

4 *Rebuttal Arguments: Right to The Tree of Life*

Modern Gospel Of Cheap Grace: How It Views Revelation 22:14

Bob Wilkin is a renown belief-alone teacher. In his article entitled, “Who Are The Outsiders? Revelation 22:14-17,”¹ he discusses his view of this passage.

By examining how weak is Wilkin’s case for reconciling Revelation 22:14 with belief alone doctrine, we will realize just how strong a passage it is for confirming Jesus literally meant what He said to the young rich man.

Wilkin concedes that Revelation 22:14 is directed at believers and the expression “do his commandments” is the correct translation. Wilkin also concedes that not every believer is obedient. Here he proves that fact by excellent proofs.

In light of the context, it is ***obvious that believers are in view here***. However, it is a mistake to conclude that all believers are meant. Not all believers can be described as “those who do His commandments.” Jesus did not take it for granted that even the Apostles would obey Him! He said to them, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” John 14:15, and, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14). Similarly, in Revelation chapters 2-3 the Lord makes it clear that ***being a victori-***

1. <http://www.faithalone.org/news/y1993/93nov3.html> (last accessed 4/24/07).

ous overcoming believer is not guaranteed

(see, for example, 2:2-7, 10, 25-28; 3:11-12).

Thus, Wilkin is admitting that there are people who are ***believers but disobedient*** to Jesus' commands. And Wilkin is conceding that only those believers who are obedient to Jesus' commands are allowed to eat from the tree of life. So how is Wilkin going to escape the conclusion that only obedient Christians later get to eat of the fruit that gives the right to eternal life in heaven?

Wilkin first affirms the belief-alone gospel as proof that this fruit could not be equal to imparting eternal life. This reasoning is circular — beginning with the conclusion you are hoping to prove, but let's hear it:

Keep in mind that nothing is required for an eternally-secure person to remain saved. It is ridiculous to think that believers will need to eat fruit from the tree of life to retain their spiritual life.

Thus, you see that Wilkin is saying that because we supposedly already know a disobedient Christian is saved because he or she is a believer, the fruit of the tree of life simply cannot be equated to eternal life. However, this is circular — you are assuming your conclusion, and then not allowing the passage to challenge your pre-supposed view.

Wilkin then explains the tree of life is simply fruit of an abundant life — a happy life. It is supposedly not eternal life:

What then is to be gained by eating this fruit? On the one hand, this fruit will be a wonderful delicacy which will be a ***delight*** to eat. On the other hand, the tree is called "the tree of life" for a reason. It will evidently grant to the believer who eats of it a ***special abundance of life***. Today when we eat foods that are good for us we feel especially energized and encouraged. This will certainly be true of the food from the tree of life!

Yet, Wilkin now contradicts Scripture because in Genesis the fruit of the tree of life is said to be able to allow Adam to “live forever” had he eaten from it. (Gen. 2:9, 3:22.)

Wilkin is aware of this contradiction. The following is how he imagines he has avoided the problem. He says:

It is true, of course, that ***the tree of life was in the Garden of Eden*** as well. However, its fruit would ***not have had the same effect on fallen people with ungloried bodies*** as it will have in eternity ***on saints with glorified bodies***. The tree of life will ***only grant abundant life to those with glorified bodies***. According to Gen 3:22 the reason God removed Adam from the garden was “lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life and live forever.” Had he eaten that fruit Adam would have ***lived forever*** in a state of separation from God (spiritual death). Of course, since the tree of life was never intended for that terrible purpose, God took it away from man until the eternal kingdom.

Wilkin is making two points. Let’s deal with the point about the difference for Adam’s body and our body. Let’s diagram the supposed differences. We will see once more the only proof is the presupposition that faith alone saves. There is nothing in the passage that supports Wilkin’s interpretation.

TABLE 1. Tree of Life Supposedly for Adam versus Us

If Adam Eats from Tree	If We Eat from same Tree
“live forever” (Gen. 3:22)	“abundant life,” but not live forever (Wilkin)

Wilkin’s explanation is that Adam did not have a glorified body but we have a glorified body. Why does that matter? Why would the fruit have an effect of ***bestowing eternal life on an unglorified body*** but it confers ***only abundant life on a glorified body***? It makes no logical sense. Wilkin is just

trying to make it appear plausible that some aspect of Adam's body can explain why the fruit could give him eternal life but only give us abundant life.

Again, Wilkin is merely making a presupposition that we are already eternally saved, and thus the tree of life cannot impart anything like eternal life. Thus, it follows from the assumption that the tree of life must impart something *other* than eternal life.

Yet, this verse is — on its face — a *contradiction* of that very assumption. This verse says eternal life (the right to eat from the tree of life which Scripture says imparts eternal life) is only for those who were obedient to Jesus' commandments. Wilkin is merely making a presupposition of an opposite salvation doctrine, and then imposing it on the passage to salvage his view.

Illustration of Wilkin's Circular Proof (Bootstrap Fallacy)

If you accept as inspired, for example, the proposition that if you score nine runs, you will win the game, but you also believe it is inspired truth that you can win a game without scoring any runs, Wilkin's logic would be reconciling this contradiction by saying: since we know you cannot win the game by scoring runs, the idea of winning the game in the first proposition merely means *enjoying* the game. You still win without scoring any runs, but if you score nine runs, you will *enjoy* the game. The problem in this reasoning is that proposition A flatly contradicts proposition B. The solution offered is merely by *changing terms* in proposition A to fit proposition B. Which means you are using Proposition B as a presupposition to refute Proposition A. Instead, what we only know is either Proposition A or B is true, but that they both cannot be simultaneously true.

Wilkin's Second Argument

Then Wilkin throws in a second interesting argument in the extended quote above.

Wilkin wants to prove the tree of life does not impart life in heaven. To prove this Wilkin argues that had Adam eaten the fruit and “lived forever” he would have done so in what amounts to hell — apart from God. “Had he eaten that fruit Adam would have lived forever in a state of separation from God (spiritual death)... [a] terrible purpose.”

This little tid-bit is fascinating. It reveals how far those who are devoted to the belief alone gospel are willing to go. They not only stretch things, but also give the *most ludicrous explanations of passages*. This example proves their doctrine is under extreme pressure by the passage at issue.

Because of Wilkin’s adherence to belief alone, he has to say the “tree of life” would have caused Adam to live forever in what has to be hell.

Can you see the flaw? Adam had already sinned and God had already promised that in the day Adam ate of the forbidden fruit (a different tree) he would die spiritually (Gen. 2:17). Thus, before eating the fruit of the tree of life (which Adam never ate), Adam was already going to hell. He already had ‘eternal life’ in that sense where his worm would never die. Thus, it must follow that eating the fruit of the tree of life would have given Adam eternal life *in heaven* as opposed to what he was already destined to experience for eternity in hell.

Yet, Wilkin ludicrously seeks to suggest that when God takes Adam away from the tree of life after Adam sinned and fell, it was *to prevent a disobedient person from living eternally apart from God*. But that was going to happen anyway without any intervention of taking away the tree of life. In reality, what God did was prevent a disobedient person from stealing an advantage God did not want disobedient people have — the right to “live forever” and be like “one of us.” (Gen. 3:22 JPS.)

If God had the idea that Wilkin is trying to sell, then God should have had no problem letting a lost person eat from the tree of life, and simply confirm his worm-like status forever in hell apart from God. Thus, Wilkin's second proposition is utterly silly.

What About the Access to the New Jerusalem?

Wilkin knows that he has one more hurdle to overcome. The passage explains that those who obey Jesus' commands have two rights. The first is the right to eat of the tree of life. Wilkin's ludicrous arguments failed to prove that the tree of life represents anything but eternal life in heaven.

Next, Wilkin concedes the same verse says the obedient have the right to enter the city of the New Jerusalem. This again appears to reconfirm that there is a right to salvation gained by obedience to multiple commandments, just like Jesus told the young rich man.² What does Wilkin have to say about this point?

The second reward to the obedient believer is the **right to enter the New Jerusalem** by its gates. Several things must be born in mind here. For one thing, most likely all believers will be going in and out of the New Jerusalem from time to time. Some believers in eternity will have their **primary dwelling** in the New Jerusalem. Surely those people **will sometimes venture outside** its walls, visit the rest of the new earth, and return. And, **many saints will not live in the New Jerusalem!** According to Rev 21:24 the new earth will contain many nations and the kings of those nations will travel to the New Jerusalem to take tribute to the King of kings. It is likely that all who live in these nations will make trips to the New Jerusalem.

2. Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.

This is a fascinating yet disturbed explanation. Jesus says elsewhere (Rev. 22:15) that *outside* the New Jerusalem are all the sorcerers, cowards, unbelievers, and their destiny is to be thrown in the lake of fire. However, Wilkin says that many believers will end up *outside* the New Jerusalem, but will be saved at all times.

Wilkin is fully cognizant of this verse in Revelation 21:15 that says those *outside* are destined for hell. Here is how he deals with this contrary verse to his supposition:

Verse 15 says, “But outside are the dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

While ***the word outside might sound like it refers to those outside the New Jerusalem*** but yet still on the new earth, that is clearly ***not the case***. The Lord is speaking of those who are ***entirely outside*** the kingdom.

Thus, for Wilkin, those *outside* who are destined to hell are ‘really really’ *entirely outside*. Therefore, disobedient Christians can be *outside* the New Jerusalem, still saved, but are not as *far outside* as are the lost destined for hell. Thus, Wilkin is asking us to believe there are *shades* of distance to the word *outside*. This way *outside* does not always mean *outside* the same way in the same few verses! It is amazing what people will believe when they start with an error!

Wilkin is, however, persistent. He claims there are three lines of proof to support his view of different levels to *outside* within the same passage. Let’s listen and then test his statements.

Three lines of evidence suggest this interpretation. First, there will be no sinners in the eternal kingdom. None. Verse 15 is describing the condition of people at that time, not their experience in this life. ***No believer with a glorified body could be described as being a dog, a sorcerer, a sexually immoral person, a murderer,***

an idolater, or a liar. While those things were true of giants of the faith like David (2 Samuel) and Solomon (1 Kings 11) in their experiences prior to death, they could never be true of saints with glorified bodies.

This first proof is nothing more than the belief-alone supposition being used to force the passage to that meaning. Yet, the passage literally contradicts belief alone. You cannot save belief-alone doctrine by saying we must simply suppose it is true, and thus require those *outside* could not possibly be one-time believers who ended up sinning. To force that construction is simply boot-strapping your conclusion. You are using your conclusion as a premise of the argument.

Wilkin continues to the second line of argument to prove two levels to the meaning *outside*:

Second, Rev 21:27 says that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter "it." The word *it* there most naturally refers to the *kingdom* since there will be no one anywhere on the New Earth whose name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. All such people will be in the lake of fire (cf. Rev 20:15).

Wilkin ends his point there, leaving us puzzled. This does not prove there are two types of *outside*. It proves there is only but one type of person inside the New Jerusalem: the saved. This would tend, if anything, to corroborate that the *outside* in Revelation 21:15 is a place exclusively for the *lost*.

Wilkin then provides his last of three points why the *outside* has two levels: one for the saved and one further out for the lost. He says:

Third, Rev 21:8 refers to many of the same sins as mentioned in Rev 22:15 (*i.e.*, murderers, sexually immoral, idolaters, and liars) and it clearly assigns the fate of people so designated as "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Again, this is highly puzzling. This proves those *outside* in Revelation 21:5 share the lost characteristic of those in Revelation 22:15. Far from proving there are some saved among those outside, this proves once more *outside* is exclusively a designation for the lost.

Wilkin is failing on all scores. He is actually marshaling evidence for the contrary to his position. He is hoping apparently the reader does not realize this, and even thinks this evidence helps prove his point. This evidence does not. It proves the opposite of Wilkin's interpretation.

From this failed series of points, Wilkin wraps up his conclusion:

Unbelievers will forever remain unjustified sinners who are forever excluded from God's kingdom.

This is a non-sequitur. These two passages (Rev. 21:8; 22:15) said *unbelievers* were merely one kind of wrongdoer outside. There were *also* murderers, liars, etc. In fact, and most important of all, there were *cowards*.

Unbelievers and Cowards In Lake of Fire

Why is this important?

Because it shows Revelation's distinction between *unbelievers* and *cowards* in Revelation 21:8 is significant. It follows that if one group are unbelievers and another are cowards, then the cowards must have been one-time believers who were cowardly. Otherwise, *unbelievers* would have been all that was necessary to say.

This distinction is proven by the *believing but cowardly* rulers of John 12:42 who "believed in him" (Jesus) but were "afraid to confess him" were lost. Thus, as commonly translated, these rulers were *one-time believers*, and could not be condemned in Revelation 21:8 as *unbelievers*. However, they could be condemned, and were condemned, as *fearful cowards*, and hence were destined to hell despite *once believing in Jesus*.

Thus, Wilkin clearly errs when he concludes Revelation 21:8 and 22:15 mean that *only* unbelievers are unjustified and excluded from the New Jerusalem. These passages instead speak clearly that *unbelievers* are only one type of sinner excluded. There are also others excluded, and among them are the cowardly. And Scripture clearly proves there are *cowards* who had been *believers* in Jesus. (John 12:42.)

Accordingly, Wilkin's conclusion is premised upon ignoring that *cowards*, *murderers*, and not merely *unbelievers*, are lost in these passages. This means that Wilkin's statement that these passages prove only *unbelievers* are lost is a non-sequitur. It does not follow logically.

Nevertheless, Wilkin was a very helpful analyst. The desperate nature of his proofs, including his circularity, prove how impossible it is for belief alone doctrine to survive Revelation 22:14. The cheap grace fabulists are forced to stretch to ridiculous lengths the clear expository statements in Revelation 22:14. It simply says those who have done Jesus' commandments have the right to the tree of life and to enter the New Jerusalem. There is no ambiguity there.

Thus, only because this passage refutes the cheap grace gospel (by restating Jesus' message to the young rich man),³ this passage is being fought off by the silliest of arguments. Let's recap them.

The cheap grace gospel has to say the "tree of life" in Revelation 22:14 (a) means *abundant life* for Christians but (b) meant *everlasting life* for Adam in *hell*. And supposedly *those who have the right to enter the New Jerusalem* does not mean to imply disobedient Christians left *outside* are lost. Instead, we are asked to imagine there is a place outside the New Jerusalem where disobedient Christians congregate but this is not to be equated with the place *outside* which Jesus said *unbelievers* (non-Christians), *murderers*, *liars*, *cowards*, *etc.*, go en route to hell.

3. Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.

If one can believe all such nonsense of the cheap grace gospel enthusiasts, one cares not at all to know the true meaning. One is simply superimposing doctrine at odds with Jesus' teaching so that every verse comes out compatible with one's *presuppositions* of what the gospel *should* mean. It is as Jesus said repeatedly 'They hear but do not listen. They see, but do not understand.'

