



Review of *What is the Gospel* by Greg Gilbert

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The subject matter addressed in the book *What is the Gospel* by Greg Gilbert is important. It addresses an issue that deals with an eternal God about an eternal matter concerning the eternal destiny of men and women.

Mr. Gilbert's theology is energetic and insidious. His belief system does not allow him to rely upon the Gospel of John to find the principles of justification salvation. In his system, God doesn't love the world but only those select few who renounce sin in the name of Christ. Faith is insufficient and Christ is ineffective in providing justification. A person must also turn away from sin. On one hand God is holy and pure and will not tolerate sin. On the other hand, God understands that a true believer will never stop sinning. Because there is no distinction between a believer and a disciple, becoming a Christian has a great cost for men and women – it's not a free gift.

What one says about justification salvation via the gospel is relevant. What one doesn't say is just as telling.

- The Gospel of John was written for a clear and simple purpose – “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that ***you may believe*** that ***Jesus is the Christ***, the Son of God; and that believing ***you may have life*** in His name. (Jn. 20:30-31) This purpose is absent from this book.
- In the Gospel of John, the issue of “***life***” is mentioned 36 times and “***eternal life***” is mentioned 17 times. “Eternal life” is mentioned only ***1 time*** in this book (pg. 93)
- In the Gospel of John, the idea, concept or word “***forgive***” and/or “***forgiveness***” is used 2 times in 1 verse – John 20:23 – “If you ***forgive*** the sins of any, their sins have been ***forgiven*** them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” This book addressed the idea forgive/forgiveness ***32 times***. Life seems to be the priority for John, not forgiveness. Forgiveness is a moot issue until a spiritually dead person has eternal life.

- In the Gospel of John, the idea of being “**born again**” is mentioned twice (Jn. 3:3, 7). Peter utilized it only two more times in the entire New Testament (1 Pt. 1:3, 23). The writer of this book **doesn’t use the concept** a single time.
- In the Gospel of John, the idea, concept or word “**believe**” and/or “**belief**” is used 98 times. This word and/or concept is used **74 times** by Mr. Gilbert.
- In the Gospel of John, the idea, concept or word “**repent**” and/or “**repentance**” is NOT mentioned a single time. In 1, 2 and 3 John it’s NOT mentioned once. In Revelation it’s used 12 times - 8 of those times regarding believers in chapters 2 and 3. This book addressed the idea of “repentance” and/or “repent” **52 times**. Mr. Gilbert forces repentance to be a good work, a “**renunciation** of sin (pg. 80).” He further states, “The Bible says that **Christians** are to be marked by the same kind of **love, compassion, and goodness** that characterized Jesus himself. **True Christians** will perform **deeds** in keeping with their **repentance**,” Paul says (Acts 26:20) (pg. 82).” Mr. Gilbert states, “It [repentance] is **turning away from sin, hating** it, and resolving by God’s strength to **forsake** it... (pg. 79).” Turning away, hating and forsaking sin are all **good works**. In contrast, “repentance” is consistently defined in Greek lexicons as **a change of mind** NOT turning from sin. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (LXX – Septuagint) Jonah 3:10 says, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God **repented** concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.” The context from which the word is used clarifies what a person needs to change their mind about.
 - **μετανοέω** fut. μετανοήσω; 1 aor. μετενόησα (Antipho +; inscr., pap., LXX, Philo, Joseph., Test. 12 Patr.) *change one’s mind*¹.
 - **μετανοέω** fut. μετανοήσω; 1 aor. μετενόησα (ἐμετενόησαν w. double augment ApcEsdr 2:24) (s. next entry; Antiphon+) *change one’s mind* Hv 3, 7, 3; m 11:4 (cp. Diod S 15, 47, 3 μετενόησεν ὁ δῆμος; 17, 5, 1; Epict. 2, 22, 35; Appian, Hann. 35 §151, Mithrid. 58 §238; Stob., Ecl. II 113, 5ff W.; PSI 495, 9 [258 B.C.]; Jos., Vi. 110; 262)²
 - **μετα-νοέω**, f. ἦσω, *to change one’s mind or purpose*, Plat., Xen.³
 - **μετανοέω**, (3340), lit., *to perceive afterwards (meta, after, implying change, noeō, to perceive; nous, the mind, the seat of moral reflection)*⁴

¹ Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1979). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature: a translation and adaption of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Worterbuch zu den Schrift en des Neuen Testaments und der ubrigen urchristlichen Literatur* (p. 511). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 640). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³ Liddell, H. G. (1996). *A lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English lexicon* (p. 503). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴ Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981). *Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (Vol. 2, pp. 279–280). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

- **μετανοέω** [*metanoëo* /met·an·o·eh·o/] v. From 3326 and 3539; TDNT 4:975; TDNTA 636; GK 3566; 34 occurrences; AV translates as “repent” 34 times. **1** to change one’s mind, i.e. to repent. **2** to change one’s mind for better⁵
- **μετανοέω**, *I change my mind, I change the inner man* (particularly with reference to acceptance of the will of God by the νοῦς (mind) instead of rejection): with ἀπό or ἐκ, the giving up definitely of the courses denoted by the following words is indicated.
- **μετάνοια**, *a change of mind, a change in the inner man*: ἀπό indicates what is given up in this change, Heb. 6:1.⁶
- **μετανοέω** μέτανῶδῶ, *met-an-ō-eh'-o*; from 3326 and 3539; to *think differently or afterwards*, i.e. *reconsider* (mor. *feel compunction*): - repent⁷

The gospel is defined by the writer as what Jesus has done for believers. Mr. Gilbert concludes that the good news is “based on what the Bible itself teaches” (pg. 20). He continues by saying, “Sadly, there has always been a tendency among Christians — even among evangelicals — to soften some of those edges so that the gospel will be more readily acceptable to the world” (pg. 21).

Mr. Gilbert asserts the gospel of Jesus is found in Romans chapters 1 to 4.

The writer states that Paul was writing to a “group of **Christians**...who **believed**...the same good news” (Pg 27-28). Paul “...tells his **readers** that their problem **IS** that they rebelled against God” (Pg 29). Mr. Gilbert seems confused. A person who has been justified cannot have a current justification problem of rebellion against God. Mr. Gilbert then lumps in believers with “the world” by stating “every last one of **us** will be held fully accountable to God” (Pg. 29). The writer doesn’t explain that believers will not be held accountable for sin but for their works (1 Cor. 3:12-15). He writes, “Finally, Paul tells his **readers** how they themselves can be included in this **salvation**” (Pg. 31). This contradicts his initial comment in that his audience was already a group of Christians – believers. Mr. Gilbert misquotes the text and misunderstands who the audience was.

Mr. Gilbert makes it clear that faith alone in Christ alone, according to Romans, is the gospel message. He says, “The salvation God has provided comes ‘through **faith** in **Jesus Christ**,’ and it is ‘for all who **believe** (3:22).’ The writer states, “By **believing** in Jesus Christ. By **trusting** him and no other to **save** me. ‘To the **one** who does **not work** but **believes** in him who justifies the ungodly,’ Paul explains, ‘his faith is counted as righteousness’ (4:5). (Pg. 30)”

Mr. Gilbert shares about the Gospel in the rest of NT.

He acknowledges the importance of context – “**Contexts** change, angles change, words change...” (Pg. 32). Mr. Gilbert also restates this on page 35, “Depending upon the **context**...”

⁵ Strong, J. (1995). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁶ Souter, A. (1917). *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (p. 157). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁷ Strong, J. (2009). *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 47). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

1 Corinthians 15

He defines the means of salvation beyond faith, believing and/or trusting in Christ. Mr. Gilbert adds **repentance**. “But God has acted in Jesus Christ to save us, and we take hold of that salvation by **repentance** from sin **AND faith** in Jesus” (Pg. 32). He quotes 1 Cor. 15 and summarizes it by stating, “But salvation comes in this: ‘Christ died for our sins...was buried...was raised.’ And all this is taken hold of by **holding fast** to the word I preached to you, by **believing truly** and not in vain” (Pg 33).

According to the writer, believers who “received” the gospel are “saved” if they “hold fast.” The writer injects an adjective that Paul didn’t use; a Christian is a person who is “believing **truly**” – one truly believes if they hold fast. Thus, the addition of the author’s understanding of repentance. If one equates “the gospel which I preached to you, which also you **received**” (justification) with “you are saved if you **hold fast**” (sanctification) then one injects the good work of “**holding fast**” into the gospel. “Holding fast” is incorrectly equated by the author as repentance - a requirement he says a proper response to the gospel requires.

Acts 2

Mr. Gilbert moves to Peter speaking to devout Jews who had just rejected Christ as the Messiah. The unique transitional and historical context of the time, the subject and the audience are important in understanding. The Jews saw a crucified Jesus as a false Messiah who blasphemed, caused problems and didn’t free them from Roman rule. Then He had come back from the dead. These 1st century Jews were “pierced to the heart” (2:37) because they saw what happened, heard what Peter was saying about Jesus and they “received his word/believed.” Peter then told them to “**Repent**” (change your mind about leadership and teaching – Mt. 23:36) and “be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **because** of the forgiveness of your sins...” (Acts 2:38). This would save these people NOT from hell, but from “this perverse generation” – disobedient Israel (2:40). According to Luke, the Jews who “received his word” and “were baptized” (2:41) were “...all those who had **believed**...” (2:44). **Belief** is the means to justification.

Instead, the writer sees these events as the general and timeless means for anyone to be justified, not just 1st century disobedient Israelis – “The necessary response; **repentance AND faith**, evidenced by the act of baptism” (Pg. 33).

Acts 3

Instead of the nation of Israel as a whole, Mr. Gilbert sees the general problem for all people for all time as the need to have sins wiped out and to avoid judgment by God. Mr. Gilbert states, “Solution: Christ suffers. Response; **repent AND turn** to God in faith” (Pg. 34). He misses the historical context.

Luke writes about the “Men of Israel” in the 1st century who “delivered up and disowned” Jesus (Acts 3:12-13). Peter relies upon the “basis of faith” (3:16 / belief) as the solution for their “ignorance” (3:17) – they didn’t believe Jesus was the Messiah. For a national blessing (Deut. 28:1-2), he tells these Jews to do two different things – “**Repent** (change your mind about Christ) therefore and **return** (obey) that your national sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come...and that He may send Jesus” (3:19-20). Peter closes with a warning to the nation – “every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people” (3:23). This is not an issue of hell or personal salvation but of national obedience and blessing – Mosaic Covenant.

Subsequently in Acts 4, after speaking about Christ and His resurrection, “Many of those who had heard the message **believed**; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (4:4). No obedience or holding fast required, simply belief in Christ for salvation (Acts 4:12).

Acts 10

In this historical account Mr. Gilbert asserts that faith alone is enough as a response to the gospel. He quotes Acts 10:43, “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who **believes** in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” No mention of repentance, turning to God or holding fast.

Acts 13

In verses 38-39 the writer states that “forgiveness of sins...happens through Jesus and it happens for everyone who **believes**” (pg. 34). Again, no mention of repentance, turning to God or holding fast.

Acts 17

In this passage the writer highlights that Paul, in his gospel presentation to a group of pagan philosophers, never mentions “**forgiveness**, no mention of the cross, and no promise of **salvation**...” (pg. 36). Mr. Gilbert also presents verses 24 to 28 as Paul teaching “...that there is a God, that this god made the world, and that he calls us to worship him (pg. 36).”

But the text of these verses deals repeatedly with another issue Mr. Gilbert ignores – life. “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people **life** and **breath** and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to **live** on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed **times** and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would **seek** God, if perhaps they might **grope** for Him and **find** Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we **live** and move and **exist**, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His **children** (17:24-28).” Paul’s gospel presentation to pagans dealt with **life** and **time** and **relationship**. Instead of calling Paul a “seed picker” (17:18) and “sneering” at the resurrection, they needed to “**change their minds**” – **repent** (17:30). Luke concluded this chapter by stating, “So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and **believed**, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them (17:33-34).” **Belief** can result when, after reasoning with a person, their mind is changed or persuaded (17:4, 11, 12, 17, 18:4, 8, 13, 19, 26, 27, 19:4, 8, 9, 18, 26).

In contrast to this historical account, Mr. Gilbert misses the context; “There’s no **gospel**, no **good news**, in his public sermon. The news Paul proclaims is all bad...Apparently, Paul preached the good news – that sinners could be **saved** from this coming **judgment** - at some alter time, perhaps publicly, perhaps privately” (pg. 36). The writer takes the position, in contrast to Paul and Luke, that the issue of **judgment** NOT **life** is the vital issue in a gospel presentation. Unlike Mr. Gilbert, Paul and Luke find “seeking”, “groping” and “finding” as a process God uses to save people who believe “Jesus” (17:18). For the writer, there is “no promise of salvation” in this encounter. When Mr. Gilbert forces the issues of forgiveness, judgement and turning from sin (his understanding of repentance) as being the gospel, Paul and Luke are found wanting in presenting life, a change of mind, belief, Jesus and finding God as biblical ingredients of a justification presentation.

According to the writer, the gospel is **“God is your Judge and you have sinned against him. Jesus has died so that sinners may be forgiven of their sins if they will repent and believe in him** (pg. 36).” One wonders if the Gospel of John and other clear and simple passages would offer something different.

Mr. Gilbert Speaks of God as the Righteous Creator

On page 40 the writer states “...that God is Creator, and that he is **holy** and righteous (pg. 40).” Mr. Gilbert says “Scripture tells us, however, that because he is perfectly just and righteous, God will deal decisively with all evil. Habakkuk 1:13 says ‘Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; **you cannot tolerate wrong.**’ To do so would be to renounce the very foundation of his throne. Even more, it would be to renounce his very Self, and that God will not do. (pg. 46)”

The writer makes it clear that God is holy and uncompromising. He tolerates no wrong. “...God is righteous and **holy**, and therefore he will **not excuse sin** (pg. 56).” Mr. Gilbert writes on page 67, “God his Father, who is **holy** and righteous, whose eyes are **too pure** to even look on evil... (pg. 67).” Mr. Gilbert does not compromise with any compromise. He states, “I have known many people who would say something like, ‘Yes, I’ve accepted Jesus as Savior, so I’m a Christian. But I’m just not ready to accept him as Lord yet. I have some things to work through.’ In other words, they claimed that they could have faith in Jesus and be saved, and yet not repent of sin” (pg. 79). But yet on page 98, Mr. Gilbert excuses sin in the church; “Look at the **church**...of course **it’s not perfect**, but the church is where the life of the kingdom is live and showcased to a world desperately in need of salvation.” Mr. Gilbert is willing to say that a “little bit of evil” is OK with a holy God, but “a lot of bad” just isn’t acceptable. The writer states, “Repenting of sin **doesn’t necessarily mean that you stop sinning** — certainly **not altogether**, and often **not in particular areas**, either. **Christians are still fallen sinners** even after God gives us new spiritual life, and **we will continue to struggle with sin** until we are glorified with Jesus (see, e.g. , Gal . 5:17; 1 John 2: 1)” (pg. 81).

Mr. Gilbert Speaks of Man the Sinner

The writer shares God’s plan for people. “...his intention was that they would **live...living** in unbroken fellowship with him...to be in **relationship** with him... (pg. 48).” The writer refers to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. On page 49 he states, “They knew what the consequences would be if they disobeyed him. God had told them in no uncertain terms that if they ate the fruit, they would ‘surely **die**,’ which meant above all that they would be cast away from his **presence** and become his enemies, rather than his **friends** and joyful subjects (Gen. 2:17).” He continued; “...God executed the promised sentence of **death** upon them...their souls became sear and arid, utterly void of that spiritual **life** that God gave them in the beginning, when everything was good. (pg. 50).” He shares Romans 3:23 – “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (pg. 50).”

Mr. Gilbert acknowledges no one is perfect and everyone has a death penalty.

The writer states “...it is so absolutely crucial that we understand both the **nature and the depth of our sin**. (pg. 51).” This might be difficult for a small child or a good (not perfect) person to do. Perhaps it’s more biblical and certainly might be wise to focus on the problem (death) instead of the cause (sin). Christ came to solve the problem of death. Christ came to give us life.

The writer seems unclear when he says, “There is a huge difference between understanding yourself to be guilty of sins, and knowing yourself to be guilty of **sin** (pg. 54).” Mr. Gilbert promotes the importance

of seeing sin as more than just a little mistake, but a gross affront to God. He eventually states, “It’s not enough to say that Jesus came to save us from sins, if what we mean by that is that he came to save us from our isolated mistakes. It’s only when we realize that our very nature is sinful — that we are indeed **‘dead** in our trespasses and sins,’ as Paul says (Eph. 2: 1, 5) — that we see just how good the news is that there is a way to be **saved** (pg. 55).”

The author seems to correctly state that Jesus came to deal with our death penalty not our performance issues. Mr. Gilbert confirms this by explaining Romans 6:23 – “...the payment we earn for our **sins** is to **die**. That’s not just physical death, either. It is spiritual **death**, a forceful **separating** of our sinful, wretched selves from the **presence** of the righteous and holy God (pg. 56).”

Mr. Gilbert Speaks of Jesus Christ the Savior

Mr. Gilbert speaks of Christ. “You are a sinner destined to be condemned. But God has acted to save sinners just like you! (pg. 60).” Save them from what? He states, “The Bible is the story of God’s counteroffensive against **sin** (pg. 61).” More correctly, it’s God’s counteroffensive against **death**. It’s God’s plan to restore an eternally right relationship (John 17:3), to move people from death to life (Eph. 2:1-5), to become friends (John 15:14).

In a book about the gospel, and certainly about justification, the first mention from the Gospel of John takes place on page 61. “John begins his story with an even more astonishing statement; ‘In the beginning (words that point back strongly to Gen. 1:1) ‘was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:1, 14) (pg. 61).”

In a book about the gospel, and certainly about justification, the second mention from the Gospel of John takes place on page 64. “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). A statement made by Christ to Pilate – not evangelistic in nature.

Mr. Gilbert makes a problematic statement. He says, “...he [Jesus] is able to defeat death and save us from our **sin** (pg. 61).” Christ saves us from our death penalty and gives eternal life to those who believe Him for it. If I were saved from sin I wouldn’t sin anymore, but indeed I (and possibly others) are still capable at missing the mark (1 Jn. 1:7, 9).

The writer makes a statement that seems to fall short. Though not bad, it’s not enough. Mr. Gilbert states, “You see, King Jesus came not only to **inaugurate** the kingdom of God, but also to **bring** sinners into it by dying in their place for their sin, **taking** their punishment on himself and **securing** forgiveness for them, **making** them righteous in God’s sight, and **qualifying** them to share in the inheritance of the kingdom (pg. 64).” First, what is lacking is that Christ came that they might have **life** and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10). I am the resurrection and the **life** (Jn. 11:25-26). He is the way, the truth and the **life** (Jn. 14:6). Second, my conduct as a Christian is what qualifies me as a believer for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Mt. 6:19-20, 1 Cor. 6:8-12).

In a book about the gospel, and certainly about justification, the third mention from the Gospel of John takes place on page 65. “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the **world!** That’s what John the Baptist...said when he saw Jesus coming toward him (John 1:29). What did he mean? The Lamb of God? Taking away the sin of the **world?**” Mr. Gilbert explains the extent of Christ’s payment as “the penalty of **death** of one’s sins could be paid by the **death** of another (pg. 65).” But the author fails to recognize that Christ paid for the sins of the **world** – Mr. Gilbert only states “...his mission was to die for

the sins of **his people** (pg. 65).” In a book about the gospel, and certainly about justification, the fourth mention from the Gospel of John takes place on page 66. “No one takes it [My life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord’ (John 10:15, 18). Jesus knew why he was going to die. Out of love for **his people** he willingly laid down his life, the Lamb of God slain so **his people** could be forgiven.” This contradicts John 3:16, 1 John 2:2, 1 Tim 2:6, 4:10, 2 Cor. 5:15, 1 Pt. 3:18 – Christ paid the death penalty for everyone. All sin, for all people for all time. “The world” NOT just “his people.” Mr. Gilbert makes it clear that “It was the punishment for **his people’s** sins!... Jesus bore all the horrible weight of the sin of **God’s people**. All **their** rebellion, all **their** disobedience, all **their** sin fell on his shoulders (pg. 67).” Mr. Gilbert is clear; “...[God] looked at his Son, saw the sins of **his Son’s people** resting on his shoulder, turned away in disgust, and poured out his wrath on his own Son (pg. 67).” He says it again, “...in Jesus’ substitutionary death for **his people** (pg. 69).” The writer asks and answers a question – “**Just who are ‘his people?’** (pg. 70)” Mr. Gilbert answers in the next chapter.

Mr. Gilbert Speaks of Response – Faith and Repentance

Faith is Reliance / Faith for a Righteous Verdict / Faith Alone

“That command – **repent AND believe** – is what God requires of us in response to the good news of Jesus (pg. 73).” “Jesus called on his listeners to **repent AND believe** the good news (pg. 73).” The writer attaches “repent and believe” with Peter (Acts. 2:38) and Paul (Acts 20:21, 26:18).

Mr. Gilbert answers his question – **who are his people?** “**Faith AND repentance**. This is what marks out those who are **Christ’s people**, or ‘**Christians**.’ In other words, a Christian is one who **turns away from his sin AND trusts in the Lord Jesus** Christ – and nothing else – to save him from sin and the coming judgment (pg. 73).”

Mr. Gilbert defines faith – “It is, biblically speaking, **reliance**. A rock-solid, truth-grounded, promise-founded **trust** in the risen Jesus to save you from **sin** (pg. 74).” What about the person who **only** believes **only** in Jesus **only** for eternal life? Is that enough? According to the writer – no. In describing faith, he uses an illustration of his son learning to swim in the pool by jumping to him. “To put it another way, it means **jumping off** the edge of the pool and saying, ‘Jesus, if you don’t catch me, I’m done. I’ve no other hope, no other savior. Save me, Jesus, or I die.’ That is **faith**. (pg. 79).” But that isn’t faith – it’s jumping. Jumping to my dad to catch me is one thing, believing my dad can catch me is another. One is active engagement; the other is passive appropriation. It’s like eating and drinking (Jn. 6:54) – it’s something but it’s NOT work. Jumping requires conduct. Believing requires persuasion.

The writer continues his discussion of faith. “The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to do the very same thing – to put our **faith in Jesus, rely** on him, and **trust** him to do what he has **promised** to do...But what exactly are we relying on Jesus for? To put it simply, we are **relying on him to secure for us a righteous verdict** from God the Judge, rather than a guilty one (pg. 75).” What about believing in Jesus for eternal life? Believing in Christ to secure a righteous verdict is not found in the Gospel of John. “The Bible teaches that the greatest need of every human being is to **be found righteous** in God’s sight, rather than wicked (pg. 76).” But the Apostle John tells us that the greatest need of every human is to have their name written in the **Lamb’s Book of Life** (Rev. 20:12, 21:27). The issue, time and again, is life.

Mr. Gilbert correctly states, “God saves us by pure grace, not because of anything we have done, but solely because of what Jesus has done for us (pg. 77).” Christ is the **only** effective provider for

justification. "...salvation comes **only through faith** in him (pg. 78)." Faith is the **only** means of justification. He writes, "It's very human to think – and even to insist – that we can contribute to our own **salvation**...we don't contribute **anything** at all...and certainly not any **good works**... (Gal. 2:16) (pg. 78-79)." Mr. Gilbert lines up well with Titus 3:5 – It's not by works of righteousness but according to His mercy He saved us. But by page 95 Mr. Gilbert has changed his mind by saying, "You can live like Jesus lived all you want, but unless you've come to the crucified King in **repentance AND faith**, relying on him alone as the perfect sacrifice for your sin and your only hope for salvation, you're **neither a Christian** nor a citizen of his kingdom." Mr. Gilbert contradicts himself when he injects the good work of repentance as a necessity for salvation.

Repentance, the Flip Side of the Coin

"If faith is turning to Jesus and relying on him for **salvation**, **repentance** is the **flip side** of that coin. It is **turning away** from sin, hating it, and **resolving** by God's strength to **forsake** it, even as we turn to him in faith...**Repentance** is not just an optional plug-in to the Christian life. It is **absolutely crucial** to it, **marking out** those who have been **saved** by God from those who have not (pg. 79)." In two verses Mr. Gilbert uses to prove his point (Acts 3:19, 26:20) the phrase "repent and turn to God" is used (pg. 79). In this context it appears that "**repenting**" (changing one's mind) AND "**turning to God**" (obedience) are two separate issues. Disobedient Jews in the 1st century and unbelieving Gentiles were called to "change their mind" about who Christ was.

A coin doesn't have one side – it has two. A coin is not made of only heads. It has heads and tails. They are not the same. Every head comes with a tail, every tail comes with a head. The coin is not only heads nor is it only tails. Thus, to equate salvation with a two-sided coin, one cannot say salvation comes only through faith. According to this writer, salvation, like a coin, has two sides. One side is faith and the other is repentance. One side is reliance and one side forsaking sin. Just as heads is not alone on a coin, faith is not alone in salvation. In addition to faith, turning away from sin is "absolutely crucial" for this author's justification (pg. 79).

The author shows his hand fully – without obedience, a person is not justified. Christ did not die for everyone created in the image of God, but only died for those people who believe AND turn away from sin. Turning away from sin is a good work – in spite of what the writer says ("...we don't contribute anything at all...and certainly not any good works... (pg. 78-79).

"I have known many people who would say something like, 'Yes, I've accepted Jesus as Savior, so I'm a Christian. But I'm just not ready to accept him as Lord yet. I have some things to work through.' In other words, they claimed that **they could have faith in Jesus and be saved, and yet not repent of sin**. If we understand repentance rightly, we'll see that the idea that you can accept Jesus as Savior but not Lord is **nonsense**. For one thing, it just doesn't do justice to what Scripture says about repentance and its connection with salvation. For example, Jesus warned, 'Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:3). The apostles, when they heard Peter's story about the conversion of Cornelius, praised God for granting to the Gentiles 'repentance that leads to life' (Acts 11:18), and Paul speaks of 'repentance that leads to salvation' in 2 Corinthians 7:10...And **where that renunciation of sin is not present, neither is genuine faith in the One who defeated it** (pg. 80)." This statement demonstrates the writer's belief that salvation is not by faith alone – refusal, denial and rejection of disobedience is required – all good works. This requirement of refusal to sin is directly opposed to the writer on page 117 – "Thank God, my relationship with him is not based on **my fickle will** or **my ability to live righteously**."

Additionally, this statement is at odds with Mr. Gilbert's previous observations and comments – "...even after God gives us new spiritual life, and **we will continue to struggle with sin** (pg. 81)." A refusal to renunciate sin is synonymous with continuing to struggle with it. When works are added to justification, wiggle room without compromise is pursued but always at the cost of contradiction. Non-biblical principles usually are inconsistent.

This wiggle room continues when Mr. Gilbert states, "When a person **genuinely repents AND believes** in Christ, the Bible says that he is given new spiritual life... When that happens, **our life changes** — not immediately, not quickly, not even necessarily steadily. But it does change. We begin to **bear fruit** (pg. 82)." But on page 117 the writer says, "...the gospel tells me that my righteous standing before God is not grounded in checking off some spiritual bingo card. Enough fruit?" A myriad of reasonable questions arises. How soon is acceptable? How quick is timely? How many pauses are allowed? What fruit is produced? Who needs to see the fruit? If producing fruit is an act of God, why is a Christian given numerous commands to obey?

Mr. Gilbert continues down the rabbit hole. He states, "There is always a danger that when we begin to **see fruit** in our lives, we'll subtly begin to **rely on that fruit for our salvation**, instead of on Christ...But if fruit gives assurance then fruit is relied upon (pg. 82, 84)." Mr. Gilbert stated that "repentance **marks out** those who are saved (pg. 79)." If fruit from obedience and renunciation from sin marks out those who are justified, then looking for fruit is to be expected. In biblical contrast, if faith alone in Christ alone is what is required for justification, then looking to Christ and His promises are a reasonable source of assurance (2 Tim. 1:12, 2:13).

On page 95 the writer says, "...**entrance into his kingdom** depend solely on whether a person **repents** of sin **AND trusts** in him and his atoning work on the cross (pg. 95)." One must repent and trust. Clearly it's not "only through faith (pg. 78) but also requires a "renunciation of sin (pg. 80)."

Mr. Gilbert Speaks About The Kingdom

The writer misses the fact that justification is a free gift. Mr. Gilbert states, "There's no doubt that becoming a Christian is a **costly thing** (Luke 14:28) (pg. 85)." Not according to Jesus: The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life **without cost**" (Rev. 22:17). Paul talks about the "free gift" in Romans 5:15, 16 and 6:23.

The writer states that "...**sin** itself was **defeated** when Jesus cried out on the cross, 'It is finished.' (pg. 89)." If sin was defeated then why is a Christian warned not to deny that sin is a part of life, commanded to obey and directed to confess sin (I Jn. 1:7-9). Sin wasn't defeated, spiritual death was. Sin is a reality and believers still have choices to obey or disobey.

The author does not seem to understand the biblical principle of eternal rewards in the Kingdom for obedient believers. Mr. Gilbert says, "...**inclusion in the kingdom of God** depends entirely on one's response to the King...Think about the story of the rich young ruler. 'What must I do to **inherit eternal life**?' the man asks. And Jesus' answer, finally, is 'Follow me,' which for that man meant **turning away from his trust in his own wealth** and believing in Jesus (Mark 10:17, 21) (pg. 93)." Christ defined what "inheriting eternal life" meant in vs. 21 – a believer who engages in good works will have "treasure in heaven."

The author takes Matthew 25 out of context. Mr. Gilbert equates the interaction of believers and unbelievers with Israel in the Tribulation with the normal experience of everyday life.

“It’s **not** at all that living the life of the kingdom brings us into the kingdom. It’s that once we have been brought into the kingdom through faith in the King, we find ourselves with a new master, a new law, a new charter, a new life — and therefore **we begin to want to live the life of the kingdom** (pg. 97).” Mr. Gilbert moves good works in justification from the front to the end. According to the writer, living obediently doesn’t get a person in the Kingdom but a person who is in the Kingdom will live obediently. A requirement is changed to an expectation – front end works are turned into backend works. Yet, in reality, if we want to “live the life of the kingdom” then why does Paul command - 1. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 2. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but 3. present yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to **life**. (Rom. 6:12–13). Works have nothing to do with justification therefore works don’t indicate justification. (Gal. 2:16, 3:11, Rom. 4:4-5)

Borrowing some phrases from Mr. Gilbert, I have some serious biblical and theological reservations about Mr. Gilbert’s understanding of justification. I’m not convinced that Scripture places effort as a requirement to be born again. I also don’t think the general trajectory of human culture, either in Scripture or in history, is in Mr. Gilbert’s Reformed theological belief system. At the end of the day, I wonder if the impulse to shove works into the center of the gospel comes from the bare fact that the world just doesn’t like God’s grace and Christ’s free gift of eternal life (pg. 108).

In a book about the gospel, and certainly about justification, the fifth and final mention from the Gospel of John takes place on page 121 – “I desire that they...may be with me where I am’ Jesus said (John 17:24).” This statement from Christ is a request to the Father concerning His disciples who already had eternal life – it’s not evangelistic in nature thus has nothing to do with the gospel.

Mr. Gilbert is consistently contradictory to the very end. On page 116 we see, “There aren’t a million things you ought to do. There is **one: repent** of your sins **AND believe** in Jesus...What the gospel calls you to do is to **turn your heart** away from sin **AND** toward Jesus in **faith**...But it all begins with **repenting** of sin **AND trusting** in Jesus to save you.” To say there is one thing required for salvation and then list pairs of two is just like the Apostle Peter injecting works into salvation. Paul said that he was not being “straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14).

Mr. Gilbert presents the gospel as such:

1. “First, Paul tells his readers that it is God to whom they are accountable. (pg. 28)”
2. “Second, Paul tells his readers that their problem is that they rebelled against God. (pg. 28)”
3. “Third, Paul says that God’s solution to humanity’s sin is the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (pg. 30)”
4. “Finally, Paul tells his readers how they themselves can be included in this salvation...The salvation God has provided comes ‘through faith in Jesus Christ,’ and it is ‘for all who believe.’ (pg. 30)”

Perhaps a more biblically consistent and grace-based gospel presentation would be found in four basic principles of Christianity:

1. God loves us and wants us to live forever in a relationship with Him (Jn. 3:16, 17:3).

2. Spiritual death is a problem (Rom. 3:23, 6:23, 5:8).
3. Jesus Christ is the solution (Jn. 14:6, 1 Cor. 15:3-6a, 1 Jn. 2:2).
4. Faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life (Jn. 3:36, 5:24, 6:40,47, 11:25-27, 1:12, Eph. 2:8-9).

What this author offers is deceptive. It is kind, challenging and contains good intentions (much like Peter did) but it is unbiblical. To effectively address spiritual issues, one's strategy should be consistent with the biblical text. Mr. Gilbert routinely equates a unique transitional moment in 1st century Christianity as the ministry norm for today. This causes a forfeiture or a compromise of context. Correct thinking leads to correct doing. The author's thoughts are misguided by Reformed Theology, are Lordship oriented and lend to justification salvation being made to a select few – not to everyone in the world. God's plan, the person of Christ and people made in His image are priceless and have great need for truth, peace, life and freedom. A Scripture centered gospel presentation is critical for these to become a reality in the lives of those who seek Him.