end”) receives over six pages of exegetical explanation (pp. 451-57); and the explanation of Revelation 3:4-5 also receives six total pages of coverage (pp. 447-49; 457-60). But curiously none of these points within the chapter on the overcomer make Wilkin’s bulleted list of our book’s supposed “main points.”

### Conclusion

The previous fourteen examples of Wilkin’s claims contrasted with our responses demonstrate that the book *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* has been badly misrepresented by Bob

Wilkin in his review in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. But in closing, having considered the many negative claims made against the book thus far, you may wish to consider the following endorsements by several godly and grace-oriented Bible teachers and leaders that paint a very different and much more positive view of the book.

I am so glad that this book has been written for such a time as this. There is so much errant teaching in print and from the pulpit on the Judgment Seat of Christ. Pastors Dennis Rokser, Tom Stegall, and Kurt Witzig have provided a carefully researched and courageously written book that is biblically based in all of its argumentation and refutation. False teaching is addressed directly, definitively, but in kindness, clothed in Christian grace. The writers take on the false teachings that say unfaithful, carnal Christians will experience punitive judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is untrue and is an assault on God's grace, as well as on the secure position every Christian has in Christ, Who provided the full payment for all of our sins past, present, and future. He has forgiven us for ALL of our sins (Col. 2:13). There is nothing left of sin's punishment for Christians to pay for. This book is a must read for any and all Christians who have fears and questions about what will happen as a result of appearing before Christ at the Bema. This is a scholarly study, yet easy to read, follow, and understand. Each of the writers has presented his case with clarity, insight, grace, and respect. May God use this book to correct errant teaching and give hope and peace to all believers.

Samuel L. Hoyt, Th.D.

Author of *The Judgment Seat of Christ* and *Facing Life's Greatest Challenges*

Recent confusion about the believer's place in the coming kingdom has led some in the free grace movement to posit the unscriptural view that believers who suffer loss at the judgment seat of Christ will suffer some degree of sorrow and possibly exclusion from the Kingdom during the Millennium. This view runs contrary to Biblical teaching about the grace of God and unfortunately confuses what Jesus taught to Israel in the Gospels with what the New Testament epistles have to say to the Church. The result is a mixing of law and grace, a position against which the apostle Paul contended in so many of his epistles. Dennis Rokser has assembled a team of solid Bible teachers who hold to a Biblical position that is thoroughly grounded in the grace of God. This book is a must read for pastors and earnest Bible students today. I highly recommend it.

George Gunn, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Bible, Theology, and Biblical Languages  
Shasta Bible College, Redding, CA

Like several other Grace Gospel Press publications, *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* is a much needed clarion call to return to the grace of God which is able to perfect us in Christ Jesus. Putting fear into believers by misinterpreting certain passages to teach that punitive damages may await them at the judgment seat is neither a biblical nor healthy motive to live the Christian life. God's grace has always been sufficient! Perfect love casts out fear. The authors deal with the passages involved in the discussion and show how rightly interpreting them leads to a harmony of Scripture. If you are tired of the perform-or-else mentality this book will give you a much needed rest and desire to meet your Savior.

Jeremy Thomas  
Pastor-Teacher, Fredericksburg Bible Church

The contributors to *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* have done the Church a major service. First, they have helped to identify and clarify the majority teaching of the grace movement on the issue of millennial exclusion. Second, they have successfully refuted the view that some true believers will be excluded from any events of the millennium, including its initial marriage feast. While readers, even of the same perspective as the contributors, may disagree with some of the details, this work provides an excellent overview of the hermeneutical and theological issues involved. At stake is the biblical view of the nature of grace and God's revealed plan for His coming kingdom.

Mike Stallard, Ph.D.  
Dean and Professor of Systematic Theology  
Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA

*Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness* examines some unusual theories that are currently being advanced about the judgment seat of Christ. Will believers face a type of protestant purgatory? Does loss of rewards mean banishment from the kingdom for the believer? The authors thoroughly examine and refute these strange doctrines. They explore the relevant passages of Scripture and allow the text to speak for itself. This study on eternal rewards from a traditional free grace perspective is a breath of fresh air.

Bob Nyberg,  
New Tribes Missionary Training Center

As with so many movements, the free grace movement seems to suffer from both its friends and foes alike. On the one hand are the opponents of free grace, such as the advocates of Lordship Salvation and Hyper-Calvinism, who essentially contend that progressive sanctification is automatic in the life of every child of God. Under this rubric, the Judgment Seat of Christ would be the equivalent of

everyone receiving a participation trophy at an awards ceremony. Since perseverance is automatic under their system, there will be no real forfeiture of awards or loss experienced by the child God at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ. On the other hand, are those advocates of free grace theology who are so aggressive in maintaining the reality that not all believers persevere, that they end up perverting the Judgment Seat of Christ into an imbalanced concept. The latter often argue the case for millennial exclusion, or the idea that some believers will make it into the kingdom while others will not. They also argue that some Christians will actually experience the wrath of God and punitive damages at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ. Although much has been written critiquing the former group, not much has been written critiquing the latter group by those within the free grace camp. Critiquing your opponents is always easier than critiquing your friends. The dearth of literature on this topic makes the present volume of great importance. The writers take great pains to demonstrate that turning the Judgment Seat of Christ into the wrath of God is just as problematic, perhaps even more problematic, than making the Judgment Seat of Christ of no consequence. The case for punitive damages at the Judgment Seat of Christ is often developed from the pre-Church-Age parables. In this book, the authors set the record straight by maintaining the Israel-Church distinction, which allows interpreters to build their interpretation for the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ from the right set of Scriptures. They also show that the notion of the wrath of God at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ is really a concept that is an extreme one and far outside what the dispensational tradition has historically taught. If you are confused about the future judgment seat of rewards, either by assigning too little consequence to it, or by reading too much into it, then this book is for you. This book is recommended since it brings much needed balance to the judgment seat of rewards, which is a very important yet grossly misunderstood area of prophetic truth.

Andy Woods, Ph.D.

Professor of Bible and Theology at College of Biblical Studies  
Senior Pastor, Sugar Land Bible Church

*Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* is an excellent and much needed response to the false teaching of a “Protestant Purgatory” or a “Punitive Bema Seat of Christ.” This work is biblical, exegetical, and pastoral. It heartens the believer from Scripture that the “outer darkness” is for the unsaved, not for the Christian; that to be “cast out” from the coming Kingdom or the New Jerusalem in the Eternal State is for the lost, not the child of God; that to be an “overcomer” is not based on the believer’s performance as a Christian, but rather on his position in Christ, the Overcomer. By careful and proper exegesis of the biblical texts, the authors demonstrate that the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place for the rod, but for rewards. If it were not, and punishment for sin, failure, and unfaithfulness is to be doled out to the Christian on that future occasion, then

why believe now that Christ's propitiatory and substitutionary sacrifice was sufficient to meet God's righteous demands? Why have any joyful anticipation of the Blessed Hope? This book reassures the believer that Christ's death was sufficient, and the Christian can look joyfully for his Lord's return at any moment. *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* The answer is a definitive No! And this book proves it. The believer's heart will certainly be strengthened by grace in reading it.

Bruce Scott, M.Div.  
Friends of Israel  
Director of Field Ministry & Hesed Project

Every few years, it seems a dangerous new "wind of doctrine" blows through the church leaving a large wake of victims in its path. While the false teaching regarding Christians and Outer Darkness is by no means new, it has gained surprising new traction in recent years. *Should Christians Fear Outer Darkness?* examines the clear teaching of God's Word on this issue, and categorically refutes the notion that Christians will face any form of punitive damages after death.

J. B. Hixson, Ph.D.  
President, Not By Works Ministries

After reading this book, and reading it a second time, I can fully endorse it as an excellent study of the question of whether or not a true believer in Christ, that is, one who has been "born again," will be judged for sins after believing in Christ and be cast out into outer darkness where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Some evangelical, conservative pastors and teachers are currently teaching this so-called "Protestant Purgatory" as true to Scripture. I am pleased to say that this book, edited by the Grace Gospel Press, Duluth, Minnesota will more than adequately refute this doctrine. The authors are all elders / pastors from the Duluth Bible Church.

There are 17 chapters in all, every one of them giving full attention to these and many other issues related to this doctrine. The answers are thoroughly treated and if the reader takes time to read each section carefully and prayerfully, he or she will have ample reason to believe what Jesus Himself said in John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

Thomas O. Figart, Th.D.  
Retired Bible College Professor  
Author of *The King of the Kingdom of Heaven: A Commentary on Matthew*



This book is one of those rarities—it will not stay in your library; you will be taking it off the shelf and referring to it time after time after time. From the first chapter on, you will be hooked by the book’s thorough and rigorous scholarship with its practical applications of Bible doctrine—those great truths which will bring comfort and assurance to the believer who is justified, declared righteous, and “in Christ.” It would take a thesaurus full of superlatives to do justice to this book.

Michael D. Halsey, D.Min.  
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