Week 6 Free Grace Theology
Fruit or No Fruit

Why is Free Grace Theology in a Class on False Gospels?

1. The Free Grace (Easy-Believism) position of "faith alone and nothing else" has become the prominent view in most evangelical churches.
2. Free Grace has given many people a false assurance of salvation.
3. Free Grace treats repentance, sanctification, and discipleship as not necessary for salvation.
4. A person with a false assurance of salvation often becomes resistant to the true Gospel.
5. Evangelism can focus on the production of responses rather than the proclamation of a message calling for conversion.

John MacArthur*

"And through the years of my life, I have been engaged in a battle, on this particular front, for many years I [have been] trying to deal with what is called 'no lordship' teaching. This is the pervasive idea that really had a dominant influence in America in the last century, and certainly continues even now..."

*John MacArthur, "Spiritual Transformation, Part 2," sermon 90-300, October 23, 2005, Grace to You, official transcript from *Grace to You* can be found at https://www.gty.org/sermons/90-300/spiritual-transformation-part-2

What is the Essence of "Free Grace Theology"?

"The Free Grace position claims that we are justified by 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)."*

"...the whole gist of the no-lordship message: you can have Jesus as Savior and Friend here and now and decide later whether you really want to submit to His authority or not." John MacArthur**

*Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), pp.19-20,

** John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?*, rev. and expanded 20th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), page 30.

What is the Essence of "Lordship Theology"?*

(Selected Distinctives)

- "First, Scripture teaches that the gospel calls sinners to faith joined in oneness with repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 20:21; 2 Pet. 3:9)...
- Third, Scripture teaches that the object of faith is Christ Himself, not a creed or a promise (John 3:16). Faith therefore involves personal commitment to Christ (2 Cor. 5:15)...
- Fourth, Scripture teaches that real faith inevitably produces a changed life (2 Cor. 5:17)... Those with genuine faith follow Christ (John 10:27)...do good works (Eph. 2:10)...

- Sixth, Scripture teaches that Jesus is Lord of all, and the faith He demands involves unconditional surrender [to Jesus as Lord] (Rom. 6:17-18; 10:9-10)...
- Eighth, Scripture teaches that behavior is an important test of faith. Obedience is evidence that one's faith is real (1 John 2:3)...
- Ninth, Scripture teaches that genuine believers may stumble and fall, but they will persevere in the faith (1 Cor. 1:8)..."

*Source: Grace Community Church, "Lordship Salvation," Grace to You, 2001, adapted from John MacArthur writings cited at https://www.gty.org/articles/DD07/lordship-salvation.

Is There Agreement on Certain Essentials by Both Camps?*

"There are many articles of faith that are fundamental to all [orthodox] evangelical teaching. For example, there is agreement among all believers on the following truths:

(1) Christ's death purchased eternal salvation;

(2) the saved are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone;

(3) sinners cannot earn divine favor;

(4) God requires no preparatory works or pre-salvation reformation;

(5) eternal life is a gift of God;

(6) believers are saved before their faith ever produces any righteous works; and

(7) Christians can and do sin, sometimes horribly."

Source: Grace Community Church, "Lordship Salvation," Grace to You, 2001, adapted from John MacArthur writings cited at https://www.gty.org/articles/DD07/lordship-salvation.

How Does Free Grace Theology Differ From Lordship Salvation?

- Faith is alone with no other requirement than intellectual agreement (mental assent).
- Salvation does not require repentance because repentance would add a work to salvation.
- There is no requirement for sanctification and obedience for salvation.
- A person can walk away from the faith and still be saved, i.e., a "carnal Christian" can be saved.
- No works/fruit are necessary to indicate genuine salvation.
- The primary role of evangelism is to share facts of Jesus alone.

* See Charles Bing's guide on **Giving a Clear Gospel Invitation backing up some of the above see *GraceNotes - no. 38 by Dr. Charlie Bing – December 2007***
https://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=38&lang=eng

Is There a Biblical Basis for Faith Alone?

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47).

"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"We Are Justified by Faith Alone, But the Faith That Justifies is Never Alone!"

Who originated the phrase?

"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." John Calvin – Canon 11*

Calvin and all the major reformers held that the "faith that justifies" includes repentance evidenced by works that accompany genuine faith.**

*Source: John Calvin, Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote (1547), in Tracts Relating to the Reformation, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 152.

**See Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), pp.32-33

Where Did the Modern Free Grace Theology Originate?

Some believe it began with the Charles Finney revivals of the (1830's) during which he created the "anxious bench" the precursor to the altar call. He would call people to the front by saying something like: "There is the anxious seat, come out and avow your determination to be on the Lord's side."

Then more recently, according to Wayne Grudem, "... 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 1959-1986."*

*Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 21

Zane Hodges' Free Grace Position

"The fourth gospel [of John] says nothing at all about repentance; much less does it connect repentance in any way with eternal life. This fact is the death knell for lordship theology. Only a resolute blindness can resist the obvious conclusion: *John did not regard repentance as a condition for eternal life."**

What error in biblical interpretation does Hodges make?

*Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 148; emphasis original.

Two Basic Principles of Biblical Interpretation (Hermeneutics)*

Analogy of Scripture: interpret a passage with other passages, especially those that speak to the same subject.

Analogy of faith: the result of an interpretation should fit the doctrine taught by Scripture as a whole, not just one parallel verse.

*For a complete explanation of these rules see R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016)

How to Apply the Analogy of Scripture and Faith

1. Start with the passage in its own setting (grammar, genre, historical situation, author's purpose).
2. Compare it with other passages that address the same subject, giving priority to clearer texts.
3. Check the result against the broad lines of biblical teaching so the part does not overturn the whole.
4. Where texts seem to be in tension or conflict (faith and works, law and gospel, divine sovereignty and human responsibility), accommodate or hold both rather than forcing one to erase the other.

*For a complete explanation of these rules see R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016)

What is the Evidence for Hodges' Errors?

2. Compare it with other passages that address the same subject, giving priority to clearer texts.
    1. Matthew 7 times,
    2. Mark 5 times,
    3. Luke 11 times.
    4. Acts 10 times
    5. Epistles 19 times.

So, if one book doesn't mention repentance, are we supposed to disregard all the other instances it is discussed throughout the New Testament? No, of course not!

"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" Mark 1:14-15

"I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish...I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5).

"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32).

"The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41).

More Repentance in the Gospels

"From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matthew 4:17).

"I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

"and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

What is the Evidence for Hodges' Errors?

3. Check the result against the broad lines of biblical teaching so the part does not overturn the whole.

"Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37-38).

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;" (Acts 3:19).

"For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10)

More Repentance in Acts and the Epistles

"Therefore, repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;" (Acts 3:19).

"He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God," (Romans 2:4-5).

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

The Role of Works in Justification

We are saved purely by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ. Our good works contribute nothing to our salvation. Rather, works are the fruit of our salvation, not the cause!

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

James 2:14-26

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. But someone may *well* say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?...You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone...For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

If a person's professed faith never produces good works, that profession gives no evidence of saving faith.

John 15:8-11

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."

You are proving something that is already true and genuine.

Philippians 2:12-13

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure" (NASB1995).

"Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him" (New Living Translation).

Genuine salvation will result in obedience and recognition that God is at work in you. God gives us the desire and power to produce fruit. If someone has not been genuinely saved, they will not have the power to produce good works that will glorify God.

The Dangers of the "Free Grace Theology"

- The explanation and offer of the Gospel to people are incomplete.
- People are told that all they need to be saved is to merely agree to the facts about Christ, i.e., intellectual agreement (mental assent).
- People are assured of salvation when they are not saved.
- People will believe that repentance and obedience to Christ are not necessary.
- This teaching fosters immorality since obedience is not required for salvation.

What Critics See as the dangers of "Lordship Salvation"

- That people will fear they have not done enough to be saved.
- That people will think that it is impossible for them to be saved because it requires too much.
- That some will reject the teaching outright thinking that it is works-oriented salvation.
- That they need to do something before they can be saved (works-based salvation).

The Six Choices for "Faith Alone"

1. That Jesus was a good teacher.
2. That Jesus was a deeply spiritual man who said some remarkable things.
3. That Jesus was someone God chose to do extraordinary things such as prophesying.
4. That Jesus was the most extraordinary man who ever lived and performed miracles.
5. That Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the O.T., was crucified and resurrected, who requires nothing of me except to intellectually accept these facts about Him.
6. That to be genuinely saved we are to submit to Jesus as Lord and Savior, repent of our sins, and deny ourselves through obedience to Him.

Jesus as Lord?

"that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

"They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (Acts 16:31-32)

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

"For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

(cf. Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; John 3:36; Romans 10:9-13; Romans 14:7-9)

A Free Grace Theologian's Criticism of Lordship Salvation

- Dr. Robert N. "Bob" Wilkin
- Master of Theology in **1982** and his doctorate in **1985**, both from **Dallas Theological Seminary**
- **Author of** *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus*.
- He founded Grace Evangelical Society in **1986** to promote his understanding of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

Straw Man Fallacy

- A "Straw Man Fallacy" occurs when someone misrepresents the opposition's position through exaggeration, misrepresentation, or an outright lie and then attacks that position.
- Example:
    - Person 1: "Faithful Christians may experience serious illness, poverty, and suffering."
    - Person 2: "So, you don't believe God can heal people or answer prayer."

Red Herring Fallacy

- A "Red Herring Fallacy" occurs when someone inserts something irrelevant into an argument. Usually, this is done to give the appearance that they are refuting a person's position.

Example:

- **Person 1:** "Is this belief consistent with what Scripture teaches?"
- **Person 2:** "The people who believe it sincerely love God."

SUMMARY

- Salvation is not mere intellectual agreement (mental assent) to the facts about Christ. Rather, salvation is the result of Christ's effectual call by God's grace received through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. True salvation will produce a changed life, growing obedience (sanctification), and perseverance. These are the results and evidences of genuine salvation.

Resources:

- **Books:**
    - Wayne Grudem, *"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).
    - John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?*, rev. and expanded 20th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).
- **YouTube Video:**
    - John MacArthur on Lordship Salvation in His Own Words
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CMVPua0y4M
- Grace to You sermon audio and transcript (audio only and transcript) can be found at: https://www.gty.org/sermons/90-20/the-lordship-of-christ-introduction