

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Salvation without Repentance from Sin? A Critique of the “Free Grace” Gospel

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1

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[Note: Please understand that this is an unpublished paper and should not be taken as my final, published viewpoint on the question of Free Grace theology.

I hope and expect that I will get useful feedback on this paper when I read it at the ETS meeting in San Diego, and after that I plan to refine it to correct any misstatements or inaccurate claims that may be in it. I am happy for anyone to download and print this paper and use it however it may seem appropriate, but I ask that you would not quote it in any published material as representing Wayne Grudem’s position -- not until I remove this initial disclaimer or actually publish it somewhere other than posting it on my website as an unfinished paper. Thank you! -- Wayne Grudem]

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Introductory notes:

There are many things that I greatly appreciate in the official statement of beliefs (the “Covenant”) of the Free Grace Alliance: [I will mention just some of those things:]

**Covenant:**

As members of the Evangelical Tradition, we affirm the Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the inspired Word of God and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. Furthermore, God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory. As members of this tradition, we are concerned about the clear understanding, presentation, and advancement of the Gospel of God’s Free Grace.

We affirm the following:

- The Grace of God in justification is an unconditional free gift.
- 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WG comment: I would agree – but I would have a fuller definition of “faith” than Free Grace advocates—see below

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- Christ has delivered us from condemnation and guaranteed our eternal life.
- Justification is the act of God to declare us righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ alone.
- Assurance of justification is the birthright of every believer from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, and is founded upon the testimony of God in His written Word.<sup>3</sup>
- Spiritual growth, which is distinct from justification, is God's expectation for every believer; this growth, however, is not necessarily manifested uniformly in every believer.
- 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.<sup>4</sup>

## COVENANT:

In agreement with these affirmations, we covenant to work together graciously and enthusiastically to advance this Gospel of Grace, and to communicate with a positive and gracious tone toward all others, both inside and outside the Free Grace Alliance. [From <http://www.freegracealliance.com/covenant.htm> ]

In addition, there are dozens – hundreds – of other doctrinal and ethical convictions held by Free Grace advocates with which I would enthusiastically agree. Many Free Grace supporters have been my friends and allies in the advancement of the kingdom for many years.

Therefore it is with some hesitation that I undertake this presentation.  
And I consider it a dialogue among friends.

In addition – wish to thank Roger Fankhauser, president, and others in FGA who sent me a detailed courteous, and thoughtful interaction with an earlier form of this presentation which I gave several months ago in my home church.

- Not interacting as much with Grace Evangelical Society (Robert Wilkin)
- most things I am concerned about -- held by both groups
  - differ over what gospel content is necess. to believe (won't get into that)

## A. What Is the Free Grace Gospel?

→ The “Free Grace” position claims that we are justified by faith alone,

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<sup>2</sup> WG: This is true, but I think there is more than just being persuaded of this fact – a decision to trust in the living person Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> WG: I would say “some measure of assurance” – more later

<sup>4</sup> WG: If I could define “faith” in the way Protestant teachers have historically defined it, to include repentance from sin, and to include a heartfelt personal receiving of Christ as Lord and God into one's life, and to specify that genuine faith will always produce evident works, then I could even agree with this too. But the FGA has a specialized, more narrow understanding of “faith,” which excludes these things from necessarily accompanying faith, and with which I could not agree]

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

and that “alone” means “not necessarily accompanied by certain other things.”

(“alone” means “by itself,” without other human actions connected to salvation)

Specifically, the Free Grace position says it is wrong to say

- (1) that repentance from sin must accompany faith or
- (2) that any human activities necessarily result from faith, such as good works and continuing to believe.

3

[SKIP:] This understanding of the word “alone” in the Reformation principle of “faith alone” then leads to several pastoral practices, such as:

- (1) Evangelism: Evangelistic messages generally do not include any call to turn from sin. (“works”)
- (2) Assurance: People who accurately understood the Gospel and sincerely said that they believed in Christ in the past, but now say that they no longer believe in Christ, are likely still saved and we can assure them they are saved. (b/c justifying faith is a one-time act)
- (3) Assurance: A professing Christian’s sinful conduct of life should not ordinarily be used as a basis for warning that the person might not be saved. (rather, that the person is foolishly not living according to who he/she really is)
- (4) Assurance: A professing Christian’s righteous and godly conduct of life should not ordinarily be used as a basis for giving that person assurance of salvation.

## **B. My concerns about Free Grace theology:**

### **1. Free Grace theology is based on a misunderstanding of word “alone” in the historic Protestant affirmation of justification by “faith alone”**

The consistent 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 Reformers always took “faith alone” to mean that “faith is the only thing that God responds to.”

Difference in meaning of “alone.”

Example: My Phoenix Seminary key ring:

The blue key alone opens my office door (it is the only key that works), but the blue key is never by itself (always on same key ring as classroom key, key to seminary office corridor, key to computer doors at the podiums).

My office is opened by the blue key alone, [it alone opens my door]  
but the blue key is never alone. [other keys always come with it]

And so – Reformation teaching was:

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

**We are justified by faith alone** [it alone is what God requires]  
**but the faith that justifies is never alone** [repentance, good works, other things  
always come with it]

a. This is the repeated teaching of the great Reformation teachers and confessions – and of the entire sweep of mainstream evangelical Protestantism:

**John Calvin** (1509-1564): (Reformed)

“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 and not through works” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1; vol. 1, p. 798 of Battles translation; p. 523 of Beveridge translation.)

CANON 11.

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.

John Calvin tracts & letters - Acts of the Council of Trent: Antidote to the canons of the Council of Trent, Canon 11 (quoted from [http://www.godrules.net/library/calvin/142calvin\\_c4.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/calvin/142calvin_c4.htm), accessed 02-15-14).

**Formula of Concord** (great summary of Lutheran doctrine, 1576):

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.]

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.

**39 Articles of Church of England (1571):**

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

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.

## **Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):**

**[same wording: Philadelphia Baptist Confession, 1688]**

10.2: 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.

## **New Hampshire Baptist Confession, 1833**

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 as our Profit, Priest, and King, and relying on him alone as the only and all sufficient Saviour

## **John Wesley (1703-1791):**

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. (The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 35 The Law Established Through Faith: Discourse One, Section II.6; accessed 11-16-14 at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-35-the-law-established-through-faith-discourse-one/>)

so I ask Free Grace advocates:

→ where, in the entire history of mainstream evangelical Protestantism since the Reformation, did you ever find the idea that “justification by faith alone” means “faith that is not accompanied by repentance or good works”? It is not there.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

“Faith alone” has never meant “faith not accompanied by any other human actions.” Rather, “faith alone” means “faith is the only thing that God responds to with the act of justification.”

b. There is no logical difficulty in claiming this.

Claiming logical difficulty here is failing to understand the sentence in the way it is intended: “justified by faith alone” means that nothing else counts  
-- faith and nothing else is what God counts as legitimate means of obtaining justification.

But -- “faith is not alone” means it is accompanied by other things, even though God does not count those other things as any part of the means of obtaining justification. and it is accompanied by other things because God connects them together  
(Rom 8:29-30)

[In fact, Free Grace author Fred Lybrand even claims – in book promoted by FGA – that he has found the same “contradiction” in Calvin, Luther, the Westminster Confession of Faith, John Owen, John Welsey, George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, Machen, Berkhof, Packer, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Billy Graham, etc. – indeed, almost the whole history of Protestantism! (Fred Lybrand, *Back to Faith* (n.p., Xulon, 2009), 5-9)

And his FG book expresses amazement that hardly anybody else has seen this contradiction.

I would think that would make him suspicious that he is the one who has misunderstood what he is writing about.

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.

Unlikely.

More likely that the critic is not understanding the sentence in the sense intended.

A contradiction would be

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

But none of these statements of faith or theologians ever say that.

Nor do they ever mean 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 Reformers ever say that. Nor do they ever mean that.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

→ If you think you have found a contradiction in Calvin, WCF, Anglican 39 Articles, John Wesley, great Baptist confessions, Heidelberg Cat, Lutheran Formula of Concord, you haven't. You just have not understood their sentences correctly.

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

It is promoting a view of saving faith that the Reformers never held.

The Reformers were striving to separate faith from works done to merit salvation such as participation in the sacraments – faith plus being baptized, attending the mass, doing penance – all actions, all works to earn merit with God.

They were not trying to separate faith from genuine repentance from sin, and they were not saying that genuine faith could occur without a change in someone's life. – they repeatedly said it could not!

Where the reformers guilty 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 fidei*, “faith alone.” They were willing to die rather than to 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 FG movement is that at first it sounds to people like promoting a Reformation doctrine, but it is promoting a doctrine that the leaders of the Reformation had nothing to do with.

It is promoting a novel view in Protestantism, and we should not think it has its roots in the Reformation.

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- therefore what is its proof? Not from history of Reformation or Protestantism, whose key teaching was “justification by faith alone.” Must find support only from the claim that NT teaches this view. But where is it in the NT? Where does NT ever say that faith can occur by itself in a person who is saved, without repentance from sin, and without good works following?

I think nowhere.

--much NT teaching that many changes come once one believes in Christ: (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Paul does not say “you were justified and nothing else necessarily happened when you believed”



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

but [after long list of sins:]

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. (1Co 6:11 ESV)

## 2. FG theology weakens the gospel message by avoiding any call to unbelievers to repent of their sins.

a. A call to repentance is frequent in gospel summaries:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

<sup>BGT</sup> **Hebrews 6:1** Διὸ ἀφέντες τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερώμεθα, μὴ πάλιν θεμέλιον καταβαλλόμενοι μετανοίας ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων καὶ πίστεως ἐπὶ θεόν,

“repentance” in this sense is not merely a “change of mind” in the sense of an mental assent that one’s sins are evil and worthy of judgment.

Repentance includes a sincere commitment to turn from sin.

This is not adding “works” to faith

—repentance & faith are mentioned together in NT bec. repentance from sin is a component of truly turning to Christ in faith for salvation from sin.

A heart commitment to turn from sin is no more works than is a heart commitment to trust in Christ. Both are decisions of the heart. Neither one is a “good work” in the sense of an act one does to merit favor with God.

In Heb. 6:1, the “from” is important: repentance from dead works (apo + gen) has the meaning of a repentance that turns you away from your dead works as you turn toward God (faith in God).

Many other verses:

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

(**Acts 17:30** ESV) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

(**Acts 26:20** ESV) but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 20:21** testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Acts 20:21** διαμαρτυρούμενος Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλησιν τὴν εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν.

- this is his summary of preaching the gospel in Ephesus

-- In Acts 20:21, repentance is not just a change of some mental ideas in what you think about God

Paul did not say that he testified to Jews and Greeks about a change of opinion about some intellectual facts about God

rather, it is repentance toward God that involves coming into the presence of the one omnipotent and infinitely holy God and crying out as Isaiah did,

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 6:5** And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isa 6:5 ESV)

The gospel call is ever and always a call to turn away from your sin as you turn to the Lord to seek forgiveness:

(Isaiah 55:6-7 ESV) "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

true repentance toward God is a deep, heartfelt, sorrow for one's sins and resolve to turn from them.

This is also affirmed by some of Jesus' encounters with unbelievers:

rich young ruler: asking him to give up all his possessions (Luke 18:18-30)

woman at the well: asking her to call her husband (John 4:16)

Zacchaeus, declaring that salvation had come to his house when Jesus heard that he had given half his goods to poor and had repaid fourfold anything he had stolen (Luke 19:1-10)

2 There are 2 differing Free Grace definitions of "repentance":

(1) "change of mind" -- necessary before saving faith, but includes no resolve to turn from sin (Bing, Lordship Salvation, 67-69

[WG note: sometimes it is expressed as "change of mind or heart"]

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

(2) “an internal resolve to turn from one’s sin” -- but not necessary before saving faith, desirable afterward

[WG: need to get complete quotes:] - David R. Anderson & Zane Hodges, [as quoted in FGA letter to me, p. 6, n. 17;] also Anderson on p. 8 (Free Grace Soteriology) + Hodges from Harmony w/ God, p. 57

c. Lexicons:

standard Gk. dictionary for NT – BDAG – not agree that it means “change of mind” in NT: It does list “change one’s mind” as possible meaning of *metanoēō*, (p. 640)

In fact, Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, page 67, says that “the basic meaning of the Greek word *metanoēō* is ‘to change the mind’,” and he gives a footnote to the BDAG Lexicon as his proof. (fn. 28)

But I don’t think that Bing is playing fair with his readers in this quotation. What he fails to mention is that the BDAG Lexicon does not put any New Testament passages in this first category.

Rather, this same lexicon entry puts every New Testament passage under meaning #2, “**feel remorse, repent, be converted,**”

and for noun *metanoia*,

“primarily ‘a change of mind’ . . . also with the nuance of ‘remorse’ (as regret for shortcomings and errors . . . ) . . . . In our literature with focus on the need of change in view of responsibility to deity . . . . **repentance, turning about, conversion**” (640)

That’s not the only difficulty with Bing’s discussion of *metanoēō*, because then he goes on with a long quotation from the article on *metanoēō, meteanoia* in TDNT, vol. 4, in the part written by Johannes Behm, where Behm says,

“For the Greeks *metanoēō* never suggests an alteration in the total moral attitude, a profound change in life’s direction, a conversion which affects the whole conduct” (Bing, p. 68, quoting Behm, TDNT 4, 979).

Then Charles Bing says, “It is remarkable that Behm follows this analysis with the statement, ‘One searches the Greek world in vain for the origin of the New Testament understanding of *metanoēō* and *metanoia*’ (4:980),” and then Charles Bing adds his own comment, “As if the New Testament writers were from *another* world!” (Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 68, note 30).

What I find troubling is that Bing fails to tell his readers, many of whom will fail to look up and read the long article in TDNT, is that Behm goes on later in the article to show how extra-biblical Jewish literature had quite a different meaning for these words. Behm says that “what Philo denotes by *metanoēō* or *metanoia* is the OT and Jewish concept of conversion, namely, radical turning to God . . . turning from sin . . . change of nature” (4:993). He says that Josephus likes to use these terms “for the concept of religious and moral conversion” (4:995). And he says

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, “the predominant sense of *metanoēō* is now ‘to convert’ and of *metanoia* ‘conversion.’” (4:991). He gives many examples.

Then, reading further in the TDNT article, we reach the section “*metanoēō* and *metanoia* in the New Testament,” where we find that Behm says, “the terms have religious and ethical significance along the lines of the OT and Jewish concept of conversion, for which there is no analogy in secular Greek . . . *metanoēō* and *metanoia* are the forms in which the NT gives new expression to the ancient concept of religious and moral conversion: (4:999-1000).

11

This very different picture of the TDNT article given by Charles Bing, a prominent Free Grace advocate.

d. English translations: “Repent!” not “Change your mind!”

But there is more: When authors in the FG movement define “repentance” as “change of mind,” they are differing not only with - standard NT Greek lexicon, but also with all English Bible translations known to me.

None of them translate *metanoēō* as “change one’s mind” – or even change one’s heart—

all translate it with “repent”  
and for good reason: The English word “repent” does not mean merely “change your mind” but (in religious sense of “repent”):

1. To feel remorse, contrition, or self-reproach for what one has done or failed to do; be contrite.
2. To feel such regret for past conduct as to change one’s mind regarding it: *repented of intemperate behavior*.

→ [this #3 is most applicable to religious sense]

3. To make a change for the better as a result of remorse or contrition for one’s sins. (*American Heritage Dictionary*, fourth edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), page 1478)

That is why all these verses that include “repent!” as part of the gospel message argue against the FG view:

All those translation committees made of experts in Heb & Gk have decided not to translate *metanoēō* as merely “Change your mind!” but “Repent”:

(Matthew 3:2 ESV) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

(Matthew 4:17 ESV) From that time Jesus began to preach, saying,

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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

(Acts 2:38 ESV) And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

(Acts 3:19 ESV) Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

(Acts 17:30 ESV) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

(Acts 26:20 ESV) but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

[SKIP:] I do not think this should be called “frontloading” or “backloading” the gospel. It is simply truthfully explaining what is the nature of saving faith. It is adding nothing to saving faith.

However, a word of clarification:

e. I am not willing to say that initial saving faith requires absolute, total commitment of life, for then nobody would be saved in this life.

Yes, Jesus demands this, and he is Lord of all.

But we cannot fulfill that demand in this life.

f. And I do not believe that saving faith includes obedience.

I think it results in obedience, but I do not think it includes obedience.

Nor does any major Protestant confession say that saving faith includes obedience.

[Nor does John MacArthur, 2008 edition of *Gospel According to Jesus*]

**Summary: 2. FG theology weakens the gospel message by avoiding any call to repent of one's sins.**

**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.**

a. → This weakening of the gospel message in free Grace theology is a major concern.

I am deeply concerned that this weakened gospel message,

which lacks any call to repent from sins,

will result – and has resulted -- in many unsaved people who think they are saved.

If you ask them if they are sinners in need of salvation, they would agree.

If you ask them if they believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins, they would agree.

They heard that in church and decided that they thought it was true.

And on this basis, some Free Grace teachers have assured them that they are saved.

But they have never repented from their sins.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

They are lacking a necessary component of genuine saving faith, according to frequent and repeated New Testament presentations. They never had genuine faith. They are not born again. They are lost because of a weakened gospel message.

But the NT epistles frequently show that regular churchgoers should be warned from time to time that they might not be saved

13

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

BGT **1 Corinthians 6:9** "Ἡ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; μὴ πλανᾶσθε· οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλολάτραι οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται <sup>10</sup> οὔτε κλέπται οὔτε πλεονέκται, οὐ μέθυσοι, οὐ λοιδοροὶ, οὐχ ἄρπαγες βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσουσιν. <sup>11</sup> καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε· ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλὰ ἡγιασθητε, ἀλλὰ ἐδικαιώθητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

(2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV) Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

(Hebrews 3:12 ESV) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

(John 15:6 ESV) If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

James 2:14-17: What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (Jam 2:14-17 ESV)

Z Hodges, Absolutely Free, 104-113 thinks a believer can become a total unbeliever and still be saved

→ NT writers do not do this (see James 2:

"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jam 2:17 ESV)

Hodges: dead but still saves him b/c once was alive

But: v. 14: What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (implied answer: no)

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

[Hodges: temporal salvation – but nothing in context points to specific physical danger in view – special pleading – when sozo occurs in NT w/o contextual markers tying it to a specific physical danger, refers to eternal salvation]

BGT **James 2:14** Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἂν πίστιν λέγῃ τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη; μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σώσαι αὐτόν;

(1 John 2:3-5 ESV) 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, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

(1Jo 3:6 ESV) No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

(1 John 3:9-10 ESV) No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

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

→ FG advocates give alternative explanations for these vss  
1 John 1-4 talks about fellowship, not being saved or not saved  
[see below]

[SKIP:]

Similarly: deprives churchgoers of benefit of NT warnings not to fall away.

[SKIP:] + Faith must continue:

(Hebrews 3:14 ESV) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

(1 Peter 1:5 ESV) who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(Colossians 1:22-23 ESV) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

→ I'm afraid the result has been numerous unsaved churchgoers who think they are saved.

(But they often wonder what's wrong with their Christian lives, why they don't have the joy they see in Christians around them, why the Bible doesn't seem to make much sense, why prayer is not very meaningful at all.)

→ And I'm afraid the result has been numerous other unsaved people who don't even go to church any more, but who think they are saved

because, if you were to ask them, they would say they think that it's true that they are sinners in need of salvation

and that Jesus died to pay for their sins.

Therefore some Free Grace people told them that they were already saved.

Forever. And that's all they needed to hear. Now they can't be bothered to go near a church. And they persist in their lives of sin.

b. FG teaching about assurance makes a fundamental category mistake:

Consider Grace Evangelical Society statement:

Assurance of everlasting life is based only on the promise God makes in His Word that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ alone possesses everlasting life (John 5:24; 1 John 5:9-13). Good works, which can and should follow regeneration, are not necessary for a person to have assurance of everlasting life (Eph 2:10 ; Titus 3:8).

FGA writings – the same: Assurance should be based only on the promise of God in the finished work of Christ, not on anything in ourselves or patterns of conduct in our lives.

But this whole line of argument simply involves a fundamental category mistake.

All Protestant theologians would agree that our assurance that Christ's work has earned salvation for sinners should be based fully and entirely on the testimony of God in Scripture and the finished atoning work of Christ. But that is not the question.

The question is, where do I get assurance that I have believed? Reading Bible verses about the atoning work of Christ tells me nothing about whether I have believed or not. Therefore, saying that assurance must be based on Scripture and the finished work of Christ is simply a category mistake. It does not address the category, how do I know that I have believed?

And here the New Testament gives multiple verses telling me about various evidences that I have believed and that God has brought about a change in my life, 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. [\*put verses here]



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

(2 Peter 1:10 ESV) Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

[virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love]

(1 John 3:14 ESV) 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 5:13 ESV) I write these things [I think entire book of 1 John] to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

16

c. The historic Protestant view of assurance does not say that it is impossible but just the opposite:

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 18, paragraphs 1 and 2:

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.

**4. 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”.**

I realize that Free Grace supporters have specialized explanations to put these verses into various special categories another other than tests of genuine saving faith.

I cannot go into 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, how completely unpersuasive and foreign to the New Testament these explanations sound.

Again and again, they bear the marks of special pleading.

In many 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.

-- Z. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*: Rom 10:9-17 (194-197); calling on the name of the Lord is not to gain salvation in this passage but means calling for deliverance from danger

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Luke 16:30 (226); when the rich man in hell says his brothers need repentance: his theology was wrong – (though Jesus uses other things the rich man says to prove his point)

Luke 18:22 (186); “sell all you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” “is not a gospel message but an invitation to discipleship (different from salvation)

John 15:6 (137) branches that “are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” are going through a purifying burning to prepare them for heaven

Acts 11:18 (153); “repentance unto life” is not the same as repentance unto eternal life

[see TN 6,7] ??

Acts 17:30 (145); [Areopagus:] God “commands all people everywhere to repent” is not a gospel message but a call to harmonious relationship with God, something different from the gospel message

Acts 26:19-20 (163-167): Paul’s call to repent and turn to God is not a gospel message but is preaching a message of holiness

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,<sup>20</sup> but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. (Act 26:19-20 ESV)

2 Corinthians 13:5 (201): “in the faith” means acting as a Christian, not whether you are a Christian at all

-- James 2:14 “can that faith save him?”: “save” = from some physical danger  
James 5:19-20: “will save his soul from death” means from physical death

and then James 2:17 “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”  
but ZH says (125-126) the point is that such faith was once alive  
(=> the person is still saved, just not rescued from some physical danger)

-- Some Christians will be excluded from the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Matt. 8:11-12; 22:12-13) and will be cast into “outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and will experience “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) in Christ’s future Millennial kingdom.

(Not all Free Grace advocates hold this.)

-- Some Christians will enter but not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5)

→ but see Rom 8:17

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Romans 8:16** αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ.  
<sup>17</sup> εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι· κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ, εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν.

also: Philip Simpson critique 24-25: all Christians inherit

DAC, of 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’s pattern of interpretation of the passages he treats” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, 129, speaking of *The Gospel under Siege*, 1981)

**5. Free Grace theology leads its supporters to overemphasize one necessary component of genuine faith (mental assent to the Bible’s propositions about Christ’s atoning work) and to underemphasize another necessary component of genuine faith (namely, heartfelt trust in the living person of Jesus Christ as my Savior and my God forever).**

I’m trying to take care to be accurate here.

Free Grace advocates have pointed me to the Free Grace Alliance statement of faith, which speaks about “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” not just believing that propositions about Christ are true.

I’m thankful for that.

When I talk to Free Grace advocates they assure me that they believe in Jesus personally, not just in propositions about him.

And I think that’s true. Many wonderful Free Grace Christians whom I know pray to Jesus, they don’t pray to propositions about Jesus. In church they worship Jesus, they don’t worship propositions about Jesus. In the language of 1 Peter 1:8, they “love him,” they don’t just love propositions about him.

But that emphasis simply is not there in how they write about the nature of saving faith.

Z. Hodges *Absolutely Free* (1989), 31: Faith is “the inward conviction that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That – and that alone – is saving faith.”

GES statement of faith:

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).

in *Grace in Focus*, Robert Wilkin, leader of GES, wrote (Sept-Oct 2014),

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Faith in Christ is intellectual assent. Stripped of its pejorative connotation, “intellectual assent” is a good definition of what faith is. (*Grace in Focus*, Sept-Oct, 2014, 27).

And I think that’s not accidental. I think it’s a direct result of trying to protect this misunderstanding of “alone” in “justification by faith alone”:

(1) Coming before the person of Christ and trusting in him makes optional Lordship unthinkable: 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, coming to his presence, and that means realizing that he is your God,

that he is your King and Lord for ever, that he is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal Creator and sustainer of the universe, that he is infinitely holy,

and that you dare not come to his presence while clinging to any sin

That your only hope in heaven or earth is to cry out, “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!”

That in his majestic presence any thought of saying, “Jesus, I’ll accept you as my Savior today, and I might be back later to submit to you as Lord” is as far from your mind as the uttermost part of the sea.

(2) Trusting in the person of Christ makes assurance more complex: another reason I think that Free Grace advocates downplay the element of personal encounter with the living Christ is that it opens the question of whether the person has really trusted in Christ or not. It makes the question of whether a person has genuine faith more complex.

But the question is, what does the New Testament teach. So let’s look at the New Testament:

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

→ It is foreign to the entire NT emphasis to almost exclusively emphasize saving faith as mere mental agreement with facts about myself and Christ.

Saving faith in NT is regularly represented in terms of an interpersonal interaction between the sinner and Christ which leads to trust in Christ as a person.

Several strands of teaching:

(1) **Saving faith is pictured as “coming to Christ”**

**John 6:37** All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

<sup>BGT</sup> **John 6:37** πᾶν ὃ δίδωσίν μοι ὁ πατήρ πρὸς ἐμὲ ἔξει, καὶ τὸν ἐρχόμενον πρὸς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἐκβάλω ἔξω,

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

not: whoever agrees to some facts about me I will never cast out

**John 6:35** 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. (Joh 6:35 ESV)

**John 6:44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (Joh 6:44 ESV)

**John 7:37** 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.

ἐάν τις διψᾷ ἐρχέσθω πρός με καὶ πινέτω. (Joh 7:37 BGT)

not: If anyone thirsts, let him give mental assent to some facts about me  
“coming to” someone involves personal interaction with the person

Even stronger: taking from Jesus and drinking the water of eternal life:  
that is personal interaction

ESV **Matthew 11:28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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.

BGT **Matthew 11:28** Δεῦτε πρός με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι, καὶ γὰρ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς. <sup>29</sup> ἄρατε τὸν ζυγὸν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πραῦς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν.

not: “Give assent to some facts about me, all who labor and are heavy laden.”  
Come to me. Personal interaction, even personal trust – for you are coming to gain rest for your souls.

## (2) Saving faith is pictured as “receiving” Christ

ESV **John 1:11** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

BGT **John 1:11** εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. <sup>12</sup> ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,

Not: “To all who gave mental assent to facts about him” but “Those who received him”

to receive someone – to receive a person – is to welcome that person into fellowship, into relationship, often into one’s home, and certainly into one’s life

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

also: Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, (Col 2:6 ESV)

## (3) Saving faith is pictured as “believing” something with your heart

**Romans 10:9** because, 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. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Romans 10:9** ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ· <sup>10</sup> καρδία γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν.

(also Acts 16:14: Lydia: the Lord opened her heart)

(Ezek: **Ezekiel 36:26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Eze 36:26 ESV)

Rom 10:10: not just with mental assent, but w/ “heart,” – and in Bible, the heart is the center of one’s deepest emotions, beliefs, and convictions  
- belief that is not heart belief is not true saving faith

and therefore a supposed “faith” which is mere mental assent without trust in one’s heart will lead a person only to eternal condemnation

On this point, I do not think that Joseph Dillow represented BB Warfield accurately:

In Final Destiny, pages 680-681, Dillow is attempting to show that “saving faith is simply believing something is true and resting confidently in the object of faith. It involves knowledge about the object and then belief and acceptance of that knowledge as valid” (page 679).

In attempting to prove this view of faith as merely intellectual agreement with true facts, Dillow quotes B. B. Warfield to show that “Warfield eliminates a role for the will in producing faith when he says:

Belief . . . Is a mental recognition of what is before the mind, as objectively true and real . . . . It is, therefore, impossible that belief should be the product of a volition”

But what Dillow fails to tell the reader is that that is not Warfield’s conclusion about the nature of faith..

(I found this exact wording that Dillow quoted, but in a different edition with different pagination. I found it in B.B. Warfield, “On Faith and Its Psychological Aspects,” in the form it was published in his *Studies in Theology*, Vol. 9 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991, p. 315).

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

But a closer reading of that entire article by Warfield argues directly against the point that Dillow are trying to establish.

In the statement that Dillow quotes, Warfield is not denying that saving faith in Christ must include an element of personal trust (*fiducia*), for he explicitly affirms this very clearly on pages 340-341 of the same article.

Rather, in this section, he is beginning a long argument against the idea that faith can exist apart from persuasion of the truth of evidence. He is arguing against the idea that someone can simply “decide” to believe even though there is not adequate evidence on which to base a belief. That is why he says that it is impossible “that belief should be the *product* of a volition.” He is arguing that belief must be based on evidence, not on an arbitrary act of the will in the absence of evidence.

This is evident two pages later when he begins a paragraph by saying, “It would seem to be fairly clear that ‘belief’ is always the product of evidence and that it cannot be created by volitions, whether singly or in any number of repetitions . . . [it must be] determined by evidence, not by volition” (p. 317).

But in the entire structure of the article, after a long discussion demonstrating that belief must be based on adequate evidence (to which I and all Reformed theologians would agree), then he goes on, starting on page 329, to a section in the article in which he talks about “What we call religious faith” (p. 331). When we begin to talk about religious faith, he says, the element of “trust” becomes prominent:

“In what we call religious faith this prominent implication of trust reaches its height . . . what is prominent in this state of mind is precisely trust. Trust is the active expression of that sense of dependence in which religion largely consists, and its presence in these acts of faith, belief, which communicates to them their religious quality and raises them from their beliefs of propositions, the contents of which happen to be of religious purport, to acts possessed of religious character. It is the nature of trust to seek a *personal object* on which to repose, and it is only natural, therefore, that what we call religious faith does not reach its height in assent to propositions of whatever religious content and however well fitted to call out religious trust, but comes to its rights only when it rests with adoring trust on a person . . . it rests on the person of God our benefactor, or of Christ our Savior. . . . faith in God, and above all, faith in Jesus Christ, is just trusting Him in its purity” (pp. 331-332, emphasis added).

In the remaining sections of the article, Warfield affirms several times that saving faith goes beyond believing facts about Christ and must include personally entrusting oneself to him. Here are some further statements:

[The expression] “to believe in,” “to have faith in” comes to mean simply “entrust yourself to” (332).



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The sinful heart – which is enmity towards God – is incapable of that supreme act of trust in God – or rather of entrusting itself to God its Saviour – which itself has absorbed into itself the term “faith” in its Christian connotation (337).

[Faith comes to terminate] ultimately on God Himself and to rest on Him for our works. And thus it manifests its fundamental and universal character as trust in God . . . as the inexhaustible fountain to his creatures of all blessedness (340).

The Protestant theologians have generally explained that faith includes in itself the three elements of *notitia*, *assensus*, *fiducia*. Their primary object has been, no doubt, to protest against the Romish conception which limits faith to the assent of the understanding. *The stress of the Protestant definition lies therefore upon the fiducial element*. This stress has not led the Protestant theologians generally, however, to eliminate from the conception of faith the elements of understanding and assent. (340-341).

Speaking broadly Protestant theologians have reckoned all these elements as embraced within the mental movement we call faith itself; and they have obviously been right in so doing. . . . no true faith has arisen unless there has been a perception of the object to be believed or believed in, an assent to its worthiness to be believed or believed in, and a commitment of ourselves to it as true and trustworthy. We cannot be said to believe or trust in a thing or a person of which we have no knowledge (341).

In every movement of faith, therefore, from the lowest to the highest, there is an intellectual, and emotional, and a voluntary element (341).

In another article, Warfield explains that faith is “an absolute transference of trust from ourselves to another,’ a complete self-surrender to Christ” (Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of Faith,” in *Works, vol. 2: Biblical Doctrines* (reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991, p. 478).

A little later in the same article he explains that faith “obviously contains in it, therefore, an element of knowledge . . . and it as obviously issues in conduct . . . but it consists neither in assent nor in obedience, but in a reliant trust in the invisible Author of all good . . . [it] is not a mere belief in God’s existence and justice and goodness, or crediting of His word and promises, but a practical counting of Him faithful” (p. 501). Faith “is thus the going out of the heart of itself and its resting on God in confident trust for all good” (p. 502).

So Warfield is repeatedly expressing an understanding of faith by which it includes more than agreement with the facts that I am a sinner and that Jesus died and paid for my sins. He says that Protestant theologians generally, and rightly, have seen saving faith as including a strong element of personal trust in Christ, resting on him, entrusting one’s life to him.

## (4) Saving faith is portrayed as “believing in” a person

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

ESV **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.

BGT **John 3:16** οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

+ many times in NT, esp. in John: to "believe in Jesus" means to put one's trust in him.

24

BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, *pisteuō* (meaning 2, with persons): "to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence, believe (in), trust, with implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted."

-- This sense of *pisteuō* occurs frequently w/ *pisteuō + eis*, almost "believe into, entrust yourself to"

I think *pisteuō + eis* always has this sense in NT – (I think FC agrees, p. 40)

So I don't think that *pisteuō + eis* is exactly synonymous w/ *pisteuō + en*

some overlap: they both can take sense of "trust in a person"  
but I don't think *pisteuō + eis* ever in NT takes sense of "believe facts about a person" or "believe the truth of facts reported by the person" without the sense of personal trust

[I don't think D Wallace means to say they are always synonymous, p. 359 –but maybe]

Example: A person can believe AA has not had fatal airplane crash in 40 years, 100's of thousands of flights (facts)

and that the pilot has 27 yrs. experience w/ perfect safety record (facts)

and still experience great fear when I board the plane –

I'm not trusting pilot, and I'm not trusting employees of AA

I'm just believing facts, and that falls short of personal trust

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

This strong sense of belief in someone is sometimes expressed not just with *pisteuō + eis*, but also with w/ *pisteuō + en* or + dative alone – not often, but sometimes)

John 5.24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με has eternal life.

and **Romans 4:3** For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

BGT **Romans 4:3** τί γὰρ ἡ γραφή λέγει; ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

Now wait! Someone might say.

Don't you know that pisteuō sometimes speaks of mere mental assent?

I agree, bec. words have a range of meaning

we determine specific meaning w/in that range from the context  
both immediate gramm. construction  
and the sense of the larger context

25

BDAG recognizes this:

mng. 1, “to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust” (p. 816)

and pisteuō in this sense sometimes refers to believing what another person says, such as

ESV **Matthew 21:32** For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

BGT **Matthew 21:32** ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης, καὶ οὐκ ἐπίστεύσατε αὐτῷ, οἱ δὲ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι ἐπίστευσαν αὐτῷ. ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰδόντες οὐδὲ μετεμελήθητε ὕστερον τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ.

ESV **Acts 8:12** But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

BGT **Acts 8:12** ὅτε δὲ ἐπίστευσαν τῷ Φιλίππῳ εὐαγγελιζομένῳ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐβαπτίζοντο ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες

-- “believe in” him would not be a suitable sense in these cases b/c context:  
John- Baptist and Philip are not the object of personal trust

Summary: all these strands of NT teaching are given to us to teach us again and again that:

→ **a. Saving faith requires trust in the person of Christ, and mental agreement with facts about Christ without personal trust in Christ is not saving faith**

→ I am concerned because, once again, the result of this weakened gospel may be many unsaved churchgoers who think they are saved.

But they have never truly received Christ or believed in him in the full New Testament sense. They may think that they are saved, but they are lost.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Conclusion:

A. Appreciate many FG advocates and many important doctrines that we both affirm

B. But:

1. based on misunderstanding of “alone” in historic Protestant insistence on “justification by faith alone”
2. weakens the gospel message by avoiding any call to unbelievers to repent of their sins
3. gives false assurance of eternal life to many people who profess faith in Christ but then show no evidence in their pattern of life
4. promotes numerous highly unusual, highly unlikely interpretations of the New Testament because of the need to defend a mistaken understanding of the word “alone” in the phrase “faith alone”.
5. leads its supporters to overemphasize one necessary component of genuine faith (mental assent to the Bible’s propositions about Christ’s atoning work) and to underemphasize another necessary component of genuine faith (namely, heartfelt trust in the living person of Jesus Christ as my Savior and my God forever).