

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Exactly What is the Free Grace Movement?

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Proponents of the Free Grace Movement maintain that “Free Grace” affirms that anyone can receive eternal life the moment they believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). Free Grace advocates believe that good works are not the condition to merit (as with Catholics),¹ maintain (as with Arminians), or to prove (as with Calvinists) eternal life, but rather are part of discipleship and the basis for receiving eternal rewards.²



The grace (gift) of eternal life is said to be free as the only condition for receiving it is initial faith. This view distinguishes between salvation and discipleship—the call to believe in Christ as Savior and to receive the gift of eternal life, and the call to follow Christ and become an obedient disciple, respectively.³

While this position sounds solid and quite orthodox, it nonetheless is an aberration of the historic Christian faith. Thus, the promoters of the Free Grace Movement do err—and they err quite significantly!

¹ [“Catechism of the Catholic Church PART THREE LIFE IN CHRIST SECTION ONE MAN’S VOCATION LIFE IN THE SPIRIT CHAPTER THREE GOD’S SALVATION: LAW AND GRACE ARTICLE 2 GRACE AND JUSTIFICATION”](#). Retrieved 12 April 2021. *Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life . . . Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.*

² Anderson, David (2018). *Free Grace Soteriology* (3rd ed.). The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press; Dillow, Joseph (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (4th ed.). The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press.

³ Bing, Charles (2015). *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages*. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press. pp. 7–30.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

In his excellent book, *“Free Grace” Theology 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*, Wayne Grudem writes,

“Many of the people who hold the Free Grace viewpoint that I disagree with in the pages that follow have been my friends for years, even decades. They strongly affirm the complete inerrancy of the Bible, the Trinity, the full deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ for our sins, and dozens upon dozens of other important doctrinal convictions. Many of them lead exemplary Christian lives. They are genuine brothers and sisters in Christ, and I appreciate their friendship and their partnership in the work of God’s kingdom here on earth.”⁴

2

What is the Free Grace gospel?

The Free Grace position claims that we are justified *by faith alone*.⁵ Grudem writes, “I have no disagreement with that statement in itself—in fact, justification by faith alone has been a primary belief of Protestants since the time of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.”⁶

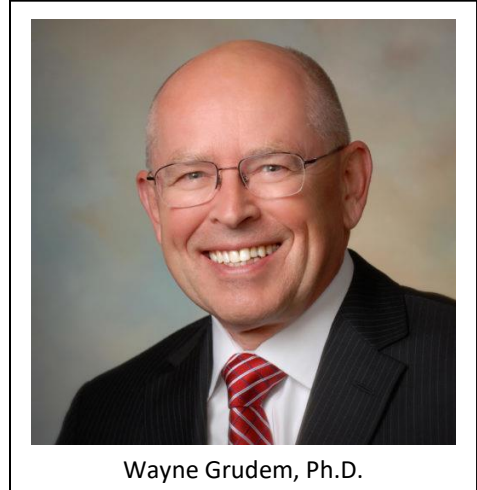
⁴ Grudem, W. (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (p. 17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway. “Therefore I consider this book to be part of a serious, earnest discussion of a significant difference, but a difference that is still among friends. Yet this book is about more than the Free Grace controversy. It is about the nature of the gospel that we proclaim in evangelism. The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the need for repentance from sin (in the sense of an internal resolve to turn from sin) as a crucial part of genuine saving faith. As I worked on this book, I became increasingly concerned that much of modern evangelicalism has a tendency to avoid or water down any call for unbelievers to sincerely repent of their sins (not merely to “change their minds”) as part of coming to trust in Christ for forgiveness of those sins ... This book also deals with assurance of salvation. How can I know if I’m really a born-again Christian, and how can I know that I will be saved for eternity? I’m concerned that there is considerable uncertainty about assurance in the evangelical world today, and therefore I have attempted to explain the New Testament material on assurance and also to treat sensitively the question of pastoral care for those who are wondering if they are truly saved ... Finally, this book deals with the nature of saving faith in the New Testament, explaining that it is a fuller and richer concept than merely believing that what the Bible says is factually and historically true (though that is important). Saving faith involves coming into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, coming into his presence and deciding to place my trust in him as a living, divine person who sees and hears us every moment and who knows the deepest thoughts of my heart. I am concerned that this emphasis on placing our trust in the person of Christ is too often missing in our evangelism today.” (pp. 17-18).

⁵ For example, the “Covenant” that defines the doctrinal position of the Free Grace Alliance says, “The Grace of God in justification is an unconditional free gift,” and, “The sole means of receiving the free gift of eternal life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose substitutionary death on the cross fully satisfied the requirement for our justification.” Accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.freegracealliance.com/covenant.htm>.

⁶ The phrase “justification by faith alone” captures the important disagreement between Protestants and Roman Catholics, who believe that we are justified by faith plus our use of the means of grace. In

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

The problem comes when the Free Grace movement understands “alone,” in the phrase “justified by faith alone,” in a novel way. Protestants generally have taken “alone” to mean that nothing else *helps* or nothing else *contributes* in our obtaining justification from God. Our faith is the only thing that God requires of us—not good works, not offering some sacrifice, not performing some ritual or ceremony, not the use of some means of grace—just faith alone.



But Free Grace proponents have gone beyond the claim that God asks of us nothing more than faith when he justifies us. They have made an additional claim: that faith *occurs by itself* when a person is justified, in the sense that no other human actions necessarily accompany faith (such as repentance from sin or doing good works after we are justified).⁷

Then, because they argue that “nothing else must necessarily be present” with faith, the Free Grace movement teaches that it is wrong to say that:

repentance from sin must accompany faith

or

any other human activities necessarily result from faith, such as *good works* or continuing to believe.⁸

This Free Grace understanding of “justification by faith alone” leads to several significant pastoral practices, such as:

Protestant theology, *justification* is defined as follows: “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 723.

⁷ Free Grace advocates certainly *encourage* good works as the “normal” and “expected” response to God’s saving grace, but they insist that no evident works must necessarily result from saving faith.

⁸ For example, the Covenant of the Free Grace Alliance says, “The Gospel of Grace should always be presented with such clarity and simplicity that no impression is left that justification requires any step, response, or action in addition to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Their literature then argues that repentance from sin is not a necessary part of saving faith (most of them define *repentance* as just a “change of mind” and not an inner resolve to turn from sin). They also argue that good works should not be said to necessarily follow from saving faith. (Grudem provides documentation of these points from Free Grace authors in his book.)

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

In evangelism. Evangelistic messages generally should not include any call to repentance, in the sense of an inward resolve to turn away from sin (this is said to be adding “works” to faith).

In giving assurance to people who deny their faith. People who accurately understood the gospel and sincerely said that they believed in Christ at some time in the past but now say that they no longer believe in Christ are likely to be still saved, and we can assure them that they are saved (because justifying faith is a one-time act).

In giving warnings to people who persist in sinful conduct. A professing Christian’s sinful conduct should not ordinarily be used as a basis for warning the person that he or she might not be saved (rather, we should say that the person is foolishly not living according to who he or she really is).

In giving assurance to people who continue to produce good works. A professing Christian’s righteous and godly conduct of life (“good works”) should not ordinarily be used as one basis for giving that person assurance of salvation.

Origins of the Modern Free Grace Movement

Where did the modern Free Grace movement come from? As far as I can tell, it stems primarily from a minority view among the faculty members at Dallas Theological Seminary. More particularly, it stems from an aggressive promotion of the Free Grace viewpoint by Zane Hodges (1932–2008), who taught New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary for twenty-seven years, from 1959 to 1986.

But that recent origin does not mean that the movement is insignificant. Although only a minority of Dallas Seminary professors held a Free Grace view, Zane Hodges was an exceptionally persuasive teacher, and every year some students adopted his view. Then, through these students, the Free Grace movement gained a remarkable worldwide influence, especially in discouraging Christians from including any explicit call to repentance in their presentations of the gospel. (I have been surprised how many Christian leaders in various parts of the world have said to me, “I’m glad you’re writing about this.”)⁹

⁹ Grudem (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 19–22).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Modern Proponents of the Free Grace Movement

Free grace theology re-emerged under this name in the late 20th century as a critical response to a perceived legalist abuse of the New Testament by Lordship salvation, Catholicism, and Arminianism.¹⁰ Its more modern prominent proponents, academicians, and theologians include:¹¹

- Lewis Sperry Chafer
- C. I. Scofield¹²
- J. Vernon McGee¹³
- Charles Ryrie¹⁴
- Robert Lightner¹⁵
- Merrill Unger¹⁶
- Miles J. Stanford
- Zane C. Hodges¹⁷
- Robert Wilkin¹⁸
- Charles Stanley¹⁹
- Larry Moyer²⁵
- Tony Evans²⁰
- Chuck Swindoll²¹
- Ernest Pickering
- Robert Thieme
- Bruce Wilkinson
- William Newell²²
- Lance Latham²³
- David Anderson²⁴
- Joe Wall

¹⁰ [Archived](#) February 21, 2009, at the [Wayback Machine](#). Dean, Robert. "Abiding in Christ: A Dispensational Theology of the Spiritual Life," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, 2006.

¹¹ **NOTE:** This listing has been posted on Wikipedia by Free Grace proponents and may be somewhat biased and, therefore, inaccurate! **Be a Berean!**

¹² Scofield, Cyrus (1922). *In Many Pulpits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹³ ["The Power of the Word of God"](#) on [YouTube](#)

¹⁴ Bob Nyberg. ["The Free Grace Fracture"](#) (PDF). 4himnet.com. Retrieved 25 February 2015.

¹⁵ Lightner, Robert (1996). *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation: The Theology of Everlasting Life*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel.

¹⁶ Unger, Merrill (1955). *Great Neglected Bible Prophecies*. Chicago: Scripture Press. pp. 120–122; Unger, Merrill (2005). *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, Rev. Ed. Chicago: Moody. p. 537.

¹⁷ Hodges, Zane (1981). *The Gospel Under Siege*. Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva; Hodges, Zane (1989). *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁸ Wilkin, Robert (2005). "Justification by Faith Alone is an Essential Part of the Gospel". *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*: 1–13.

¹⁹ Stanley, Charles (1998). *Understanding Eternal Security: Secure in God's Unconditional Love*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

²⁰ Evans, Anthony (2008). *Theology You Can Count On*. Chicago: Moody.

²¹ ["Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace? Pt. 1"](#) on [YouTube](#).

²² ["William R. Newell"](#). Pilkingtonandsons.com. 1956-04-01. Retrieved 2015-02-25.

²³ Latham, Lance (1984). *The Two Gospels*. Streamwood, Illinois: Awana Clubs International.

²⁴ Anderson, David (2018). *Free Grace Soteriology* (3rd. ed.). The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press.

²⁵ Moyer, Larry (1997). *Free and Clear: Understanding & Communicating God's Offer of Eternal Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

- Earl Radmacher²⁶
- Charles Bing²⁷
- Joseph Dillow²⁸
- Fred Chay²⁹
- J. Paul Tanner³⁰

The Free Grace Movement's prominent present-day expressions are Grace School of Theology, the Grace Evangelical Society, the Free Grace Alliance, and local churches.

Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS)

Many modern proponents of free grace theology studied and taught at the Dallas Theological Seminary, including Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Zane C. Hodges, and Dave Anderson, though the seminary itself does not hold to free grace. A number of free grace churches are pastored by graduates of DTS. A number of opponents of free grace also graduated from DTS including Darrel Bock³¹ and Daniel Wallace.

Grace School of Theology (GSOT)

Dave Anderson, former student and professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, established Grace School of Theology (originally Houston Theological Seminary)³² in 2001. Grace School of Theology "is committed to Christian scholarly endeavor in the free grace tradition."³³ The school's vision is "To develop spiritual leaders in every nation who can teach others about the love of Christ, a love that cannot be earned and cannot be lost."³⁴ The school is accredited by TRACS, ATS, and the ECFA³⁵ with 14 teaching sites in the United States and internationally.³⁶ Eight of the 36 faculty members trained at Dallas Theological Seminary.³⁷ Grace School of Theology promotes the Free Grace position

²⁶ Radmacher, Earl (2007). *Salvation*. Swindoll Leadership Library Series. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

²⁷ Bing, Charles (2010). *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (2nd ed.). Xulon. "[Lordship Salvation](#)". GraceLife Ministries. 2010-01-01. Retrieved 2020-08-06.

²⁸ Dillow, Joseph (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press.

²⁹ Chay, Fred, ed. (2017). *A Defense of Free Grace Theology*. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press.

³⁰ Tanner, Paul, ed. (2017). *A Defense of Free Grace Theology*. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press.

³¹ Bock, Darrell. "[Curriculum Vitae](#)". *Bible.org Blogs*. Retrieved 23 November 2020.

³² "[History - Grace School of Theology](#)". *Grace School of Theology*. Retrieved 2018-10-23.

³³ "[History](#)". *Grace School of Theology*. Retrieved 12 December 2018.

³⁴ "[Vision](#)". *Grace School of Theology*. Retrieved 20 December 2018.

³⁵ "[Accreditation](#)". *Grace School of Theology*. Retrieved 20 December 2018.

³⁶ "[Locations](#)". *Grace School of Theology*. Retrieved 20 December 2018.

³⁷ "[Faculty - Grace School of Theology](#)". *Grace School of Theology*. Retrieved 2018-10-23.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

through its classes (with over 600 students internationally) and also through Grace Theology Press, which has published many resources related to Free Grace theology.³⁸

Free Grace Alliance (FGA)

The Free Grace Alliance formed in November 2004 with an emphasis on international missions.³⁹ Although the new organization was officially formed for a "different reason",⁴⁰ the FGA split from GES in 2005 when most of the prominent leaders (including the chairman of the board) within GES rejected the change in the content of saving faith being taught by Zane C. Hodges and GES changed its doctrinal statement regarding the content of saving faith.⁴¹ A FGA statement of non-association with GES was made in 2009.⁴² Fred Lybrand as President of the Free Grace Alliance publicly rejected the Grace Evangelical Society view as false doctrine in 2009 and called for their repentance.⁴³ The FGA holds annual conferences, and numerous local churches and Christian ministries are associated with the FGA as members or affiliates.⁴⁴

Grace Evangelical Society (GES)

Founded in 1986 by Robert Wilkin, the Grace Evangelical Society focuses on publishing, podcasts, and conferences. GES was a focal point for the mainstream Free Grace movement until 2005, when it officially altered its beliefs statement to say that eternal life and eternal security are synonymous⁴⁵ and that belief in eternal security provided by Jesus is the sole requirement for salvation.

Zane C. Hodges, a prominent Free Grace theologian, was a core theologian of the GES group until his death in 2008. In his later years, Zane Hodges controversially argued that the inclusion of Jesus' promise of eternal salvation was a necessity for proper evangelization.⁴⁶ He viewed the sole condition of eternal salvation as believing in Jesus'

³⁸ ["Grace Theology Press by Grace School of Theology"](#). *Grace Theology Press*. Retrieved 2018-10-23.

³⁹ ["History"](#). *Free Grace Alliance*. Retrieved 20 December 2018.

⁴⁰ Bing, Charles (November 14, 2014). "The Free Grace Alliance within the Free Grace Movement: It Is What It Is!". *Free Grace Alliance National Conference*.

⁴¹ Reiher, Don (2010). "Zane Hodges and GES Did Not Change the Gospel". *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. **23** (45): 31–58.

⁴² ["Free Grace Alliance Announces an Open Break from the Grace Evangelical Society and its "Crossless" Gospel"](#). *InDefenseOfTheGospel.blogspot.com*. Retrieved 20 December 2018.

⁴³ Fred Lybrand. ["GES Gospel: Lybrand Open Letter, April, 2009"](#) (PDF). Retrieved 6 November 2020.

⁴⁴ ["Member Ministries"](#). *Free Grace Alliance*. Retrieved 20 December 2018.

⁴⁵ Lazar, Shawn. ["J. Dwight Pentecost on Eternal Security and the Promise of Life – Grace Evangelical Society"](#). Retrieved 2020-09-10.

⁴⁶ ["How to Lead People to Christ"](#). *faithalone.org*. Retrieved 2020-09-10.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

promise of eternal life, and GES began to promote this view increasingly.⁴⁷ In this view, a person could believe that Jesus is God and Savior who died and rose again, without believing in him for eternal salvation (faith in eternal security), and could therefore still be damned. A person could also become a Christian by believing in someone named Jesus for eternal security, while rejecting that he is God and Savior from sin by his death and resurrection.

8

The change in GES's official doctrinal statement caused many members (including the chairman of the board) and the majority of academic members to leave GES in 2005–6. Almost all free grace academic theologians rejected the new statement, arguing that eternal life and eternal security are not the same thing.⁴⁸ They also objected that this view would by consequence damn all Christians from the time of AD 100 until the 1500s, since there is no evidence that anyone believed in eternal security.⁴⁹ John Niemelä of GES responded that the promise of eternal life was present during that time through the regular reading of the Gospel of John in the lectionaries.⁵⁰ However, Wilson responded that Niemelä's contention was based on an informal logical fallacy and a heresy.⁵¹ Outside of the mainstream free grace movement, others have also called the GES view a modern heresy.⁵²

⁴⁷ Reiher (2010). "Zane Hodges and GES Did Not Change the Gospel," pp. 31–58.

⁴⁸ Bing, Charles (1996). "The Condition for Salvation in John's Gospel". *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. 9 (16): 25–36. Bing, Charles (1994). "How to Share the Gospel Clearly". *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. 7 (12): 51–65. Sapaugh, Gregory (2001). "A Response to Hodges: How to Lead a Person to Christ, Parts 1 and 2". *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. 14 (27): 21–28. Wilson, Kenneth (2006). "Is Belief in Christ's Deity Required for Eternal Life in John's Gospel?". *CTSJ*. 12 (2): 58–86. "[Doctrinal Statement](#)". Grace School of Theology. Retrieved 5 December 2018. "[Mission and Beliefs](#)". Free Grace Alliance. Retrieved 5 December 2018.

⁴⁹ Anderson, David (2008). "Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification". *CTSJ* (13): 49.

⁵⁰ Niemelä, John. "[Was the Gospel Lost Until the Reformation? – Grace Evangelical Society](#)". Retrieved 2020-09-10.

⁵¹ Wilson, Kenneth (2020). *Heresy of the Grace Evangelical Society: Become a Christian without Faith in Jesus as God and Savior*. Regula Fidei Press. pp. 167–74, Appendix A - The Niemelä Fallacy.

⁵² Peterson, Robert (1992). "Christian Assurance: Its Possibility and Foundations". *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review*. 18 (4): 10–24.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Core Beliefs of the Free Grace Movement

Core beliefs common to Free Grace theology historically include:

Belief	Explanation
Faith alone	God declares a person righteous by faith in Christ (imputed righteousness) regardless of works accompanying faith either before or after. John 3:14–17 compares believing in Jesus to the Israelites looking upon the bronze serpent in the wilderness for healing from deadly venom (Numbers 21). ⁵³
Free choice	Justifying faith is not an irresistible gift of God but a human response to God's love. Humanity retains a free will capable of both belief or unbelief when God lovingly woos and invites. Sanctifying faith also involves choice. People choose whether or not to obey, and the resulting consequences (sanctification and reward, defilement and punishment) are due to their choices. The principle that “we reap what we sow” applies to all humanity, because all humans have a God-given gift of making choices. ⁵⁴
Relationship differs from intimacy	A permanent relationship with God as Father and the believer as a child begins by faith alone. When someone believes, there is a “new birth” and this spiritual birth cannot be undone. However, the familial relationship does not guarantee fellowship; intimacy with God requires obedience. ⁵⁵
Justification differs from sanctification	Justification before God is a free unconditional gift by faith alone but sanctification requires obedience to God. Sanctification of all Christians is not guaranteed. Only final glorification of all Christians to a sinless state is guaranteed (Romans 8:30; Philippians 2:12). ⁵⁶
Eternal security	Once a person has believed in Jesus Christ as God and Savior that person spends eternity with God regardless of subsequent behavior. God's eternal acceptance is unconditionally given. Belonging to God's family is a permanent and irrevocable gift (Romans 11:29). ⁵⁷
Assurance of salvation	Confidence of spending eternity with God is possible for every Christian since God justifies through faith alone and provides eternal security. ⁵⁸

⁵³ Bing, Charles (2010). *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response*. Xulon.

⁵⁴ Geisler, Norman (2001). *Chosen But Free* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

⁵⁵ Anderson, David (2013). *Maximum Joy: First John – Relationship or Fellowship?* (New Study ed.). The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press.

⁵⁶ Radmacher, Earl (2007). *Salvation*. *Swindoll Leadership Library*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. pp. 143–186; Dillow (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. pp. 350–390.

⁵⁷ Charles, Stanley (1998). *Understanding Eternal Security: Secure in God's Unconditional Love*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson; Dillow (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. pp. 719–738.

⁵⁸ Moyer, Larry (1997). *Free and Clear: Understanding & Communicating God's Offer of Eternal Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel. pp. 57–79; Anderson (2018). *Free Grace Soteriology* (3rd. ed.).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Rewards and discipline	All Christians will undergo judgment by Christ based upon their works and degree of conformity to Christ's character (or lack thereof). This is called the judgment seat or Bema Seat of Christ, where Christians are rewarded based on obedience to God through faith. ⁵⁹ This judgment does not concern heaven or hell but rewards (payment for service) or temporary punishment. God's familial acceptance of his children is unconditionally given. However, God's payments of eternal honor, riches, and positions of authority are only given for children who obediently served God. Good parents discipline their children and will not approve behavior that is detrimental. Neither will God approve sinful behavior that leads to destructive consequences (Hebrews 12:5–11). ⁶⁰
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Soteriology

Free Grace theology is distinguished by its soteriology or doctrine of salvation. Its advocates believe that God justifies the sinner on the sole condition of *faith in Christ*, not righteous living. **However, Free Grace writers generally agree that good works do not play a role in meriting, maintaining, or proving eternal life.** In other words, Jesus *graciously* provides eternal salvation as a free gift to those who believe in Him.⁶¹

Although in popular speech "salvation" is commonly used to refer to justification, Free Grace advocates point out that believers can experience "salvation" in a number of ways, from a number of things either physically or spiritually. As used in the Bible, "salvation" means "deliverance" and is not a technical term meaning "go to heaven." This can be demonstrated by Acts 27:34 where the Greek word *soteria* (typically translated as "salvation") is translated "health" or "strength" because food will assist their deliverance from physical death. Spiritually, salvation can refer to deliverance from the eternal penalty of sin (justification), the current power of sin over the Christian (sanctification), the removal of any possibility to sin (glorification), and being restored to stewardship over the world as God intended for humankind at creation (restoration to rule).⁶²

Dispensationalism

Modern Free Grace theology is typically, but not necessarily, dispensational in its assumptions regarding the philosophy of history and in terms of its networks and affiliations.⁶³

⁵⁹ Radmacher, Earl (Spring 1995). "[Believers and the Bema](#)". *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. 8 (14).

⁶⁰ Dillow (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. pp. 910–989.

⁶¹ [Archived](#) December 9, 2008, at the [Wayback Machine](#); [Archived](#) November 20, 2008, at the [Wayback Machine](#).

⁶² Dillow (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. pp. 990–1030.

⁶³ Breshears, Gerry (November 21–23, 1991). [New Directions in Dispensationalism](#). Evangelical Theological Society 43rd National Conference. Kansas City, MO

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Assurance

One of the unique aspects of free grace theology is its position on assurance. All free grace advocates agree that assurance of spending eternity with God is based on the promise of scripture through faith alone in Jesus Christ, and not one's works or subsequent progression in sanctification. This view strongly distinguishes the gift of eternal life (accompanying justification by faith) from discipleship (obedience). Free Grace teaches that a person does not need to promise disciplined behavior or good works in exchange for God's eternal salvation; thus, one cannot lose his or her salvation through sinning and potential failure, and that assurance is based on the Bible, not introspection into one's works. God declares persons righteous through Christ's perfection. Whatever little progress humans make towards perfection is infinitesimal compared to Christ's perfection. Thus, comparing one's progress towards perfection with another person's progress is viewed as unwise (2 Cor 10:12). Assurance is based on Christ's perfection given freely to believers (imputed righteousness) and not based on progressive steps of holiness. Dallas Theological Seminary⁶⁴ sums up the general consensus of free grace theology in Article XI of its doctrinal statement, in reference to assurance:⁶⁵

We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude, and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6–8; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 5:13).

A novel view proposed by Zane C. Hodges and accepted only by the Grace Evangelical Society is that assurance is of the essence of saving faith: "A careful consideration of the offer of salvation as Jesus Himself presented it, will show that assurance is inherent in that offer."⁶⁶ This view holds that faith is, by definition, a conviction that what Jesus promises is true. If a person *has never been* sure that he had eternal life which could never be lost (i.e., sure that he was once-for-all justified, sure that he is going to heaven no matter what), then it is posited that he has not yet believed in Christ in the Biblical sense (cf. John 11:25-26 and Jesus' question, "Do you believe this?"). The majority of Free Grace

⁶⁴ **NOTE:** Dallas Theological Seminary *does not* advocate Free Grace theology even though a number of their former professors do so.

⁶⁵ "[Dallas Theological Seminary Website](http://DallasTheologicalSeminaryWebsite.com)". Dts.edu. Retrieved 2013-12-02.

⁶⁶ Hodges, Zane (1981). *The Gospel Under Siege : Faith & Works in Tension*. Redencion Viva. p. 10.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

advocates reject this view, because this view requires faith in eternal security for justification, not in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Repentance

Free grace theology approaches the doctrine of repentance in a different way than most other Christian traditions.⁶⁷

12

Harry A. Ironside ("Except Ye Repent", American Tract Society, 1937) and Lewis Sperry Chafer (*Systematic Theology*, completed 1947), among others, returned to consider the fundamental meaning of the Greek word *metanoia* (repentance), which simply means "to change one's mind." In biblical passages concerning eternal salvation, the object of repentance was often seen simply as Jesus Christ, making repentance equivalent to faith in Christ. Passages identifying a more specific object of repentance were understood to focus on man's need to change his mind from a system of self-justification by works to trusting in Christ alone for salvation, or a change in mind from polytheism to a belief in Jesus Christ as the true living God. Further exposition came from various free grace authors.⁶⁸

Zane C. Hodges and Robert Wilkin hold that repentance is defined as turning from one's sins, but repentance is not a requirement for eternal life, only faith in Christ. Robert N. Wilkin undertook a detailed examination in his doctoral dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary (1985), which he simplified for a more popular audience in the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* from Autumn 1988 to Autumn 1990. Hodges takes the position in *Absolutely Free!* (and in more detail in *Harmony With God*) that the process of repentance may be a preparatory step in coming to salvation, and should be evident in the life of a believer, but a lost man can be born again apart from repentance by any definition. Hodges also says that he no longer holds to the *change of mind* view of repentance. In *Harmony with God*, Hodges says that there is only one answer to the

⁶⁷ The Reformed tradition, for instance, sees repentance as "a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 713). Defined as such, it is a component of conversion and also of sanctification, and it is a regularly recurring element throughout the Christian's life. This repentance cannot be present in unbelievers at all (unless perhaps God is in the process of converting them) because only those truly regenerated by God can exercise it.

⁶⁸ E.g., Dick Seymour, *All About Repentance* (1974); G. Michael Cocoris, *Lordship Salvation, Is it Biblical?* (circa 1983) and *Repentance: The Most Misunderstood Word in the Bible* (1993); Curtis Hutson, *Repentance, What does the Bible Teach*; Richard Hill, *Why a Turn or Burn Theology is Wrong*; and Ronald R. Shea, *The Gospel* booklet (1988); and numerous articles by John R. Rice and Curtis Hutson in the *Sword of the Lord* magazine.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

question "What must I do to be saved?" "Repentance is not part of that answer. It never has been and never will be."

Content of saving faith

Among Free Grace adherents there is general agreement about the nature of saving faith⁶⁹ but not its content. The majority of Free Grace theologians hold that belief in Jesus Christ for eternal life must include belief in certain aspects of his person and work, such as one or more of the following: his deity,⁷⁰ humanity, substitutionary death for sin and bodily resurrection.⁷¹ The doctrinal statement of Grace School of Theology (cited above) supports this view.

The Free Grace Alliance also states in its affirmations that the finished work of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is essential to believe for eternal life: "Faith is a personal response, apart from our works, whereby we are persuaded that the finished work of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, has delivered us from condemnation and guaranteed our eternal life."⁷²

The more recent view of Zane Hodges and the Grace Evangelical Society considers it to be theological legalism to require (for eternal life) belief in Christ's deity, death for sin, and bodily resurrection since this would exceed the requirement of the minimal saving message to simply "believe in Jesus for everlasting life."⁷³ This view seeks support mainly from passages in the Gospel of John that speak of Jesus guaranteeing everlasting life to all who believe in him for it (3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-27). According to this view, the Gospel of John is considered to be the only evangelistic book of the Bible written to bring people to belief in Jesus Christ for eternal life (20:30-31). While no direct biblical evidence for the requirement of belief in eternal security for justification has been put forth, proponents argue that (a) eternal life and eternal security are equivalent—unless you believe in eternal security you have never believed in Christ⁷⁴ and (b) the term "Christ" means the One who guarantees eternal salvation to the believer (John 11:25-27). In this view of Hodges and GES, all Catholics, Orthodox, Arminians and Calvinists are not Christians and are not saved because they do not believe in eternal security.

⁶⁹ Chay, Fred; John Correia (2012). *The Faith That Saves: The Nature of Faith in the New Testament — An Exegetical and Theological Analysis on the Nature of New Testament Faith*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

⁷⁰ Kenneth M. Wilson (2006). "Is Belief in Christ's Deity Required for Eternal Life in John's Gospel?" *CTS Journal* 12.2, pages 58–86.

⁷¹ Charlie Bing. "[The Content of the Gospel of Salvation](#)". [gracelife.org](#). Retrieved 25 February 2017.

⁷² "[Mission & Beliefs](#)". Free Grace Alliance. Retrieved 2018-11-06.

⁷³ Zane C. Hodges. "[The Hydra's New Head: Theological Legalism](#)". [Faithalone.org](#). Retrieved 2015-02-25.

⁷⁴ Wilkin, Robert (1999). *Confident in Christ*. Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society. p. 185.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Comparison to the five points of Reformed Theology

Free Grace contrasts with the teachings of Reformed Theology, which are often characterized by the acrostic "TULIP".

Calvinism	Free Grace
Total depravity: Humans are not capable of having faith in God because they are totally depraved (total inability). ⁷⁵	God gave men the ability to choose, and they are capable of choosing to believe God and believe in Christ (without a divine infusion of faith). ⁷⁶
Unconditional election: Men are not capable of coming to faith on their own (God must infuse faith). God simply chooses to bring some to Himself independently of a choice on the part of the elected person. ⁷⁷	God desires that all persons should come to faith in Him, and election is according to God's foreknowledge of faith (1 Pet 1:1-2). ⁷⁸
Limited atonement: Since God only elects some and not others, Christ's death on the cross only applies to the elect. Jesus therefore did not die for the entire world. ⁷⁹	Jesus died for everyone, but is only effective for those who believe in Christ. ⁸⁰
Irresistible grace: Man is totally depraved, God must impose His grace upon the elect in such a way that they are compelled to believe. ⁸¹	God's grace can be and is resisted by humans but is also embraced by humans without divine coercion. ⁸²
Perseverance of the saints: The only way to know if you have received irresistible grace resulting in saving faith is to see whether you continuously grow in obedience and good works. Obedience and good works are inevitable. Since they view faith as God's gift then faith must be perfect and ultimately produce perfect people. ⁸³	The Christian is eternally secure through God's grace whether or not he/she dies in "state of grace" by persevering in good works. Perseverance in faith is the believer's choice and the means by which believers can achieve maximum joy

⁷⁵ ["The Doctrine of Absolute Inability"](#). Grace to You. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

⁷⁶ ["Doctrinal Statement"](#). Grace School of Theology. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

⁷⁷ Grudem, Wayne. ["Election Is Not Based on God's Foreknowledge of Our Faith"](#). Monergism. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

⁷⁸ Cobb, John (1954). "Election Is Based on Foreknowledge". *Review and Expositor*. **51** (1): 22–28. doi:10.1177/003463735405100103. S2CID 146858973.

⁷⁹ Schwertley, Brian. ["Limited Atonement"](#). Monergism. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

⁸⁰ Waite, D.A. ["Calvin's Error of Limited Atonement"](#). UK Apologetics. Retrieved 15 December 2018; See also Alcorn, Randy. ["What Is Your View on Limited Atonement?"](#). Eternal Perspective Ministries. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

⁸¹ Murray, John. ["Irresistible Grace"](#). Ligonier Ministries. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

⁸² Smith, C. Fred (2010). ["Whosoever Will: A Review Essay"](#). LBTB Faculty Publications and Presentations: 377.

⁸³ Piper, John (15 March 2008). ["Perseverance of the Saints"](#). *Desiring God*. Retrieved 15 December 2018.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

and fulfillment, both in this life as well as in eternity.⁸⁴

The fundamental disagreement between Free Grace and Reformed theology is over humanity's ability to choose the good and believe God.⁸⁵ Adherents to free grace point to verses such as Acts 17:27 that indicate non-believers can “grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” Further, Free Grace advocates point out that the Bible is full of admonitions for human readers to make good choices. As an example, they point to Galatians 5:13 “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” “Liberty” or freedom means the ability to make choices for yourself. This verse admonishes believers to make good choices, and acknowledges they can make a choice to follow the Spirit or the flesh. The balance of the passage speaks of the consequences of giving priority to the flesh (human lusts) or the Holy Spirit. Adherents to Free Grace theology maintain that all believers have the power to overcome sin through the indwelling Holy Spirit, but have a choice whether to use that power.⁸⁶ The “TULIP” doctrines were brought into Christianity by Augustine of Hippo starting in AD 412 during his conflict with the Pelagians.⁸⁷ Free Grace theologians argue that Augustine erred in departing from his prior traditional Christian doctrines to form Augustinian Calvinism, and this in turn influenced Calvin. Free Grace theology opposes each of these doctrines as countering the teachings of the Bible as well as the teachings of early church fathers prior to Augustine.

15

And Now for the Rest of the Story

It's safe to assume that if you're a Christian, you love the gospel. For that reason, it's safe to assume that if something were diminishing the gospel, you'd want to know what it was.⁸⁸

That is why “Free Grace” *Theology: Five Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* by Wayne Grudem is germane for your consideration. It's germane even if you've never heard of the “Lordship salvation” controversy. And it's germane because it deals with an issue at the heart of the gospel: the nature of saving faith. How does saving faith relate to repentance?

⁸⁴ Stanley, Charles (1990). *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?*. Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson. p. 80.

⁸⁵ Dillow (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. pp. 565–610.

⁸⁶ Anderson, David (2012). *Free Grace Soteriology* (Rev ed.). The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press. pp. 289–310.

⁸⁷ Wilson, Kenneth (2018). *Augustine's Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to "Non-free Free Will: A Comprehensive Methodology*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. pp. 273–298.

⁸⁸ Dillehay, Justin (2016). The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/free-grace-theology/>. Retrieved August 7, 2021, p. 1.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Does it always produce good works? Should we ever doubt that our faith is genuine? And what does it mean to say we're justified by faith *alone*? These are the sorts of crucial questions Grudem tackles in this book.

The distinguishing mark of Free Grace Theology (FGT) is its understanding of what it means to be justified by faith *alone*. For Grudem, this is also its distinguishing error:

The mistakes of the Free Grace movement today all stem from a misunderstanding of the way the word *alone* is used in the expression "justification by faith alone."⁸⁹

Grudem's central argument is that the FGT understanding of "faith alone" is directly at odds with the New Testament's, and that the difference turns on two questions: (1) Is repentance from sin (in the sense of remorse for sin and an internal resolve to forsake it) necessary for saving faith and (2) Do good works and continuing to believe necessarily follow from saving faith?⁹⁰

Upon close examination of Free Grace Theology, we discover that FGT answers *no* to both questions, whereas Grudem successfully argues that both the Bible and classic Protestantism answer *yes*. Herein lies the substance of the book.

Five Ways Free Grace Theology Diminishes the Gospel

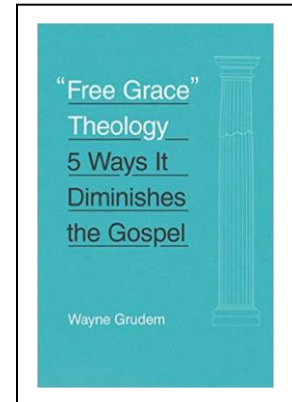
1. *The Free Grace movement does not teach the Reformation doctrine of "justification by faith alone."*

When people first hear Free Grace advocates say that they promote "justification by faith alone," it sounds attractive, because even Christians with little knowledge of theology remember that Protestants all hold to justification by faith alone. What is not clear at first is that the Free Grace movement teaches a novel and distorted view of justification by faith alone, a view that was never taught by the great leaders of the Protestant Reformation. In fact, at its very core the Free Grace movement is based on a misunderstanding of the way the word *alone* functions in the historic Protestant affirmations of justification by faith alone.

The historic Protestant position has often been summarized in a brief sentence:

⁸⁹ Grudem, (2016). "Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (p. 141).

⁹⁰ Dillehay, (2016). <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/free-grace-theology/>, (p. 1).



Lion and Lamb Apologetics

We are justified by faith *alone*, but the faith that justifies is *never alone*.

The second half of the sentence, “the faith that justifies is never alone,” means that other things always accompany saving faith. In particular, saving faith is always followed by changes in a person’s conduct of life. In other words, saving faith is never alone in a person, for *some good works will always accompany saving faith in a person’s life* and will be seen after a person comes to faith.

17

Therefore, the Reformers always took “faith alone” to mean that faith is the only thing that God responds to. But historic Protestant teaching from the Reformation onward has *never* taken “faith alone” to mean “faith that *occurs by itself* in a person, unaccompanied by other human activities” (the Free Grace view).⁹¹

Grudem demonstrates that Protestant leaders throughout history have *consistently disagreed* with the Free Grace position [see Excursus #1 on page 34]. He then determines that the Free Grace movement today is *not upholding* the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, or “justification by faith alone” [see Excursus #2 on page 36]. Finally, Grudem shows that Free Grace supporters sometimes claim that it is a contradiction to claim that we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone. For example, in a book promoted by the Free Grace Alliance, author Fred Lybrand examines this claim in the form, “It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone.” Lybrand says that this claim is “internally incongruent” and that it “leads to the notion that faith alone = faith not alone.”⁹² Lybrand adds that the illogical character of this claim can be stated in other ways, such as:

Faith apart from works = Faith with (not apart from) works.

Or:

Faith without works = Faith never without works.⁹³

But Lybrand repeatedly fails to give adequate consideration to the two different verbs in the two halves of the sentence,

⁹¹ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 27–28).

⁹² Fred R. Lybrand, *Back to Faith: Reclaiming Gospel Clarity in an Age of Incongruence* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 1–19.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 21. Fred Chay and John Correia say, “If we are to articulate that we are saved by faith alone and then stipulate by definition that the faith that saves is never alone, it seems difficult to then pronounce that we are saved by faith alone, since by definition faith is never alone.” They imply that this violates “the law of non-contradiction.” Fred Chay and John Correia, *The Faith That Saves* (Dallas: Grace Line, 2008), 150.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

We are *justified* by faith alone,
but the faith that justifies *is* never alone.

The two different verbs make clear that “faith alone” in the first half of the expression is functioning in a different way from “faith alone” in the second half. In the first half “faith alone” modifies “justified,” and in the second half it modifies “is.” When Lybrand and others in the Free Grace movement remove both verbs, then of course they can produce what looks like a contradiction: “faith alone and not faith alone.” But when they remove the verbs in this way, they distort the meaning of this doctrinal summary, and they repeatedly fail to understand the sentence in the way it is intended.

A contradiction would be seen if we put the same verb in both halves of the sentence:

We are justified by faith alone, and we *are not justified* by faith alone.

But no significant Protestant leader since the Reformation has ever said that. And no statement of faith since the Reformation has ever said that. Another contradiction would be:

The faith that justifies *is* by itself, and the faith that justifies *is not* by itself.

But none of the Protestant Reformers ever said that. Nor did they ever mean that. They said exactly what they meant: We are justified by faith alone, and the faith that justifies is not alone.

By ignoring the crucial difference in verbs in the two halves of the sentence, Lybrand even claims—in a book promoted by the Free Grace Alliance—that he has found the same “logical flaw” in John Calvin, Martin Luther, the Westminster Confession of Faith, John Owen, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, J. Gresham Machen, Louis Berkhof, J. I. Packer, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Billy Graham, and others—indeed, almost the whole history of Protestantism!⁹⁴

He is surprised that he has found so little literature “specifically challenging this cliché.”⁹⁵ His explanation for this lack of critical analysis is that this common summary was just accepted as “an idiom, a cliché, or a proverb” that was simply taken as an “unquestioned assumption.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Lybrand, *Back to Faith*, 5–9.

⁹⁵ *Cliché* is the term Lybrand repeatedly uses to refer to the doctrinal summary “We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone.”

⁹⁶ Lybrand, *Back to Faith*, 7–8.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

But for Lybrand to claim a logical difficulty here is to claim that hundreds of the greatest minds in the history of the church since the Reformation and tens of thousands of the brightest pastors have failed to notice a *simple* logical fallacy at the heart of their faith. Not to put it too strongly, this is unlikely. It is more likely that the critic has not understood the sentence in the sense in which it is intended.⁹⁷

A final thought on *why* the proper meaning of “justification by faith alone” is so crucial. If Free Grace advocates are wrong in their understanding of justification by faith alone—that is, if their view is not the view that was taught by leaders of the Reformation (as can be demonstrated), and if it is not the view of saving faith taught by the New Testament—*then the entire Free Grace movement is based on a mistake, and it should be abandoned!*⁹⁸

2. *Free Grace theology weakens the gospel message by avoiding any call to unbelievers to repent of their sins.*

A call to repentance is found in several gospel summaries in the New Testament. For example, when the author of Hebrews wants to mention foundational Christian doctrines, he includes repentance and faith:

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of *repentance* from [Gk. *apo*] dead works and of *faith* toward God. (Heb. 6:1)

In this verse, the “from” (Greek *apo*) is important: it shows that repentance here is not merely a “change of mind” about one’s accountability before God (a common Free Grace explanation) but includes a conscious turning *away from* dead works. This implies a decision to turn away from one’s former pattern of life and begin to walk in a path of obedience to Christ.⁹⁹

Therefore, this verse is one of many examples of repentance in the sense that I have defined it elsewhere:

Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Grudem, (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 35–37).

⁹⁸ Grudem, (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (p. 39). Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ The same idea of turning from sin and turning toward God is found in Paul’s description of what happened when the Thessalonians came to saving faith: “You turned *to God from idols* to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9) (though the word *repentance* is not used here).

¹⁰⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 713.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

This is not adding works to faith. Rather, repentance and faith are mentioned together in Hebrews 6:1 because repentance *from* sin is a component of truly turning *to* Christ in faith for salvation from that very sin. Such a commitment of the heart to turn from sin is no more “salvation by works” than is a commitment of the heart to trust in Christ. Both are decisions of the heart. Neither one is a *work* in the sense of an act one does to merit favor with God.

Several other verses also mention repentance as an important part of evangelistic proclamations of the gospel of Christ:

... and that *repentance and forgiveness of sins* should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47)

This is Jesus’s summary, after his resurrection, of the gospel message that his disciples would proclaim throughout the world, and “repentance and forgiveness of sins” are explicitly mentioned as the content of the preaching. Notice here that faith is not even mentioned explicitly. Just as genuine saving faith assumes that a person has repented from sin, so genuine repentance assumes that someone is turning to Christ in faith. Repentance from sin and faith in Christ are two sides of the same coin, two aspects of the same decision of the heart.¹⁰¹

It should be noted at this point that Free Grace supporters provide *two different explanations* for the verses about repentance.

1. Some say *repentance* means “a change of mind” that is necessary for saving faith.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 41–43).

¹⁰² The first Free Grace definition of *repentance*, one which seems to be more common, claims that *repentance* means just a “change of mind” (and not any internal resolve to turn from sin). According to this Free Grace definition, when an unbeliever repents, he begins to think of himself as a sinner in need of salvation and begins to think of Christ as his Savior who has earned salvation for him by his death and resurrection. *Repentance* is thus a change of mind that is necessary for saving faith. But it need not imply any resolve to turn from one’s sins. Charles Bing holds this view. He writes, “The English word ‘repent’ is used to translate the Greek word *metanoō*.... The basic meaning of the Greek word *metanoō* is ‘to change the mind.’ ... Thus it is concluded that the word *metanoō* denotes basically a change of mind. [Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response*, 2nd GraceLife ed. (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), 67, 69. Bing notes that his book “was originally presented as a Ph.D. doctoral dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary” (iii). In a later publication, Bing says that “it is also accurate to translate the word *repentance* as a *change of heart*.” Charles Bing, *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2015), 51. However, he is still unwilling to include the essential element of an inward resolve to forsake sin in his explanation but says, “Obviously, and interchange should result in an outward change—that would be natural and expected,

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

2. Others say *repentance* means “an inward resolve to turn from sin” that is an optional part of the Christian life.¹⁰³

But exactly what does the term *repentance* (*metanoia*) actually mean? An excellent discussion can be found in Louis Berkhof’s widely used *Systematic Theology*. Berkhof repeatedly emphasizes that a turning from former sins and turning to a new way of life is essential in the meaning of the word:

Metanoia (verbal form *metanoēō*). This is the most common word for conversion in the New Testament, and is also the most fundamental of the terms employed.... In the English Bible the word is translated “repentance,” but this hardly does justice to the original, since it gives undue prominence to the emotional element.... In the New Testament ... it denotes primarily a change of mind, taking a wiser view of the past, including *regret for the ill then done, and leading to a change of life for the better*.... While maintaining that the word denotes primarily a change of mind, we should not lose sight of the fact that its meaning is not limited to the intellectual, theoretical consciousness, but also *includes the moral consciousness, the conscience*.... *Metanoia* includes a *conscious opposition to the former condition*. This is an essential element in it, and therefore deserves careful attention. *To be converted*, is not merely to pass from one conscious direction to another, but to do it with a *clearly perceived aversion to the former direction*.¹⁰⁴

Grudem writes, “My conclusion in this chapter is that the Free Grace movement preaches a weakened gospel because it avoids any call to people to repent of their sins. This is no minor matter, because repentance from sin is such an important part of the gospel in many New Testament summaries and presentations that it cannot be omitted without grave consequences in the lives of people who hear such a weakened message.

“However, I am not willing to say that the Free Grace gospel is a false gospel. That is far too strong a category to apply here, and it calls to mind Paul’s extremely strong condemnation in Galatians 1:6–10. I think it is certainly possible to distinguish between a *true gospel* that is presented in an incomplete or weakened form (such as with Free Grace

but it is not automatic” (52). (Quoted in Grudem, (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*, pp. 55–56.)]

¹⁰³ Some Free Grace advocates may object that they do not think repentance is merely “optional” because they teach that it is desirable and important, though not required for salvation. But something that is not required is still optional. Grudem, (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (p. 55).

¹⁰⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 480–81; emphasis added. [Quoted in Grudem, (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 61–62).]

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

teaching), and a *false gospel* that simply proclaims falsehood rather than truth about Jesus Christ and his work of redemption.”¹⁰⁵

3. *Free Grace theology gives false assurance of eternal life to many people who profess faith in Christ but then show no evidence in their pattern of life*

Grudem makes five rather significant points as he makes the case that Free Grace Theology gives many people a false assurance of salvation.

22

A. The result of the weakened Free Grace gospel is many unsaved people

The weakening of the gospel message should be a major concern for evangelical Christians today. In spite of the fact that some people come to genuine saving faith under Free Grace preaching, Grudem remains deeply concerned that such a weakened gospel message, which lacks any call for people to repent from their sins, will result—and has resulted—in many unsaved people who think they are saved. But they are not.

If you ask them if they are sinners in need of salvation, they will agree. If you ask them if they believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins, they will agree. They heard that teaching in a church one time and decided that they thought it was true. They “changed their minds” about sin and about Christ and about their need for salvation. Intellectually they believed those things to be true facts about history and about themselves, and on this basis some Free Grace pastors and teachers have assured them that they are saved. *But they have never truly repented from their sins!*¹⁰⁶

B. New Testament epistles frequently warn churchgoers that some of them might not be saved

The remedy for this situation, according to the New Testament, would be to ask churchgoers (and those who claim to be Christians but don’t go to church) to examine their lives to see if there has been a genuine change as a result of being born again. Authors of the New Testament epistles repeatedly write to various churches telling them that some patterns of conduct are evidence of being born again, but other patterns of life are inconsistent with the way a born-again Christian will act. They frequently warn people that if there has been no change in their pattern of life, they might not yet be truly saved.

It is important to recognize that these warnings were written not to people outside the church but to people who would be listening to the New Testament epistles as they were

¹⁰⁵ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (p. 74).

¹⁰⁶ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 77–78).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

read aloud in New Testament churches. The New Testament authors do not hesitate to warn their readers that *some who are among them might not be saved*. I expect that this is an unpopular teaching in many circles today, but I cannot see the New Testament as teaching anything else.¹⁰⁷

C. The Free Grace view says that people can become complete unbelievers and still be saved

23

Free Grace advocates do not want to challenge people who *say* they believe in Christ to examine their lives in this way. They claim that we are adding “works” to faith if we say that good works and continuing to believe in Christ are necessary results of saving faith. This leads Zane Hodges to argue, for example, that someone can profess faith in Christ and then later completely deny the Christian faith and become a total unbeliever, yet that person is still saved.¹⁰⁸ Hodges says that when John the Baptist sends a message to Jesus, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Luke 7:19), this proves (according to Hodges) that at that point in time, “John the Baptist is not believing.... John the Baptist does not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God.... But he had not lost the gift of eternal life.”¹⁰⁹

Hodges also says, “Nowhere does the Word of God guarantee that the believer’s faith inevitably will endure.... The failure of one’s faith is a grim possibility on the field of spiritual battle.”¹¹⁰ A little later he says, “When we trust Him, He guarantees that we

¹⁰⁷ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (p. 79).

¹⁰⁸ Robert Wilkin says that both he and Zane Hodges agree “that once a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life he is eternally secure, even if he later stops believing that (or even if he can never remember believing that).” Robert Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 29n4.

¹⁰⁹ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 105–7. However, Luke 3:19 does not prove that John the Baptist had lost all his faith, for his very question implies that he is still looking forward to the Messiah, the “one who is to come,” as did all believing Jewish people of his time (see John 1:41; 4:25). But because Jesus did not immediately drive out the Roman soldiers and establish an earthly kingdom of God, John was wondering if Jesus was in fact that expected Messiah in whom he hoped and trusted, just as Old Testament saints had done.

¹¹⁰ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 111. He does not here consider 1 Peter 1:5, where Peter says that Christians are those “who by God’s power are being guarded *through faith* for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” God’s sustaining power works by preserving our faith. I should also make clear at this point that I do not think that a genuine believer can ever lose his or her salvation, for there are many passages in the New Testament that teach that God will protect and keep every genuine believer until the last day (see John 6:38–40; 10:27–29; Rom. 8:1, 30; Eph. 1:13–14; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:5; see also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994], 788–92). But the way that God protects genuine believers is by enabling them to continue to believe; as 1 Peter 1:5 says, we are being guarded “through faith,” not apart from our faith. My position is far different from the Free Grace position at this point, for they think that a person can have genuine saving faith and then completely abandon that faith and fall

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

possess eternal life (John 6:47)—that we will not come into judgment (John 5:24)—that he will raise us up at the last day (John 6:39–40). And even if we stop believing all this, He remains faithful!”^{111 112}

D. Free Grace teaching about assurance makes a fundamental category mistake

This entire line of argument about assurance involves a fundamental category mistake. All Protestant theologians would agree that our assurance *that Christ's work has earned salvation for sinners and that all who trust in Christ will be saved* should be based fully and entirely on the testimony of God in Scripture and what Scripture teaches us about the finished atoning work of Christ. That is how we are to learn about something that has happened outside of us, long before we ever lived: Christ died and paid the penalty for our sins.

But that is not the question here. The question is not:

How do I know that Christ has died for people's sins and that he will save all who believe in him?

The question is, rather:

How do I know *that I have truly believed?*

Reading Bible verses about the atoning work of Christ tells me nothing about whether I have believed or not. Therefore, saying that assurance of my salvation must be based *only* on Scripture and the finished work of Christ is simply a category mistake. It does not address the category of personal belief: How do I know that *I personally have believed?*¹¹³ And here the New Testament gives several verses telling me about various evidences that I have believed, verses that talk about how I can know that I have come to know God, that I am born of God, that I have faith, that I have passed from death to life, and so forth. Such verses include:

into a state of total unbelief. The implication of that view is that many unbelievers will go to heaven—something the New Testament never teaches!

¹¹¹ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 112.

¹¹² Grudem, (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 82–83).

¹¹³ Zane Hodges refuses to address the question and simply asserts, “People know whether they believe something or not.” Rather than explain more deeply what it means to believe in Christ, he dismisses the question as a waste of time: “It is an unproductive waste of time to employ the popular categories—intellect, emotion, or will—as a way of analyzing the mechanics of faith.” Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 31.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities [virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love] you will never fall. (2 Pet. 1:10)

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:3–6)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (1 John 3:14)¹¹⁴

When Free Grace supporters ask, “Is it not possible that a true believer would fall into a time of disobedience and apparent unbelief?” my reply would be, “Yes, that is certainly possible, but while such a person remains in a state of disobedience and apparent unbelief, we should not give that person unqualified assurance of salvation but should warn that person that he or she does not appear to be saved.”

Grudem explains that he does not differ with Free Grace supporters over the question of whether a true Christian can fall into a time of disobedience, but over the question of whether, during that time, the person should be assured that he or she will be eternally saved. Prolonged and willful patterns of disobedience and explicit professions of unbelief in Christ give evidence that the person is in fact not saved, as these New Testament verses repeatedly emphasize.¹¹⁵

Yet we must also be clear that the historic Protestant position does not make evidence of a changed life the *only* basis for assurance. The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, who “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16), gives another basis for assurance, as does the leading of the Spirit, for “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Another basis for assurance is a deep inner sense of

¹¹⁴ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 84–86).

¹¹⁵ “If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13) probably does not refer to complete loss of saving faith but to a temporary weakness of faith or temporary unfaithfulness in conduct, such as Peter’s denial of Christ (see discussion in George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 406–7). The verb *apisteō* need not imply complete unbelief, because one possible meaning is “be unfaithful.” See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 103.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

reliance on Jesus Christ for salvation rather than reliance on oneself, for Scripture says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36), and, “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself” (1 John 5:10; see also many “whoever believes in him” verses such as John 3:15, 16, 18; 6:35, 47; 7:38; 11:25; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6).¹¹⁶

Grudem concludes this section with a final thought: Finally, I need to make clear that our assurance that Christ has died to pay for our sins, and that all who believe in him will be saved, must be grounded only in the truthfulness of the words of God in Scripture that tell us these things. I am not disagreeing with the Free Grace advocates who say that our assurance of *these things* must be based on the truthfulness of Scripture. I am simply arguing that when they make belief in the truthfulness of Scripture the *only* basis for assurance of my salvation, they make a fundamental category mistake because the truthfulness of Scripture does not answer the other aspect of assurance, the question, “How can I know that I personally have believed these things?” Scripture also tells us how to address that question, in the verses that I mentioned above.¹¹⁷

E. The historic Protestant view does not say that assurance of salvation is impossible, but just the opposite

Free Grace advocates sometimes suggest that people who reject their viewpoint would never be able to gain true assurance of salvation until they die, because who knows whether their lives will take a turn for the worse and they will deny Christ and begin to live a life of sinful rebellion, showing that they were never really saved?

David Anderson says that according to the non-Free Grace position, someone who thinks he is saved has to admit that he might fall away at some time in the future, and this “would prove that [he] never [was a Christian] in the beginning.” Therefore, he says, following the logic of the non-Free Grace position,

present faithfulness is an unreliable basis for present assurance. Only *future* faithfulness can provide any grounds for assurance. But the future is always out there. Until one dies, one can always fall away. Present faithfulness is not firm footing for assurance of salvation.¹¹⁸

Robert Wilkin makes similar claims. He says, “If saving faith is more than believing facts, then one cannot have assurance of his eternal destiny by any cognitive method,” and, by rejecting his view of saving faith, “it is impossible to be sure of your eternal destiny since

¹¹⁶ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 87–89).

¹¹⁷ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (p. 94).

¹¹⁸ Anderson, David R. (2012). *Free Grace Soteriology*. Edited by James Reitman. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 219–20; emphasis original.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

you can't be sure that you believe in Christ." If one rejects the Free Grace view, he says, "because no one's life is perfect, certainty of one's eternal destiny is impossible in this system."¹¹⁹

But Anderson and Wilkin simply misunderstand the other position when they say that people who reject a Free Grace position are unable to have a confident assurance of their own salvation in this lifetime. The verses I cited above on assurance do not speak that way. Peter tells his hearers "to *confirm* your calling and election" (2 Pet. 1:10), and John says that "if we keep his commandments," then "we *know* that we have come to know him" (1 John 2:3). He also says, "By this we may *know* that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:5–6).

Therefore, as Grudem wrote over twenty years ago,

No one who has such assurance should wonder, "Will I be able to persevere to the end of my life and therefore be saved?" Everyone who gains assurance through such a self-examination should rather think, "I am truly born again; therefore, I will certainly persevere to the end, because I'm being guarded 'by God's power' working through my faith (1 Peter 1:5) and therefore I will never be lost. Jesus will raise me up at the last day and I will enter into his kingdom forever" (John 6:40).¹²⁰

The most influential Protestant tradition since the Reformation, at least in Reformed circles, is represented in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643–1646), which says:

Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, *may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace....* This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion ... but *an infallible assurance of faith* founded upon the *divine truth* of the promises of salvation, the *inward evidences* of those graces unto which these promises are made, the *testimony of the Spirit* of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. (18.1–2)

Therefore, in contrast to the claims of Free Grace advocates, historic Protestantism has taught that believers may attain an "infallible" assurance of salvation and have "certainty" that "they are in the state of grace." This assurance is based on several types of evidence as indicated by many New Testament passages.

¹¹⁹ Wilkin, Robert N. (2012). *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*. Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, (pp. 13, 16, 19).

¹²⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 805–6. For a longer discussion of the New Testament's teaching on remaining a Christian (or, more precisely, the perseverance of the saints), see the entire chapter, 788–809.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

By contrast, the Free Grace movement gives false assurance of eternal life to many unsaved people who have never genuinely repented of their sins, show no evidence of regeneration in their daily lives, and perhaps even profess to be complete unbelievers. The tragic result of this mistaken Free Grace teaching is many people who are unsaved for eternity but who have wrongly been assured that they are saved.¹²¹

4. *Free Grace teaching overemphasizes agreement with facts and underemphasizes heartfelt trust in the person of Christ.*

It is important to recognize that there is a disagreement about the nature of saving faith among different groups in the Free Grace movement. Some Free Grace advocates view faith as *intellectual assent* to the facts of the gospel, while other Free Grace supporters affirm that saving faith must include *trust that is placed in the person of Jesus*. But even this second group underemphasizes the element of trust in the person of Jesus and overemphasizes belief in facts—belief that I am a sinner and belief that Christ has died to pay for my sins.

It is vital to understand that the New Testament teaching about saving faith shows that it must go beyond belief that these facts are true (intellectual assent to facts) and must also include heartfelt trust in the living person of Jesus Christ as my Savior and my God forever.¹²²

A. Some Free Grace advocates say that faith equals mere intellectual assent¹²³

Representatives of the Free Grace movement who define faith only in terms of agreement with facts (intellectual assent) include Zane Hodges, the founding father of the modern Free Grace movement. Hodges writes,

Faith ... is the *inward conviction* that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith.¹²⁴

Similarly, the Grace Evangelical Society doctrinal statement says this:

Faith is the conviction that something is true. To believe in Jesus (“he who believes in Me has everlasting life”) is to be convinced that He guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it (John 4:14; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; 1 Tim. 1:16).

¹²¹ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 94–97).

¹²² Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 99–100).

¹²³ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 100–101).

¹²⁴ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 31.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

An even more explicit statement of this viewpoint is found in the Free Grace journal, *Grace in Focus*, where Bob Wilkin, executive director of the Grace Evangelical Society, explains:

Faith in Christ is intellectual assent. Stripped of its pejorative connotation, “intellectual assent” is a good definition of what faith is.¹²⁵

Wilkin then gives further explanation as follows:

For example, do you believe that George Washington was the first President of the United States? If you do, then you know what faith is from a biblical perspective. There is no commitment, no decision of the will, no turning from sins, and no works that are part of faith in Christ. If you are convinced or persuaded that what He promised is true, then you believe in Him.¹²⁶

B. Other Free Grace advocates say that faith includes trust in the person of Christ¹²⁷

The second Free Grace group disagrees with the first viewpoint and says that faith must rest in the person of Christ, not merely in the truth of propositions about him. This group is best represented by the Free Grace Alliance, whose covenant (doctrinal statement) says this:

The sole means of receiving the free gift of eternal life is *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*, the Son of God, whose substitutionary death on the cross fully satisfied the requirement for our justification.¹²⁸

In addition, Charles Bing defines saving faith as trust in Christ:

What makes saving faith different from any other faith is its object. Therefore, saving faith is defined as trust or confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ as the savior from sin. It is personal acceptance of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for the sinner.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Bob Wilkin, “What Is Free Grace Theology?” *Grace in Focus* 29.5 (September/October, 2014): 27.

¹²⁶ Ibid. On this same page, Wilkin goes on to explain that belief in Jesus’s promise of eternal life, in order to constitute valid faith, must not include any idea that works are also necessary.

¹²⁷ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 101–102).

¹²⁸ Free Grace Alliance website, accessed February 8, 2015,

<http://www.freegracealliance.com/covenant.htm>; emphasis added.

¹²⁹ Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response*, 2nd GraceLife ed. (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), 62. He gives a similar definition on pp. 175–76.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

C. Both groups deemphasize the element of heartfelt trust in the living person of Christ¹³⁰

Even with these explicit affirmations of the person of Christ as the object of faith, Grudem still does not find in Free Grace literature nearly as much emphasis as we find in the New Testament on *trusting in Christ as a living Savior, coming to him, receiving him, and believing in him* with one's heart.

It does not seem to be accidental that Free Grace literature either explicitly denies that faith is anything more than intellectual assent or else downplays and deemphasizes the element of personal, heartfelt trust in the person of Christ. Such a denial or lack of emphasis would be the natural result of trying to protect the idea that "justification by faith alone" implies that faith should never be said to require repentance from sin or to necessarily result in obedience and good works. It would be the natural result of two considerations:

1. If you emphasize coming into the presence of the person of Christ and trusting him, it becomes very difficult to say that repentance from sin is optional or that subsequent obedience to Christ is optional. The more you talk about the need for trust in the *person* of Christ the more you have to talk about a *personal encounter* with Christ, about coming into his very presence, and that means realizing deeply that he is your God.

To come into the personal presence of Christ is to come before the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal Creator and sustainer of the universe—and he is infinitely pure and holy. The more we emphasize coming into the presence of Christ and trusting him, the more the idea of optional submission to his lordship becomes unthinkable. When we truly realize what it is to come into the majestic presence of the risen Christ, any thought of saying, "Jesus, I'll trust you as my Savior today, and later I might decide to turn from sin and follow you," is as far from our mind as the uttermost part of the sea.

2. Trusting in the person of Christ makes assurance more complex, but Free Grace advocates want to make assurance of salvation simple: if you have believed that you are a sinner and that Christ is your Savior, you can have absolute assurance that you are saved.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Grudem, (2016). "Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 105–107).

¹³¹ See, e.g., David Anderson's affirmation: "We believe a person can have absolute assurance that he is born again the moment he believes. We can give him this assurance, not because of a change in his life that we can feel or see, but because we believe without doubt the promises of God that offer eternal life as

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

On the other hand, if saving faith involves more than just intellectual agreement that some statements in the Bible are true—if it also includes trusting in Christ as a living person—that is not quite so easy to determine. It opens the question of whether an individual has really trusted in Christ or not. It makes the question of whether a person has genuine faith more complex.

But does the New Testament really teach that saving faith must include personal trust in Christ himself? We can look at several strands of thought in the New Testament that affirm this.

D. Saving faith requires trust in the *person* of Christ, and this means that mental agreement with facts *about* Christ without personal trust in Christ is not saving faith¹³²

In the New Testament, saving faith is regularly represented in terms of an interpersonal interaction between the sinner and Christ, which leads to trust in Christ as a person. [See Excursus #3 on page 38]

5. *Free Grace advocates have to adopt numerous highly unlikely interpretations of the New Testament because of the need to defend their mistaken understanding of the word “alone” in the phrase “faith alone.”*

Grudem writes, “Regarding the Bible passages we have considered up to this point, I realize that Free Grace supporters have developed specialized explanations that enable them to put these verses into various special categories *other than* those pertaining to initial saving faith or evidence of saving faith.”¹³³

It is not my purpose to interact with all of those explanations in detail at this point, except to say that I think Free Grace “insiders” have no idea how strained, how idiosyncratic, how artificial and contrived, how insensitive to context, and how completely unpersuasive and foreign to the New Testament these explanations sound. Again and again they bear the marks of special pleading. In some cases, they are not even mentioned as legitimate exegetical alternatives in the standard commentaries because no serious interpreter in history of the church has held these interpretations.¹³⁴

a free gift to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as the son of God and Savior from his sins.” Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*, 220.

¹³² Grudem, (2016). “*Free Grace*” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (p. 107).

¹³³ The reader is encouraged to read Chapter 5 of Grudem’s book to see firsthand some of these strained interpretations of Scripture.

¹³⁴ Grudem, (2016). “*Free Grace*” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 119–120).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

It is not surprising that D. A. Carson writes about Zane Hodges, “To the best of my knowledge not one significant interpreter of Scripture in the entire history of the church has held to Hodges’ pattern of interpretation of the passages he treats,” and he says that Hodges’s approach results in “many, many utterly novel (and, I fear, unconvincing) exegeses.”¹³⁵

Regarding Zane Hodges’s view of the gospel, Michael Horton writes,

As James Boice, J. I. Packer, and others have argued in their works, no respected, mainstream Christian thinker, writer, or preacher has ever held such extreme and unusual views concerning the nature of the gospel and saving grace as Zane Hodges.¹³⁶

Yet Hodges’s teachings and writings have been the primary driving force behind the resurgence of the modern Free Grace movement for several decades.¹³⁷

Wayne Grudem’s Hope for the Future

I sincerely hope that many Free Grace supporters, while perhaps finding this book hard to read, will also be able to seriously consider it as an attempt at a kind of “family intervention” by a brother who loves them very much and is earnestly pleading with them to change their viewpoint. I hope they will see that the Free Grace view is inconsistent with the Bible and come to agree that justification by faith alone does not require that faith *is* alone in the person who believes; that genuine repentance from sin is a necessary part of saving faith; and that genuine faith, according to the New Testament, will always result in evident good works and in a faith that continues until the end of our lives.

I also hope that evangelicals who read this book and do not hold to Free Grace positions will be challenged in their evangelism never to avoid or water down the frequent New Testament calls to unbelievers to sincerely repent of their sins as they come to seek forgiveness in Christ (even though we live in a culture that will mock such preaching as harsh and judgmental). I also hope that in their evangelism they will emphasize the need not only for non-Christians to believe that the teachings of the Bible are true but also for a clear decision of their will to trust in Christ as a person in whose very presence they live and move and have their being. And I hope that evangelical pastors and other leaders

¹³⁵ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 129. Carson is referring specifically to Hodges’s *The Gospel under Siege* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1981).

¹³⁶ Michael Horton, *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1992), 11.

¹³⁷ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 139–140).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

will be challenged to refrain from giving unqualified assurance of salvation to those who were once part of an evangelical church but who now give no evidence of a living faith in Christ or of the kind of good works that will always follow from genuine faith.

Finally, I earnestly hope that after reading this book, any Free Grace followers who have never truly repented of their sins, who have never seen any evident change in their lives, and who have never sincerely received Christ and believed in him as a person will decide to turn from their sin, trust in Christ as a living person, and, for the first time, be truly born again. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).¹³⁸

A Final Thought

In 1977, Debby Boone, daughter of Pat Boone, recorded “You Light Up My Life.” It held the No. 1 position on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart for ten consecutive weeks in 1977 and topped *Record World* magazine's Top 100 Singles Chart for a record 13 weeks. Although it was written by Joseph Brooks as a love song, the devout Boone interpreted it as inspirational and proclaimed that it was instead God who “lit up her life.”

However, one of the lyrics within the song was a cause of concern for fellow Christians:

*It can't be wrong
When it feels so right*

These lyrics suggest that one’s feelings should overrule (or at least modify) revealed truth. This was the great concern for many within American Christendom in 1977.

I end this rather lengthy discourse on the Free Grace Movement with this thought: Does Free Grace Theology—and, hence, Free Grace advocates—also place an undo emphasis upon feelings as opposed to revealed truth? Are they not preaching an “easy believism” theology that leaves out the harsh reality of the need for repentance? Do they not err in their misrepresentation of *sola fide*. Do they not truly understand Sovereignty? Joseph Dillow, one of their own advocates, admits that the fundamental disagreement between Free Grace Theology and Reformed theology is over humanity's ability to choose the good and believe God.¹³⁹ Free Grace Theology ultimately makes the individual person the sovereign over his eternal destiny, whereas the Reformation loudly trumpeted that God alone is Sovereign! Are they not also singing with Debby Boone, “It can't be wrong when it feels so right”?

¹³⁸ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 145–146).

¹³⁹ Dillow (2012). *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. pp. 565–610.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

EXCURSUS #1

Protestant leaders throughout history have consistently disagreed with the Free Grace position¹⁴⁰

When we examine the writings of the great Reformation teachers and confessions of faith, we find a consensus of teaching that we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone in the life of a believer, because genuine saving faith will always be accompanied by good works that come after justification. Here are several examples:

1. *John Calvin (1509–1564)*. (Calvin was the first and most influential theologian in the Reformed tradition.)

Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.... Thus it is clear how true it is that *we are justified not without works yet not through works*.¹⁴¹

In another place Calvin writes:

I wish the reader to understand that as often as we mention faith alone in this question, we are not thinking of a dead faith, which worketh not by love, but holding faith to be the only cause of justification. (Galatians 5:6; Romans 3:22.) *It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light. Wherefore we do not separate the whole grace of regeneration from faith, but claim the power and faculty of justifying entirely for faith, as we ought*.¹⁴²

2. *Formula of Concord (1576)*. (This is the great summary of Lutheran doctrine that expressed a consensus among differing Lutheran groups.)

III. We believe, also, teach, and confess that *Faith alone is the means and instrument whereby we lay hold on Christ the Saviour*, and so in Christ lay hold on that righteousness which is able to stand before the judgment of God; for that faith, for Christ's sake, is imputed to us for righteousness (Rom. 5:5).

¹⁴⁰ Grudem, (2016). "Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (pp. 28–32).

¹⁴¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.16.1; also found in the Henry Beveridge translation: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 523; emphasis added.

¹⁴² John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters: Acts of the Council of Trent, Antidote to the Canons of the Council of Trent*, Canon 11, accessed February 15, 2014, http://www.godrules.net/library/calvin/142calvin_c4.htm; emphasis added.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

VIII. We believe, teach, and confess that, although antecedent contrition and subsequent new obedience do not appertain to the article of justification before God, yet we are not to imagine any such justifying faith as can exist and abide with a purpose of evil, to wit: of sinning and acting contrary to conscience. But after that man is justified by faith, then that true and living faith works by love, and good works always follow justifying faith, and are most certainly found together with it, provided only it be a true and living faith. For *true faith is never alone*, but hath always charity and hope in its train.¹⁴³

3. *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571)*. (This is the doctrinal standard of Anglican or Episcopalian churches.)

XII. Of Good Works: Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.¹⁴⁴

4. *Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)*. (This is the doctrinal standard used by most Presbyterian and Reformed churches.)

11.2: Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the *alone* instrument of justification: yet is it *not alone* in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.¹⁴⁵

5. *New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833)*. (This statement has been widely used by various Baptist groups in the United States.)

VII. Regeneration ... is effected ... by the power of the Holy Spirit ... its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.

VIII. We believe that Repentance and Faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ

¹⁴³ *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, 3 vols. (1931; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 3:116, 118; emphasis added.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:494; emphasis added.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:626; emphasis added.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and relying on him alone as the only and all sufficient Saviour.¹⁴⁶

6. *John Wesley (1703–1791)*. (Wesley was the founder of Methodism.)

We are, doubtless, justified by faith. This is the corner-stone of the whole Christian building. We are justified without the works of the law, as any previous condition of justification; but they are an immediate fruit of that faith whereby we are justified. So that if good works do not follow our faith, even all inward and outward holiness, it is plain our faith is nothing worth; we are yet in our sins.¹⁴⁷

7. *Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths (1916)*. (This is one of the oldest and largest Pentecostal denominations.)

Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God according to the hope of eternal life (Luke 24:47; John 3:3; Romans 10:13–15; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 2:11; 3:5–7)... The inward evidence of salvation is the direct witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:16). The outward evidence to all men is a life of righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Titus 2:12).¹⁴⁸

EXCURSUS #2

Therefore, the Free Grace movement today is not upholding the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, or “justification by faith alone.”¹⁴⁹

When we read this consistent testimony from all of the major traditions that flowed out of the Reformation—Lutheran, Reformed and Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal—we begin to wonder where Free Grace advocates ever found their unusual view of justification by faith alone. It simply does not represent the view of any of the mainstream evangelical Protestant groups that followed the Reformation. None of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3:744–45.

¹⁴⁷ John Wesley, “The Law Established Through Faith,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley*, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-35-the-law-established-through-faith-discourse-one/>.

¹⁴⁸ “Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths,” sec. 5, accessed June 23, 2015, http://agchurches.org/Sitefiles/Default/RSS/AG.org%20TOP/Beliefs/SFT_2011.pdf.

¹⁴⁹ Grudem, W. (2016). *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 32–35). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

them ever taught that “justification by faith alone” means “faith that is not accompanied by repentance or by good works.” In the historic Protestant theological tradition, “faith alone” has never meant “faith not accompanied by other human actions.” Rather, “faith alone” has always meant that “faith is the only thing that God responds to with the act of justification.”

This insistence that genuine faith *must be accompanied by good works* becomes all the more striking when we recognize that the leaders of the Reformation were deeply concerned to separate faith from works done to merit salvation. They insisted that faith did not need to be accompanied by such works, in distinction from their Catholic opponents who taught that justification required faith plus participation in the sacraments — we are saved by *faith plus* being baptized, attending the Roman Catholic mass, doing penance, and so forth¹⁵⁰ — all of which, in the eyes of the Protestant leaders, were *works* to earn merit with God.

The leaders of the Reformation were not trying to separate faith from genuine repentance from sin. Nor were they saying that genuine faith could occur without a change in someone’s life — they repeatedly said it could not!

Were the Reformers guilty then of adding works to faith as the basis of justification? Absolutely not! They were in the midst of a life-and-death struggle for the very survival of the true gospel and the very life of the church. At the heart of their struggle was *sola fide*, “faith alone.” They were willing to die rather than add works to faith as the means of justification. Yet they repeatedly and unanimously insisted that justification is by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone — it is always accompanied by good works.

I think the initial attractiveness of the Free Grace movement is that at first it *sounds* to people like it is promoting a Reformation doctrine. In reality, it is promoting a doctrine that the leaders of the Reformation had nothing to do with. It is promoting a novel view in the history of Protestantism.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ The seven Roman Catholic sacraments are (1) baptism, (2) confirmation, (3) eucharist (what Protestants call the “Lord’s Supper”), (4) penance, (5) anointing of the sick, (6) holy orders (that is, ordination to be a priest or a nun), and (7) matrimony. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), para. 1,113. The *Catechism* goes on to say, “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation” (para. 1,129); and, “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man” (para. 1,989).

¹⁵¹ However, the Free Grace view of saving faith is similar to that of the eighteenth-century Sandemanians, named after their leader Robert Sandeman (1718–1771), a Scottish pastor, who held that “bare assent to the work of Christ is alone necessary.” R. E. D. Clark, “Sandemanians,” *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 877. Sandemanian churches were established in both the UK and the US, but Sandeman’s successors “never

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Therefore, what is its proof? The proof comes not from the history of the Reformation or Protestantism, in which the key teaching was justification by faith alone. The Free Grace view must find its support only from the claim that the New Testament teaches this view. But where is it in the New Testament? Where does the New Testament ever say that saving faith can occur by itself in a person who is saved, without repentance from sin and without good works following? I think nowhere.

On the other hand, there is much New Testament teaching that many changes will necessarily come once one believes in Christ: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creation*. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). And Paul does not say, “You were justified but nothing else happened when you believed.” Rather, after naming a long list of sins, Paul declares that their lives have decisively changed:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)

Many other passages teach that regeneration, which always occurs in close connection with saving faith, brings numerous significant changes in a person’s life.¹⁵²

EXCURSUS #3

Saving faith requires trust in the *person* of Christ, and this means that mental agreement with facts *about* Christ without personal trust in Christ is not saving faith¹⁵³

In the New Testament, saving faith is regularly represented in terms of an interpersonal interaction between the sinner and Christ, which leads to trust in Christ as a person.

1. *Saving faith is pictured as coming to Christ*

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’ ” (John 6:35). *Not: whoever agrees with some facts about me shall not hunger.*

had more than a small following.” “Glasites (also Sandemanians)” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1974), 571.

¹⁵² See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 704–6.

¹⁵³ Grudem, (2016). “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (pp. 107–112).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). *Not: Whoever agrees to some facts about me I will never cast out. To “come to” a person implies interpersonal interaction.*

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44). *Not: No one can agree with some facts about me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink’ ” (John 7:37). *Not: If anyone thirsts, let him give mental assent to some facts about me, because “coming to someone” involves personal interaction with the other person, and the image of taking water from him and drinking gives an even stronger indication of personal interaction.*

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). *Personal interaction is implied.*

All these passages affirm that trusting in Christ for salvation involves coming into his presence and interacting with him, trusting him personally. A personal encounter is in view.

2. Saving faith is pictured as receiving Christ

“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:11–12). *Not: To all who gave mental assent to facts about him but to all who received him.*

In the first-century context, to “receive someone” would have meant welcoming that person into fellowship, into a relationship, probably into one’s home, and certainly into one’s life. A personal encounter with Jesus Christ is in view. (See also Col. 2:6, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.”)

3. Saving faith is pictured as believing something in your heart

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Rom. 10:9–10)

Paul does not just say “believe in your mind.” Belief with one’s heart is significant because the heart in Scripture is the center of a person’s deepest emotions, beliefs, and

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

convictions, and this includes much more than mere intellectual assent. (Cf. Acts 16:14, which says of Lydia that the Lord “opened her heart”; see also Ezek. 36:26.)

4. Saving faith is portrayed as believing in a person

Several New Testament verses talk about “believing in” Christ. The most familiar of these is John 3:16:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever *believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life.

The Greek expression here for “believes in” is *pisteuō eis*, where *pisteuō* is the verb for “believe” and *eis* is a preposition meaning “into, in, toward, to.” This is notable because, before the time of the New Testament, *pisteuō* was seldom if ever followed by this preposition. It gives a sense of “believing into” Christ, or going out of oneself to place trust in another person. This same preposition (*eis*) is found with *pisteuō* forty-six times in the New Testament (thirty-four of them in John’s Gospel). All or nearly all of these verses (along with a few other verses using *pisteuō* with other constructions)¹⁵⁴ take the strong sense indicated in the BDAG lexicon as meaning (2): “to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence, believe (in), trust, with implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, over forty verses, such as John 3:16, all containing the strong Greek expression *pisteuō eis* (“believe in”), provide a significant argument that saving faith in the New Testament involves not merely belief in facts in the Bible but placing one’s trust in Christ as a person.

¹⁵⁴ I do not claim that *pisteuō + eis* is exactly synonymous with *pisteuō + en*. There is some overlap in meaning, because *pisteuō + en* can sometimes be used in the strong sense of “trust in a person” (at least in John 3:15; similarly, *pisteuō* with no preposition can be used this way: see John 5:24 and Rom. 4:3 with just *pisteuō + dative*). But I have not found that *pisteuō + eis* when used of *trusting in a person* ever takes the weakened sense of “believe facts about a person,” or “believe the truth of facts reported by the person,” without the sense of trust in the person himself.

There are two verses that use *pisteuō + eis* but do not specify a person as the object. It seems to me that there is room for disagreement over the meaning of “many believed *in his name*” in John 2:23, but I would take it to refer to genuine trust in Christ, because believing “in his name” is believing in him, in biblical usage. In 1 John 5:10, to believe “in the *witness* that God has borne concerning his Son” is to place confidence in God himself, who speaks this witness, and not to believe this is to make God “a liar,” according to this verse.

One other construction, *pisteuō + epi*, literally “to believe on” someone (twelve times in the NT) also usually implies a strong sense of movement out of oneself to rest one’s trust “on” another person.

¹⁵⁵ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 817.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

To use a simple analogy, an airline passenger can believe that American Airlines has not had a fatal airplane crash in over ten years, with tens of thousands of flights completed successfully, and still experience great fear when he boards the plane. Believing those facts is still different from trusting the pilot himself. But if, when he boards the plane, he sees that the pilot happens to be his neighbor whom he has known for many years, then he trusts the pilot himself, which is an example of trust in a person.

Similarly, a non-Christian can believe that Jesus died to pay for people's sins but still not trust in the person of Jesus Christ to save him.

I realize, of course, that the verb *pisteuō* sometimes speaks of mere mental assent; words have a range of meanings. We determine the specific meaning within that range from the specific grammatical construction in which the word occurs and from the larger context in which the statement occurs. The BDAG lexicon recognizes this with *pisteuō*, because it gives this as meaning (1): "to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust."¹⁵⁶

Yet the fact remains that dozens of verses in the New Testament, especially the many verses with *pisteuō eis*, speak about trust in Christ as a person, "believing in him." Here are some other examples:

Whoever *believes in him* is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:18)

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever *believes in me* shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and *believes in him* should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:40)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever *believes in me*, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and *believes in me* shall never die." (John 11:25–26)¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 816. Examples of the meaning "to consider something to be true" include Matt. 21:32 (believing John the Baptist) and Acts 8:12 (believing Philip).

¹⁵⁷ Remarkably, Joseph Dillow quotes Rudolph Bultmann, the most famous and influential twentieth-century proponent of "demythologizing" the New Testament, to support the idea that "adding prepositions to the word 'faith' like 'believe into,' or 'believe in,' do not change the fundamental meaning. These constructions mean the same thing as 'believe that.'" Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 681, with reference to

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Therefore, the evidence from several strands of New Testament teaching (verses about coming to Christ, receiving Christ, believing in one's heart, and believing in Christ) all indicate that saving faith requires trust *in the person of Christ*, and that mere mental agreement with facts about Christ is not genuine saving faith.

But if this is true, it gives me deep concern, because the result of a weakened Free Grace gospel will be many unsaved churchgoers who think they are saved but are not. They have never truly received Christ or trusted in him as a person. While they think that they are saved, they are lost.

Soli Deo gloria!

Bultmann's article on *pisteuō* ("faith") in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 6:203.

Dillow shows no awareness of the fact that Bultmann's entire approach was to apply a radical skepticism to every supernatural event in the New Testament, thus "demythologizing" the New Testament entirely (that is, draining it of its supernatural elements). Of course Bultmann would want to remove any supernatural elements (such as the idea of *trusting in* the person of Christ, whom we cannot now see) from the New Testament. But he is hardly a reliable guide to understanding the nature of faith in the Bible.