

“Free Grace”

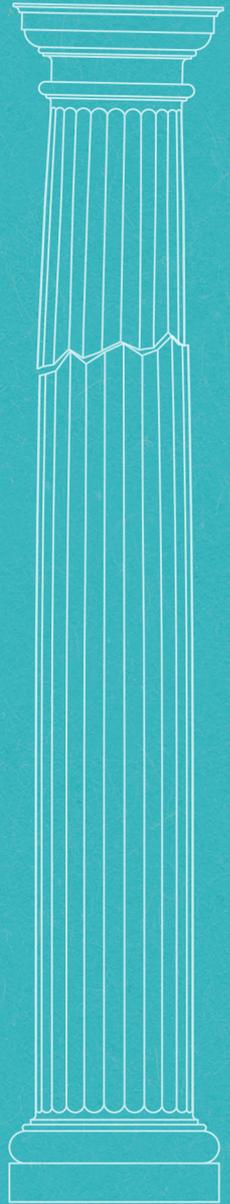
Theology

5 Ways It

Diminishes

the Gospel

Wayne Grudem



“With grace, patience, pastoral tenderness, and honesty, Wayne Grudem takes a careful look at biblical teaching on the gospel and evangelism as he critically examines the teaching of what is called Free Grace. As well intentioned as this position is, Grudem argues it falls short in five areas. He is fair, citing Free Grace materials in full and engaging biblical texts with care. I commend this book as one who has had similar discussions on these topics with people who hold this position, people whom I also respect as Grudem does.”

Darrell L. Bock, Executive Director of Cultural Engagement,
Howard G. Hendricks Center; Senior Research Professor of
New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“Within evangelicalism, there is a kind of presentation of the Bible’s teaching on grace that actually diminishes what the Bible teaches about grace, while purporting to elaborate and emphasize it. Wayne Grudem carefully, charitably, wisely, and pastorally takes on that kind of teaching in this book. This is an issue that especially pastors and those preparing to be pastors need to think through clearly, because confusion in our teaching and preaching on this will harm the sheep and our witness.”

J. Ligon Duncan III, Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological
Seminary, Jackson

“Ever so fair and irenic, New Testament scholar and trusted theologian Wayne Grudem gives no quarter to the purveyors of the so-called Free Grace gospel as he exposes their troubling pattern of selective reading of the standard Greek lexicons, as well as of famed theologians, to effect the illusion of support for their position. Grudem does more than demolish a house of cards as he pastorally lays out what the New Testament says about the nature of the gospel, repentance, faith, and assurance. Grudem’s critique is a gift of love to the church universal, and especially to those under the unfortunate thrall of errant teaching.”

R. Kent Hughes, Visiting Professor of Practical Theology,
Westminster Theological Seminary

“The so-called ‘lordship controversy’ has been simmering for several decades now. I’m thankful for several fresh resources that deal with these matters accurately and succinctly. Wayne Grudem’s book in particular is an excellent and very useful digest of the main doctrinal and biblical issues under debate. He answers the questions with uncommon clarity and skill, always from Scripture.”

John MacArthur, Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley,
California; President, The Master’s College and Seminary

“Credence without commitment and assurance without action are the hallmarks of the so-called Free Grace version of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is, however, unbiblical, anti-evangelical, and sub-Christian, as Grudem’s patient and well-informed analysis clearly shows.”

J. I. Packer, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College

“Wayne Grudem’s book on Free Grace is the best I have read on the subject, and I commend it with enthusiasm for several reasons. First, it is biblically saturated, showing us again and again what the Scriptures say. Second, Grudem’s explanations are so clear that virtually any Christian can read and understand this book. Third, the book is amazingly kind, generous, and charitable. Grudem isn’t on the attack. He loves those with whom he disagrees, and that love shines through the book. Fourth, Grudem recognizes the issue is massively important since it has to do with the nature of the gospel we preach and proclaim. He argues convincingly that works are a necessary fruit of salvation, which doesn’t threaten free grace but upholds what the great Reformers taught about salvation.”

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This excellent and insightful book is much needed in the church today, especially in view of ever-increasing focus on the nature of the gospel. His analysis of the ill-named Free Grace movement is clear, thoroughly biblical, and entirely persuasive. He deals forthrightly yet charitably with the views of those who advocate this mistaken conception of the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. All Christians will benefit greatly from reading Grudem’s analysis. I cannot recommend this book too highly.”

Sam Storms, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“This book is charitable yet rock-solid in its penetrating insights regarding the Free Grace movement. The soteriology of this movement is thoroughly consistent—and deeply flawed. Grudem has addressed a number of the key issues and texts in a gracious and gentle manner. I recommend it to anyone who is interested in the Free Grace movement and its implications for the gospel.”

Daniel B. Wallace, Senior Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“With care and weighty biblical and historical argumentation, Grudem applies his clear-headed reasoning to show where the Free Grace view has gone wrong. Because this disagreement has to do with the very nature of the gospel, saving faith, and the basis of assurance, it is critical that Christians understand rightly what Scripture teaches on these matters. *“Free Grace” Theology* provides an excellent guide to understanding why the traditional Protestant and Reformed view of these matters accurately expresses biblical teaching and where the Free Grace view misleads. Every Christian can benefit from reading this book, to grow in clarity and conviction of understanding of what salvation by faith alone truly means.”

Bruce A. Ware, T. Rupert and Lucille Coleman Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Free Grace” Theology

5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel

Wayne Grudem

“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel

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To
Darryl DelHousaye,
president of Phoenix Seminary,
supporter and advocate for all his faculty members,
tireless promoter of everything that advances
the work of God's kindom,
my pastor for many years,
and my friend.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

(1 Cor. 15:58)

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In addition, I wish to express much appreciation to Fred Chay, for thirteen years a colleague of mine at Phoenix Seminary, for his patience with me in numerous extended discussions on these matters. Fred is a highly skilled, articulate, and thoughtful theologian, and though in the end we did not agree on the issues discussed in this book, we agreed on many, many other things, and I believe that we continue to count each other as valued friends and colleagues in the work of the kingdom of God. My excellent teaching assistant Jeff Phillips also helped to sharpen my thinking on these issues.

Others who do not hold a Free Grace position also helped me to clarify my thinking and to understand the Free Grace po-

sition better, including my president, Darryl DelHousaye; and my academic dean, Bing Hunter, at Phoenix Seminary; pastor Jamie Rasmussen at Scottsdale Bible Church; pastor Josh Vincent at Trinity Bible Church; and my teaching assistants John Paul Stepanian, Daniel Malakowsky, Jason Miller, and Joshua McCoy; as well as good friends Steve and Kitty Oman. Jenny Miller helped me at several points with typing and details of manuscript preparation. Librarians Doug Olbert and Mitch Miller helped me with finding resources in the library, and Don Baltzer helped with modifying the depiction of my seminary key ring (see p. 37). Greg Salazar helped me with some research at the Cambridge University Library, and Alice Jackson provided timely help in manuscript printing at the Tyndale House Library. Trent Poling rescued me from a near disaster when, nearing the end of my work, I accidentally gave Microsoft Word a command to “sort” all the paragraphs in the book alphabetically! My friend Dan Wallace gave me many helpful suggestions on an earlier form of this manuscript, and Mark Chapman provided me with historical materials on different views of the nature of conversion. Joshua McCoy compiled the bibliography and helped with proofreading. Jason Miller helped me solve several computer problems.

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Savior Jesus Christ, who (I believe) guided me to work on this project in spite of my resistance to the idea for several years and gave me strength to complete the project. I pray that he will continue to guide this book into the right hands and make it persuasive to others, but only to the extent that he deems it faithful to his Word, the Bible.

Wayne Grudem

June 2015

Introduction

It is with some reluctance that I write this book. 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. 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 (see chapter 2).

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 (see chapter 3).

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 (see chapter 4).

What I have found to be true in many previous theological disputes has also proven to be true in the dispute before us here: the Lord has several purposes in allowing a doctrinal controversy into his church. In particular, I suspect that the Lord would have us not only disagree graciously with those who hold the Free Grace position but also think carefully about our own understanding and practice regarding the nature of the gospel, repentance, saving faith, and assurance of salvation.

Many evangelicals today who have never heard of the Free Grace movement have unknowingly moved too far in the direction of Free Grace teaching anyway. They have become too timid about urging unbelievers to repent of their sins as they come to trust in Christ (in part because we live in a culture that would condemn any call for repentance as legalistic and judgmental), too vague about explaining what it is to trust in Christ personally, and too uncertain about how and when to give assurance of salvation to those who are part of our churches.

For all these reasons, I hope that this book will be useful for evangelical Christians today.

A. What is the Free Grace gospel?

The Free Grace position claims that we are justified *by faith alone*.¹ 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.²

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

¹For 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>.

²See discussion below for evidence from many Protestant leaders. 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 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.

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).³

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.⁴

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

³Free 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.

⁴For 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. (I provide documentation of these points from Free Grace authors in the following pages.)

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.

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.”)

B. Why I do not use the term *Lordship Salvation*.

Some readers may wonder why I do not use the term *Lordship Salvation* in discussing this topic. In fact, the matters that I discuss here have in previous years often been referred to as the “Lordship Salvation controversy.”⁵ But as I researched this topic, it became increasingly apparent that the phrase *Lordship Salvation* was a decidedly misleading and unfortunate summary of the central issues involved.⁶ In brief, popular terms, the controversy was sometimes summarized as follows.

⁵E.g., note the titles of these books: Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989); Kenneth Gentry, *Lord of the Saved: Getting to the Heart of the Lordship Debate* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992; repr. Fountain Inn, SC: Victorious House, 2001); Michael Horton, ed., *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008); Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010).

⁶I was glad to see that John MacArthur Jr. said bluntly, “I don’t like the term *lordship salvation*. I reject the connotation intended by those who coined the phrase. It insinuates that a submissive heart is extraneous or supplementary to saving faith. Although I have reluctantly used the term to describe my views, it is a concession to popular usage.” John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 23. The habit of referring to this as the “Lordship Salvation controversy” probably stems from a two-part article in the once-popular magazine *Eternity* 10:9 (September 1959), “Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior? No . . . Yes,” 13–18, 36, 48, with Everett Harrison arguing the *no* viewpoint and John Stott arguing the *yes* viewpoint on the opposite pages. Although the title of that article pointed to some differences between the two authors, it did so in an imprecise and confusing way, for Stott never claims that *perfect* submission to

- 1) Some people believe that you can accept Jesus *as Savior but not as Lord* (the Free Grace position).
- 2) Other people believe that you have to accept Jesus *as both Savior and Lord* (those who do not hold the Free Grace position but rather what was termed the “Lordship Salvation” position)

The problem is that neither side will ever win or lose the argument when it is framed in those terms. The Free Grace supporters who hold the first position still affirm strongly that Jesus is in fact Lord over the entire universe and over all of our lives, even though we imperfectly submit to his lordship.⁷ And those on the non-Free Grace side, those who hold the second position, all agree that our submission to Christ’s lordship is imperfect in this life.⁸

So both sides agree that Jesus is Lord of our lives in some sense and is not fully Lord of our lives in another sense. Trying to define precisely *how much* Jesus has to be acknowledged as Lord for genuine saving faith becomes an increasingly muddled task, and it simply does not contribute much clarity to the dis-

Christ’s lordship is necessary for saving faith but says that “in true faith there is an element of submission” (p. 17), and Harrison affirms that “Christ is Lord by virtue of resurrection whether anyone acknowledges it personally or not” (p. 16). The article would have focused the discussion more precisely if it had asked, “Is repentance from sin a necessary part of saving faith?” (Harrison: no; Stott: yes), and “Will good works and continuing to believe necessarily follow from saving faith?” (Harrison: no; Stott: yes).

⁷ Charles Bing says, “Though both the Lordship Salvation position and the Free Grace position agree that Christ’s Lordship is essential for salvation, there is disagreement over how an unsaved person must respond to Christ’s Lordship in order to be saved. . . . Jesus is Lord of all regardless of one’s submission to Him.” *Lordship Salvation*, 178–79.

⁸ John MacArthur says, “I am certain that while some understand more than others, no one who is saved fully understands all the implications of Jesus’ lordship at the moment of conversion.” But he adds, in distinction from the Free Grace position, “I am, however, equally certain that no one can be saved who is either unwilling to obey Christ or consciously, callously rebellious against His Lordship.” *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?*, anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 15.

cussion. Therefore I do not plan to discuss the question of the lordship of Christ in the rest of this book. I do not think that is the best way to focus the issue.

In addition, when Free Grace proponents refer to the position that disagrees with them as the “Lordship Salvation” position, they wrongly suggest that it is an unusual or minority view that seeks to add the idea of lordship to the ordinary idea of salvation. But, in fact, what the Free Grace movement calls the “Lordship Salvation” view has just been the ordinary, mainstream, evangelical Protestant view since the Reformation. It is not a novel or minority view at all, for it has been held by all the main branches of Protestantism (see chapter 1).

My own conclusion is that there are important differences concerning two other matters:

- 1) whether repentance from sin (in the sense of remorse for sin and an internal resolve to forsake it) is necessary for saving faith, and
- 2) whether good works and continuing to believe necessarily follow from saving faith.

The two positions clearly and explicitly disagree on the answers to those questions. And it is on those two questions that the debate should be focused. In my judgment, any further discussion that refers to this as the “Lordship Salvation controversy” will just muddy the waters. In the material that follows, I will simply refer to the two positions as the “Free Grace” position and the “historic Protestant” position (or, at times, the “non-Free Grace” position).

At this point someone might ask why I refer to the position I am opposing as the “Free Grace” position. After all, don’t all Protestants believe in free grace? My response is that, yes, all orthodox Protestants believe in free grace, but it is always courteous to refer to a position that you disagree with by a descriptive term that the other side would choose for itself, and the term “Free Grace” (capitalized) is commonly used by the two major organizations that promote this view, both the Free Grace Alliance⁹ and the Grace Evangelical Society.¹⁰

By the same token, I hope that no reviewer of this book will refer to my position as the “Lordship Salvation” position, for I explicitly disavow that label as misleading and confusing (see above). Throughout this book, I regularly refer to my own position as the “historic Protestant” position (or sometimes as the “non-Free Grace” position), and I attempt to demonstrate in chapter 1 that I am arguing for the viewpoint held historically by the most influential leaders and statements of faith in the various branches of historic Protestantism, including representative Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal groups.¹¹

However, my concerns with the Free Grace movement are not limited to theological differences on those two points above. I am convinced that the theological position held by the Free

⁹See their website: <http://www.freegracealliance.com>.

¹⁰See their website: <http://www.faithalone.org>. It is common in Christian circles to refer to groups by names they would take for themselves, such as “Baptists” (even though nearly all churches believe in baptism), or “Congregationalists” (even though all churches have congregations).

¹¹Although my book *Systematic Theology* makes clear that I personally hold doctrines that would place me in the Reformed and Baptist theological traditions (with sympathy for some teachings of the charismatic movement), the position I am arguing for here is more “historic Protestant” than uniquely representative of any of those three traditions.

Grace movement is also inconsistent with *historic* Protestant convictions and has harmful consequences in the church today as well. Therefore, I have organized my concerns into five chapters, and in those chapters these two differences over repentance and good works will surface again and again. The first chapter deals with the history of Protestantism, and the remaining four deal with my concerns about the practical consequences of Free Grace teaching.

Not the “Faith Alone” of the Reformation

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:

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.

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).

A. Protestant leaders throughout history have consistently disagreed with the Free Grace position.

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*.¹

¹John 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

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.²

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).

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

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 523; emphasis added.

²John 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.

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.³

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.⁴

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.⁵

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

⁴*Ibid.*, 3:494; emphasis added.

⁵*Ibid.*, 3:626; emphasis added.

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 as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and relying on him alone as the only and all sufficient Saviour.⁶

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.⁷

⁶Ibid., 3:744–45.

⁷John 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/>.

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).⁸

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

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 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

⁸“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.

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 forth⁹—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

⁹The 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).

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.¹⁰

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:

¹⁰However, 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 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.

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.¹¹

C. There is no logical difficulty in claiming this.

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.”¹² 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.¹³

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

¹¹ See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 704–6.

¹² Fred R. Lybrand, *Back to Faith: Reclaiming Gospel Clarity in an Age of Incongruence* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 1–19.

¹³ 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.

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

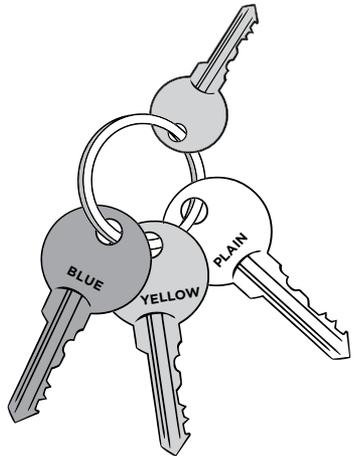
the Free Grace Alliance—that he has found the same “logical flaw” in John Calvin, Martin Luther, the Westminster Confession of Faith, John Owen, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, J. Gresham Machen, Louis Berkhof, J. I. Packer, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Billy Graham, and others—indeed, almost the whole history of Protestantism!¹⁴

He is surprised that he has found so little literature “specifically challenging this cliché.”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶

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.

A simple example is helpful in illustrating how the Reformation teaching is not a contradiction.

This illustration of my key ring from Phoenix Seminary shows the



¹⁴Lybrand, *Back to Faith*, 5–9.

¹⁵*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.”

¹⁶Lybrand, *Back to Faith*, 7–8.

two different senses in which “alone” can be used. Now it is perfectly true to say that my office door is *opened by the blue key alone* (it is the only key that works to open that door). But the blue key is *never by itself*, because I always keep it on the key ring with the yellow key (which opens the faculty office corridor), the plain key (which opens the classroom doors), and the small key (which opens the computer door at the podium where I teach). Therefore my office door is opened by the blue key alone (it is the only key that works), but the blue key that opens my office door is never alone (it is never found by itself but is always accompanied by other keys).

This simple statement about my keys is parallel to the historic Reformation teaching that we are justified by faith alone (faith is the only response that God requires from us), but the faith that justifies is never alone (because it never occurs by itself, but is always accompanied by—or includes—repentance from sin and is always followed by other actions such as doing good works and continuing to believe).

D. Why is the proper meaning of “justification by faith alone” so important?

I have spent several pages on this first point, explaining what it means that we are “justified by faith alone,” because I think a misunderstanding of this issue has led Free Grace supporters to all the other mistakes I raise concerns about in the following pages.

Why do Free Grace advocates claim that we should not tell unbelievers that they need to repent of their sins when they come to trust in Christ? Because they think this is adding an-

other element (repentance) to “faith alone.” (See the discussion in chapter 2.)

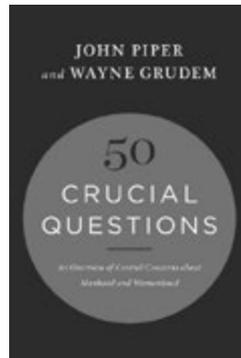
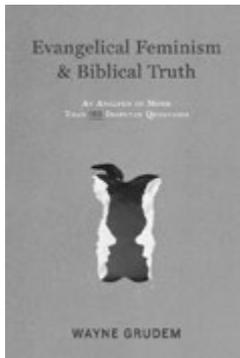
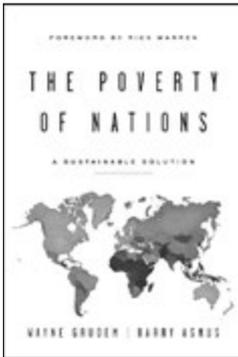
Why do Free Grace advocates claim that we should not say that good works are a necessary result of saving faith? Because they think that this is adding another element (good works) to “faith alone.” And why do they claim that we should not say that a true believer will continue to believe until the end of his or her life? Because they think this also adds another element (continuing in faith) to “faith alone.” (See discussion in chapter 3.)

Why do some Free Grace advocates teach that saving faith is only intellectual agreement with some facts about Jesus and does not also include heartfelt trust in Jesus *as a person*? And why do other Free Grace advocates speak of trust in Jesus as a person but do not emphasize it? Because they think this would be adding another element (personal encounter with Christ) to “faith alone.” (See discussion in chapter 4.)

Why do Free Grace advocates adopt highly unusual and unprecedented interpretations of numerous New Testament texts that speak, on the surface, of the need for repentance or the necessary evidence of good works and continuing in faith? Because they need to explain away those verses that seem to them to be adding other elements to “faith alone.” (See discussion in chapter 5.)

But 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 I have argued above), and if it is not the view of saving faith taught by the New Testament (as I will argue in subsequent chapters)—then the entire Free Grace movement is based on a mistake, and it should be abandoned.

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