

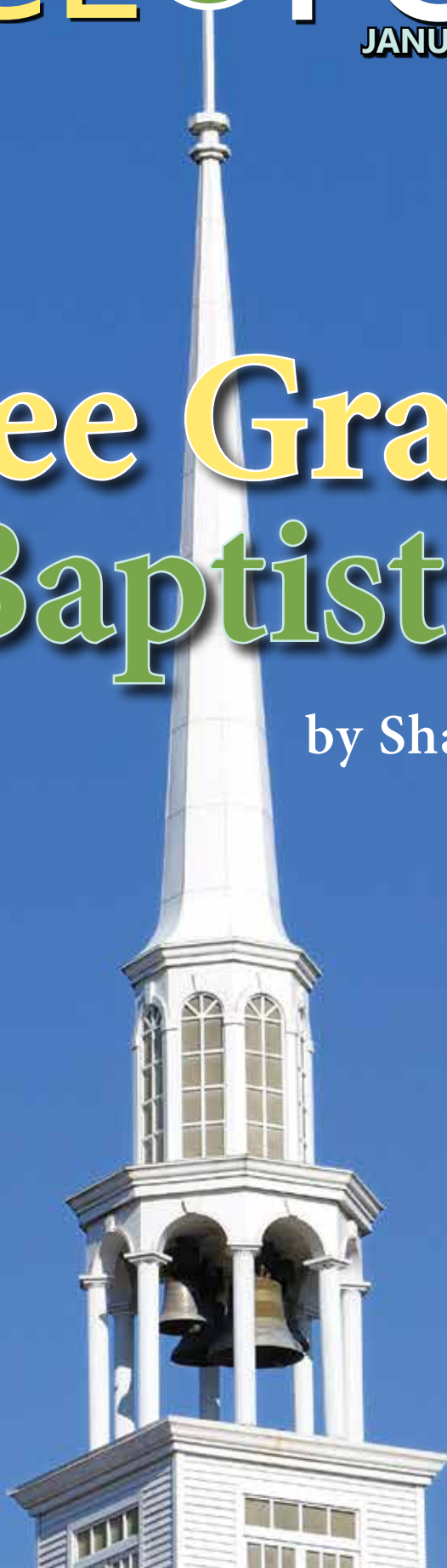
# GRACE FOCUS

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JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2014

## Free Grace for Baptists

by Shawn Lazar



# Articles

3/	FREE GRACE FOR BAPTISTS by Shawn Lazar
6/	HOW REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY DISTORTED CHRISTIAN THOUGHT by Ronald E. Diprose
8/	FOSTERING DOUBT: A REVIEW OF FRANCIS CHAN'S "CRAZY LOVE" by Bruce Bauer
12/	THEY WILL SEE HIS FACE: REVELATION 22:4 by Bill Fiess
17/	DID JESUS COME TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS OR IN OUR SINS? by Bob Wilkin
19/	GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S FREE WILL: ANOTHER LOOK by Ron Rosso
21/	EATING JESUS' FLESH AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD? by Ken Yates
23/	THE MAJORITY IS NOT NECESSARILY RIGHT by Alfy Austin
25/	Q&A by Staff
28/	FAITH IS JUST BELIEVING by Art Farstad
30/	OUR REAL HOME: A REVIEW OF RANDY ALCORN'S "HEAVEN" by L. E. (Bud) Brown

## From the Editor's Desk

Bob Wilkin

Only a few years ago we were still publishing a four-page newsletter. Then Kyle suggested it would be much more effective to switch to a 16-page magazine. Well, we took his idea and ran with it and we are so glad we did.

Shawn has been pushing for us to go to 32 pages. Again, we liked the idea and this is the first 32-page issue of our magazine.

I personally very much like this expanded version of the magazine. We have room for more articles, pictures, and other features.

In this issue there are ten articles and one section dealing with questions and answers. Two of the articles are over 20 years old. The articles by Alfy Austin and Dr. Art Farstad were originally published in *Grace in Focus* in December of 1989 and June of 1991, respectively.

We've also added a few reviews of well-known Christian books, in this case *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan and *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn.

If this is your first issue of our magazine, welcome. Assurance of everlasting life is powerful. It can move you out of love and gratitude to give your life in service for Christ. And the prospect of eternal rewards is highly motivating as well. Those are themes we address often in our magazine.

Enjoy.



## GRACE IN FOCUS

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# Free Grace for Baptists

By Shawn Lazar



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

## Introduction

Some Baptists identify as Arminian, others as Calvinist, and a few as Calvinian. But there are many more Baptists who avoid each of these labels without having a name for what they believe. I would suggest that some are Free Grace without knowing it.

Free Grace is a relatively new term but the theology behind it is not. It's neither Calvinist nor Arminian. It's conservative and Dispensational. It has a high view of Scripture and stresses expository preaching and evangelism. There are many Baptists who are openly Free Grace, like Dr. Earl Radmacher, but there many more who are essentially Free Grace in their doctrine without calling it that, like Dr. Charles Stanley.

I like to introduce people to Free Grace theology by going through John 3:16. It's one of the most famous verses in the Bible and most Baptists know it by heart. However, I have found that few Christians actually believe what Jesus promises there. Here is John 3:16, subdivided into five sections, each of which contains a precious truth:

*For God so loved the world / that He gave His only begotten Son / that whoever believes in Him / should not perish / but have everlasting life.*

Let's go through the verse, section by section.

## A Divine Motivation

First, the Lord tells us about God's motivation: *For God so loved the world*. You would think that would be clear and uncontroversial. God loves all mankind without exception.

However, right off the bat we find that Calvinist Baptists reject this idea. They interpret *the world* (*kosmos*) as the *world of the elect*, and so take John 3:16 as teaching that God only loves the elect. But

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that interpretation has no basis in John's Gospel, Epistles, or Revelation which use *kosmos* 106 times in 79 verses and never once means "individuals whom God has predestined to heaven." Rather, *kosmos* can mean the sum total of created things (John 1:3), the world order (which is hostile to God, John 1:9, 10), or humanity in

general, and that's what it means here (cf. 3:19).

Free Grace Baptists unhesitatingly affirm that God loves all mankind. He is not always *pleased* with everyone or *approves* of how they live, but there is no doubt that God *loves* everyone in the world no matter who they are, what they believe, or what they've done.

## A Divine Action

Second, the Lord tells us about God's act of love, which motivated Him to give *His only begotten Son*, Jesus. What was Jesus given to do? While all Baptists know that He was given to die on the cross as an atonement for sins, they don't all agree on who Jesus died for.

Most Calvinist Baptists deny that Jesus died for the sins of the world, reasoning that since God only loves the elect, they are the only people for whom Jesus died. This is the famous doctrine of Limited Atonement. Moderate Calvinists (3 and 4 pointers) are willing to live with the contradiction of believing that God only elected some to salvation, but sent Christ to die for all.

By contrast, Free Grace Baptists affirm that God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son to die *for the world*. Jesus' death was meant for all humanity. The atonement is as universal as God's love.

## A Condition

Third, the Lord Jesus tells us of a human condition that must be met: *whoever believes in Him*. All Jesus requires is belief in His promise. We are all free to come to Him in faith. You would think this emphasis on simple belief would be uncontroversial among Baptists, but you would be wrong because they disagree over the nature of faith.

Jesus says that faith alone is required for eternal salvation. There are plenty of Calvinist and Arminian Baptists who would agree, at least on the surface. They publicly teach that we are justified by faith apart from our works. However, when you ask them what *faith* is, they redefine it to include works. For example, you'll often hear preachers say something like this:

You can't be saved by doing good works. You have to believe in Jesus. Of course, if you truly believe then you'll do good works. If you aren't turning away from your sins and reforming your life, you don't actually believe. We're saved by faith alone but never by a faith that is alone.

Don't be fooled. This is a form of salvation by works.

To see why, imagine if the Judaizers had tried that reasoning on Paul. They claimed that Christians couldn't be saved without being circumcised (Acts 15:1). Paul accused them of compromising justification and abandoning the gospel. Do you think Paul would have been at all impressed if the Judaizers had replied:

Oh Paul, we absolutely agree that salvation is not by faith *and* circumcision. But that's not what we're saying. We're saying that salvation is by a faith *that* circumcises. We are saved by faith alone, that's true, but if you aren't circumcising, you don't really believe.

Paul would have rejected such sophistry and so do Free Grace Baptists. There is no difference between teaching that salvation is by faith *plus* works and teaching that salvation is by a faith *that* works. Both make works a condition of salvation and both are contrary to the freeness of the gospel promise.

The bottom line is that faith is faith and works are works. Hence, according

to John 3:16, Jesus requires *belief*, not *behavior*.

But what about works? They have an important role to play in helping our neighbors and in Christian growth, maturity, and rewards in the coming Kingdom. But eternal life and eternal rewards are two separate matters. Rewards are earned (Rev 22:12), while eternal life is a gift, received by faith apart from works (Eph 2:8-9).

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“There is no difference between teaching that salvation is by faith *plus* works and teaching that salvation is by a faith *that* works. Both make works a condition of salvation, and both are contrary to the freeness of the gospel promise.”

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## The Consequence

Fourth, the Lord presents the wonderful consequence of believing in Jesus. John 3:16 promises that believers *have everlasting life*. We don't get it in the future. We don't have to earn it or keep it. We have it. Everlasting life is a present possession. Just as the Israelites were healed the moment they saw the bronze serpent (John 3:14-15), we have eternal life the moment we believe in Jesus for it.

Calvinist and Arminian Baptists typically reject this. They don't believe that eternal life is a present possession. Instead, they will speak about something called “final salvation.” They'll say the salvation we have is provisional, temporary, and can be lost. Or they'll say we can't be sure we are truly saved until something called the “final judgment.” They fail to recognize that when someone believes in Christ for eternal life, they're no longer subject to the Great White Throne Judgment (John 5:24). They will be rewarded

for their works at the Bema (2 Cor 5:10), but they will not be gathered with the unbelieving nations to determine their eternal destiny (Rev 20:11-15).

Other Baptists would heartily agree that eternal life is a present possession. The difference is, they're relatively unfamiliar with John's language of eternal life. They normally think in terms of Paul's language of justification.

Free Grace Baptists would agree that preaching forensic justification is essential wherever people think they can be saved by works. However, forensic justification is only one aspect of eternal salvation. God wants to do more than just declare us “not-guilty.” He wants to adopt us as sons and daughters (John 1:12), give us a new birth (John 3:3), make us new creations (2 Cor 5:17), and allow us to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Justification doesn't capture that big picture and was never meant to. But John's simple language of eternal life does. Moreover, while the mechanics of justification can be fairly complicated, the idea of eternal life is easy enough for a child to understand. Hence, Free Grace Baptists tend to prefer the Johannine language of everlasting life when doing evangelism.

## A Guarantee

Fifth and finally, in John 3:16, Jesus gives believers a wonderful guarantee. Not only are they given everlasting life as a present possession, Jesus also promises we will never perish thereafter. Notice He doesn't say, *probably* won't perish or *hopefully* won't perish. Jesus guarantees our eternal security. This is the famous doctrine of “once saved always saved.”

Against this plain teaching, Arminian Baptists say that believers *can* perish, either by committing a major sin or by ceasing to believe. You can have salvation one day and lose it the next. But if that was true, then Jesus shouldn't have made any promises about believers not perishing, because it's possible they might.

Calvinist Baptists don't quite believe Jesus' promise of eternal security either. What they actually believe in is the perseverance of the elect, which isn't the same thing at all. They think that everyone whom God has predestined to heaven will go there because that is what God has sovereignly chosen to do, and there's no



power on earth that can thwart His will. However, mere belief is not a sign that one is among the elect since it's possible for a reprobate person to believe in Jesus for a while, only to stop believing later on, proving they were never elect in the first place. This creates a terrible dilemma for the Calvinist. How can he know he is one of the elect? Not through faith. The result is a lack of assurance. For example, this has proven to be a recurring problem in Calvinist John Piper's church:

I deal with this as much as anything, probably, in the people that I'm preaching to. Fears and doubts...not about objective 'Did He rise from the dead'—very few people are wrestling with that—but 'Am I in? Am I saved?' That's very common for people to wrestle with. (See "Justification and the Diminishing Work of Christ")

Since the Calvinist doesn't know if he's elect, and can't look to his faith for evidence (since he might fall away in the future), his only recourse will be to look to his works for assurance. Following the Puritans, he will look for signs of the Spirit's work in his life in order to ascertain if he's elect. But this introspective search can only end in failure. For every good work he might take as evidence of his election, the Calvinist will find just as many sins that suggest he's reprobate, leaving him with nagging doubts. At least, that was Piper's experience: "why I sin against my wife the same at age sixty-two that I did at age forty-two causes me sometimes to doubt my salvation" (See "Why God is Not a Megalomaniac in Demanding to be Worshipped").

By contrast, Free Grace Baptists take John 3:16 on its face and affirm Jesus' promise of eternal security. The moment you believe in Jesus for everlasting life you have it and are eternally secure thereafter. As Jesus says, believers shall *never perish*.

However, some Baptists think the promise security demands a continuous faith. Believers shall never perish, but the moment someone loses their faith, they also lose their eternal life. But that interpretation would contradict what Jesus told the woman at the well. He assured her that normal water would leave her thirsty, no matter how much she drank. But one drink from His living water (i.e., one act of faith) and she would never

thirst again (have eternal security) (John 4:10-14).

Jesus made the same point to Nicodemus. The Israelites weren't saved by continuously gazing at the bronze serpent. One look and they were healed (John 3:14-15, cf. Nu 21:9).


It is the same with faith. You don't need to believe in Jesus again and again in order to maintain your salvation. All it takes is one drink, one look, one act of faith, and you become regenerate in that moment, and will have eternal life forever.

Knowing this is essential to Christian well-being, because Jesus' promise of eternal security forms the basis of our assurance. God does not want us to live in doubt about our salvation. Believers can and should know they have eternal life and are eternally secure. It's not an advanced doctrine for mature believers, but a basic part of Jesus' offer of salvation, and so, a part of saving faith.

## Conclusion

There is more to John 3:16 than meets the eye. Although many Baptists know it by heart, they just as often openly deny what it teaches. Either they deny that God loves all men, or that Jesus died for all, or that simple faith is all that God requires of us to be saved, or that everlasting life is a present possession, or that believers are eternally secure.

Free Grace Baptists affirm every one of those precious truths.

I began this essay by suggesting that many Baptists are Free Grace without knowing it. Maybe that describes you and your church. No doubt you have many questions and objections and particular verses that need explaining. If you would like to learn more about Free Grace theology, I would suggest visiting our website ([faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org)) where you can find thousands of pages of Biblical resources exploring key verses and themes. There is a worldwide movement among Evangelicals seeking to restore the radical freeness of the gospel promise of everlasting life through faith in Jesus. Won't you help us spread the message of God's free grace in Christ? 

*Shawn Lazar is the Director of Publications for the Grace Evangelical Society.*

## WHAT IS GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY?

**THE GOSPEL PROMISE** was under assault in Paul's time and still is today. How many "Christians" have followed the ancient Galatians in believing they can be saved by a mixture of faith and works?

Grace Evangelical Society (GES) was founded in 1986 to promote the soul-winning truth that God offers man the free gift of everlasting life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from works done before or after the new birth (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:26).

Another of our aims is to promote Christian growth by emphasizing the Biblical truths about eternal security, assurance, and eternal rewards.

We do this by publishing *Grace in Focus Magazine*, expository books, booklets, and tracts, and the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. We also hold an annual conference held each Spring at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, and regularly speak at local churches and Bible conferences.

For more information about our ministry please visit

**FAITHALONE.ORG**



# How Replacement Theology Distorted Christian Thought

by Ronald E. Diprose

## Christian Anti-Judaism

The contempt for Israel and its institutions evident in early Christian writings such as the pseudonymous *Epistle of Barnabas* gradually turned to hate when it became clear that the Jewish people, theoretically disinherited by God, had not vanished from the scene. Two examples will suffice to show just how “anti” Jewish the Christian Church became.

The first of these examples was the preaching of John Chrysostom around Easter of 387. At the beginning of his sixth anti-Jewish sermon, he stated that since God hates the Jewish people, Christians are also duty bound to hate them. Had the Church followed the example of the Apostles, instead of hating the Jews, she would have considered evangelizing them one of its top priorities (Rom 1:16).

The second example is Martin Luther’s work, *The Jews and their Lies* (1543). Luther’s vehemence against the Jews in this writing is incredible. As well as reinstating all the Medieval myths concerning presumed crimes committed by Jews, Luther incites his readers to engage in numerous anti-Jewish activities, everything short of cold-blooded murder. Because of Luther’s earlier role of reasserting the truth of the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the radical anti-Judaism contained in this writing was very influential right up till the time of Adolf Hitler. Is it any wonder that the chief rabbi of France, Gilles Bernheim, considers the mention of Jesus as Messiah the greatest obstacle to dialogue between the Church and Israel?

## The Loss of the Hebrew Worldview

Replacement Theology also produced many negative effects in the Christian Church itself. The first of these was the way the Church began reading the Old Testament Scriptures. Echoing what happened in the second century, one Sunday School teacher in recent times put it like this: “When you read ‘Israel’ in the Old Testament you need to understand it to mean the Church.” By allegorizing Israel’s Holy Scriptures, the Church not only eliminated Israel as a subject of theological reflection, she also lost the Hebrew pattern of thought. Consequently important Christian doctrines were formulated in a Greek philosophical framework.

For example, theologians began to talk about the “impassibility” of God, a concept hardly compatible with Hosea’s description of God’s love for Israel or the circumstance of Jesus, “God with us”, weeping before the tomb of Lazarus! (Jn 11:35).



Front piece for Luther's "The Jews and their Lies"

Moreover Jaroslav Pelikan writes, “the Augustinian tradition has been affected by the loss of contact with Jewish thought, whose refusal to polarize the free sovereignty of God and the free will of man has frequently been labeled Pelagian” (Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 1:22). Obviously, it is absurd to suggest that the writings of the Old Testament followed the ideas of someone who lived at the time of Augustine! The point is that the Old Testament does not polarize “the free sovereignty of God and the free will of man,” but much Christian theology does because it is overly influenced by Greek thought.

## A Hierarchical and Priestly Church

Has it ever occurred to you to compare the terms used in the New Testament to describe church leaders with the following terms used by Roman Catholicism: “priests,” “bishops,” “archbishops,” “cardinals,” and “pope”? Why ever would a church want to call its leaders “priests” rather than “elders” and attribute to their leaders a mediatory rather than a pastoral role? (cf. 1 Tim 3; Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4; 1 Pet 1:22-23; 2:4-5; 4:10-11; 5:1-4). What is even more surprising is that one of the main tasks of Roman Catholic priests is to offer sacrifices! A casual reading of the New Testament is enough to know that Christ’s death and resurrection put an end to all sacrifices and that everyone who has received new life in Christ is part of a “holy priesthood” and has received at least one spiritual gift enabling them to contribute to Christian ministry (Heb 10:1-25; 1 Pet 2:5-10; 4:10-11). So why this dramatic and lasting change in many Christian Confessions?

The answer lies in the new self-understanding of the post-apostolic church as being “the true Israelitic race,” an expression used by Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho*, CXXXV). As I read the writings of the so-called “Apostolic Fathers” I discovered that their claim that the Church is the new, true Israel, is closely linked with the way they read the Old Testament writings, as though written to and for the Church. Thus the book of Leviticus, which describes the duties of the Levitical priesthood, was taken as instruction for Christian “priests.” To give an example, instead of taking the bread and wine *in memory* of Christ and of his once-for-all sacrifice, as Christ himself instructed (Lk 22:19-20; 1 Co 11:23-26), these writers began to talk about Christian “priests” offering sacrifices which, they claimed, were better than those offered by the Levitical priests (*Dialogue*, CXVI-CXVII). Thus the categories of ministry which pertained to Aaron and his sons were used increasingly to define Christian ministry.<sup>1</sup>

What is most serious in this operation is that the specific kind of ministry associated with the New Covenant instituted by Christ was increasingly neglected, in particular the preaching of the gospel of grace, in view of producing faith unto salvation in the hearers. Instead of the ministry of the New Covenant empowered by the Holy Spirit, of which the goal is the new birth and reconciliation with God (see 2 Cor. 3:5–5:21), the majority of church leaders from the second century on considered themselves to be a priestly cast coming between God and the congregation.

One typical fruit of these developments was the concept of the Eucharist, a word which means “giving of thanks.” Beginning with Justin Martyr the “Eucharist” began to be thought of as a sacrifice (*Dialogue*, CXVII), the value of which, according to Irenaeus, depended on invocation of the Holy Spirit by ordained priests.<sup>2</sup> As Thomas Lindsay observes,

this priestly development was so radical that it can only be compared with the radical nature of the Reformation, only that the second century development was a negative one.<sup>3</sup>

The final link in the chain, which transformed the Christian Church into a Hierarchical body, was Cyprian and his polemical writing, *The Unity of the*

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*Church*. Whereas the apostle Paul taught that the factor unifying Christians, and therefore the principle for receiving each other into fellowship, is their common faith in Christ (Rom 15:7), Cyprian taught that the unifying factor is the legitimate successor of Peter, whom he identified in a certain Roman bishop. According to Cyprian, “sacraments” administered by local priests whose ordination cannot be traced to this bishop were null and void.

It is no accident that Cyprian is the most quoted Church father in the chapter on Church doctrine entitled “Lumen Gentium” in the documents of the Vatican II Council. But all readers of the New Testament know that no man has the power to deny another the benefits of Christ’s unique and final atoning sacrifice, because these benefits are received by faith (Rom 10:9-13; 1 John 2:1-2; 4:8-10).

## Conclusion

We have seen three ways in which Replacement Theology influenced Christian thought and practice. First, it pitted the Church against the very people from whom her own spiritual blessings derived (*cf.* Rom 15:27). Second, by imagining herself to be *true Israel*, the Church, in order to retain the Holy Scriptures which predated the birth of Christ, had to allegorize much of their content and thus lose their true meaning. Third, taking the “Old Testament” as being written for the Church, led to the neglect of vital New Covenant gospel truth in favor of reinstating a mediating priesthood as the norm for Christian ministry. Replacement Theology had led the Church a long way from apostolic teaching! 

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*Ronald E. Diprose was Academic Dean at Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, Rome, for twenty five years, and is Editor of the theological journal Lux Biblica.*

1. See Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004), 109-124.

2. Zechariah Schariah, “Development of epiclesis in the liturgy,” unpublished paper presented at the Evangelische Theologische Facultiet, Leuven, Belgium, September 1992, pp. 17-22.

3. Thomas M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), 210.

## News from the Grace Community

- Bob Bryant of Cyprus Valley Bible Church will be joining the GES Board in January.
- At the recent FGA conference O.T. scholar Paul Tanner defended the view that the world was created in six literal days and that the earth is only a little over 6,000 years old. At the same conference another O.T. scholar, Ron Allen, showed that the Old Testament indeed teaches the bodily resurrection of the dead.



# Fostering Doubt

## Reviewing Francis Chan's *Crazy Love*

by Bruce Bauer

Francis Chan is the senior pastor of Cornerstone Community Church of Simi Valley, California. He is a graduate of Master's College and Seminary, both founded and presided over by John MacArthur. Chan has also established a school called Eternity Bible College, having the goal of making Bible education affordable. The college meets at the church and at satellite facilities.

The church's website contained a standard evangelical statement of faith. The school's statement was more extensive, having strong Calvinist (TULIP) doctrines subtly interwoven.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to his duties as a pastor and college president, Francis Chan speaks regularly at conferences, particularly youth gatherings, nationwide. Chan maintains a website with videos introducing each chapter of *Crazy Love* ([crazylovebook.com](http://crazylovebook.com)).

### Good Intentions

Since its release in May 2008, *Crazy Love* has climbed the sales charts worldwide. It ranked ahead of such top-sellers as, *The Purpose Driven Life*, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, and the perennial favorite, *My Utmost for His Highest*. An old saying goes, "Never argue with success!" However, I question such wisdom when referring to a book which may be proffering unsound doctrine.

After reading *Crazy Love* and after viewing several of Chan's online sermons, I believe that he is sincere in wanting Christians to experience radical living for God. Chan claims to model such a lifestyle:

We ended up moving into a house half the size of our previous home, and we haven't regretted it. My response to the cynics, in the context of eternity, was, am I the crazy one for selling my house? Or are you for not giving more, serving more, being with your Creator more? (136).

Chan is fond of using the word "crazy." He often employs it in his writings and sermons. Usually, he means all-out devotion to God. On at least two occasions in the book he uses "crazy" to disparage his critics. It's as though he is sending out a warning to any who might dare to challenge his extreme theological stances. Chan even created a brief online video to stave off criticism called, "When You're Too Popular." In it he quotes Luke



Francis Chan

6:22, 23, 26 in saying that false prophets were praised while true prophets of God were scorned. "If I am really saying everything that God would have me to say, there will be plenty of people who are against me."

As much as I may admire the author's apparent sincerity, good intentions, or convincing style, I nonetheless will always take content over delivery, substance over style, actual words over intentions. If the chief goal of the author in writing the book is to stimulate committed Christian living, who could argue with that? But, at what price? If the objective is accomplished by promoting a works-oriented "gospel" which destroys many Christians' assurance of salvation, has the cost been too great?

### Lordship Salvation Taken to the Extreme

There is no question that *Crazy Love* advocates a teaching called Lordship Salvation. I identify Francis Chan's variation as extreme, primarily because *Crazy Love* dwells heavily on condemnation to a severe level that I have not witnessed personally in the writings of other Lordship Salvation proponents, e.g., John MacArthur, John Piper, and J. I. Packer. It appears that in Chan's thinking, only a tiny minority of professing Christians will be counted worthy to make it to heaven.

As the title *Crazy Love* suggests, Chan focuses overwhelmingly upon obsessive living for God (especially chapter eight, "Profile of the Obsessed"), apparently even to abandoning balance in areas of personal safety and financial security.

I found no allowances for what I call, "what about" situations: What about someone who is a believer but has fallen into sin? What about differences in background, personality, age or spiritual maturity? What about Biblical cases of those who could be labeled lukewarm? Lot was a backslider his entire adult life, yet Peter calls him a righteous man in 2 Pet 2:7. Samson was a womanizer and David was a murderer, yet both are listed in the



Hebrews 11 hall of faith. The Corinthian church was filled with worldly, spiritual babes, much like the Laodicean church of Revelation 3. Yet Paul refers to them often as brothers. For these reasons, I call *Crazy Love* extreme.

## Creating a Culture of Uncertainty

As with all Lordship Salvation teaching, *Crazy Love* muddies the distinction between justification and sanctification, melding them together while distorting the simple message of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. The Lordship camp says that it's not good enough to become saved by trusting Christ for salvation, one must also promise a lifetime of commitment to Christ, then follow through with that commitment or else be in danger of not making it to heaven one day. Charlie Bing calls it a "front-loading" of the gospel:

Well, the Lordship Salvation camp says that we should front-load the gospel and raise the ante. Let's raise the standard so that we make sure that only those who are committed to going on can really become Christians to begin with, they would say. Is that the answer? Doesn't that breed legalism and insecurity which never produces spiritual maturity and Christlikeness? ("Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship," *JOTGES* [Autumn 1999], 1).

Chan unknowingly answers Bing's question. In *Crazy Love*, he tells of many people from his congregation asking him questions like, "If I divorce my wife can I still go to heaven?" "Do I have to be baptized to be saved?" "If I commit suicide, can I still go to heaven?" (p. 86) It seems that Chan's application of Lordship Salvation teaching to his own church has created such questioning doubts among his people.

With that in mind, here are some sample quotations from *Crazy Love* with my responses.

## Devotion?

**Quote:** "My conclusion? Jesus' call to commitment is clear: He wants all or nothing. The thought of a person calling himself a 'Christian' without being

a devoted follower of Christ is absurd." (p. 85)

**Response:** Chan makes an interpretation based, by his own admission, upon a superficial, childlike reading of the Gospels. He cites no specific Scripture whatsoever. To which Gospel is he referring?

It's doubtful that he spent much time in John, for it says repeatedly that eternal life comes through believing in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-18, 36; 5:24; 6:28-29, 37, 40; 7:38; 10:9; 11:25-26; 14:6;

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**"Crazy Love muddies the distinction between justification and sanctification, melding them together while distorting the simple message of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus."**

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17:3). Chan must have targeted *discipleship* passages, spoken primarily to the apostles and intimate disciples, most of whom were *already* believers!

Jesus warned of troubles they would face as His followers. Indeed, all of the eleven apostles, following Judas Iscariot's exit, would one day experience torture and/or martyrdom. Again, without Biblical reference, Chan, using the *obvious* argument, declares, "Jesus' call to commitment is clear: he wants all or nothing" (p. 85). He bolsters his contention by slamming and caricaturing the opposing position of believing in Christ alone for salvation: "The thought of a person calling himself a 'Christian' without being a devoted follower of Christ is absurd" (p. 85). Chan would be hard-pressed to contort the verses cited from John, or Acts 16:30-31, Rom 4:5, Eph 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5 to prove his *commitment* salvation.

## Obeys to be Saved?

**Quote:** "Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will obey what I command' (John 14:15). And our question quickly becomes even more unthinkable: *Can I go to heaven without truly and faithfully loving Jesus?* I don't see anywhere in Scripture how the answer to that question could be yes." (86)

**Response:** In context, His crucifixion looming, Jesus was comforting and guiding His closest disciples, who were *already believers!* [Judas had already gone off to betray Jesus.] This verse was *not* a call to salvation or perseverance. Robert Wilkin comments:

The concept of obeying God's commands does occur in John's gospel using other terms (for example, John 14:15, "If you love me, *keep* My commandments"; see also 15:14). However, none of those are connected with obtaining eternal salvation or of guaranteed perseverance. There is no promise in John that those who believe in Christ will persevere in good works. In fact, there are warnings that they might not (see John 15:6; *Confident in Christ*, 271).

To get a sense of what Jesus meant by *what I command*, we must examine the immediately-preceding context. John 13:35 declares, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 14:1 enjoins, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." Following Philip's plea for Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus charges the disciples in 14:11, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." Preceding John 14:15, Jesus promises the disciples: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Summarizing, I might paraphrase John 14:15: "Whoever loves Me will keep guard over My commands to love each other, to trust the Father and Me so your hearts won't be troubled, and to believe confidently in who I am, the Son of the living God." In a nutshell: love, trust, and believe!

## Christianity Without Discipleship?

**Quote:** “Some people claim that we can be Christians without necessarily becoming disciples. I wonder, then, why the last thing Jesus told us was to go into all the world, making *disciples* of all nations, teaching them to *obey all* that He commanded? You’ll notice that He *didn’t* add, ‘But hey, if that’s too much to ask, tell them to just become Christians—you know, the people who get to go to heaven without having to commit to anything’ [emphasis Chan’s]” (p. 87).

**Response:** Chan misquotes Matthew 28:19-20 [incomplete quotation] from the NIV without citation. He says this was the last thing Jesus told us. Actually, Jesus’ final words are recorded in Acts 1:8. Chan sardonically constructs a straw man, then razes it. Without legitimizing his mocking mischaracterization of the Free-Grace position, I’ve never heard anyone else define Christianity that way. *Of course* a person must commit to something when becoming a Christian. That *something* is actually a *someone*, namely Jesus Christ. When the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-31 came trembling from an earthquake to Paul and Silas, “He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’” Chan amalgamates the gospel message of salvation by faith in Christ alone with issues of discipleship and commitment, which creates a complicated mess, placing unreasonable demands upon the unsaved. Bing remarks:

The Lordship Salvation view of discipleship assumes a Christian response from unbelievers. But what would an unbeliever understand about carrying his cross? What would an unbeliever understand about loving God with all his heart? He doesn’t know God. Would we expect an unbeliever to give up all his possessions or be willing to? What kind of logic is it that demands an unbeliever such sophisticated, mature Christian decisions that I am still grappling with in my own life? It just doesn’t make sense to expect from someone who is dead in sin, to expect from someone whose mind has been veiled by Satan himself, to respond to

God with a fully loving heart at the moment of salvation, to respond to God in total commitment and total submission, to be willing to suffer for Him (“Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship,” 5-6).

Matthew 28:19-20 reads, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach-



ing them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” *Therefore go* can indicate *going* or *while going*. *Disciple, mathetes*, means “learner,” as a rabbi’s student. Jesus had disciples—intimate and broader groups. John the Baptist also had disciples. Ryrie explains:

The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 commands us to make disciples. This involves two activities—baptizing and teaching. Baptizing is a single act; teaching is a continuous process. Disciples have to be baptized (an evidence of salvation—therefore, one may say that disciples must first be saved); then they have to be taught over and over to obey (observe all things). In New Testament times, baptism served as one of the clearest proofs that a person had accepted Christ. Baptism was not entered into casually or routinely as is often the case today. Although it is clear in the New Testament that baptism does not

save, to be baptized was to signify in no uncertain terms that one had received Christ and was also associating himself with the Christian group, the church... normally, a baptized person was a saved person; and a saved person was a baptized person. This is why our Lord’s Great Commission can use “baptism” as equivalent to “salvation.” (*So Great Salvation*, 93-94).

So, what is the proper order of discipleship according to the Bible? First, lead people to salvation through faith in Christ alone. Second, baptize them as outward evidence of their eternal salvation. Third, teach them the Bible and how to grow in their faith (sanctification). I find it significant that Chan failed to quote Jesus’ words in Matt. 28:19-20 (“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”), yet Chan *does* include the part about *obeying* everything Jesus commanded. This striking omission eliminates the gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, intrinsic to the call to baptize. Furthermore, it implies that salvation comes through obedience to God’s commands, in spite of Rom 3:20!

## The Origin of Chan’s Extreme Teachings

Online magazine *Today’s Christian* explains the genesis of Chan’s radical beliefs:

In 2002, a trip to Uganda changed Chan forever. There he saw real poverty, and it became personal. Little girls the age of his daughters rooted through dumpsters for food. Chan began to ask himself, What does it look like to love my neighbor as myself? His answer was to move his family of four out of their 2,000-square-foot house into one half that size so they could give more to missions. “I couldn’t reconcile how I could live in such a nice house while others were starving,” Chan says. But while he was beginning to respond to God’s difficult calls in his personal life, Chan wasn’t sure he could do whatever God demanded of him as the leader of his church. So in May 2006, he announced his plans to resign as Cornerstone’s pastor. He wasn’t sure he’d ever return.<sup>2</sup>





Extreme poverty in Uganda

Francis Chan returned to Cornerstone on October 8, 2006, preaching a sermon entitled, “Lukewarm and Loving It” (YouTube). In it, he expressed that he had experienced doubts of his own salvation when he left the church. Much of *Crazy Love* appears to emanate from that sermon—an excoriating condemnation of Chan’s congregation and of evangelical Christianity today. Combining his interpretations of the rich ruler in Luke 18 with the *spitting out* of the lukewarm Laodicean church of Revelation 3 (more on this later) he says, “We are so weird. We are so filthy, filthy, filthy rich. And yet, most of you think you’re not.” Continuing,

It’s not gonna be easy; it’s not gonna be probable; but, by the power of God, *some* of you *could* go to heaven. I have this haunting fear that some of you here at Cornerstone Church, possibly *many, many* of you are going to hell. It keeps me up at night.

Cornerstone’s reaction a week later: Chan preached a follow-up sermon “Slavery Can Be Fun” (YouTube). In it he said,

People keep asking our pastors, ‘What should I do?’ You know, I had people say, ‘It was like you stuck a dagger in

my gut and I was like aw’ you’re absolutely right’; that is, the more I heard it, I said, Wow, this is so cool. This is exactly the way the church is supposed to respond.

Chan shares more responses, “I will do anything!” People are just going, ‘Whatever, whatever, whatever!’”


It is pretty sad to see Christians living in such bondage and insecurity!

## Conclusion

I bear no animosity toward Francis Chan. I do not know him personally. What I know of him comes entirely from reading his book and from watching some sermons. It is clear that he views his convictions as correct and he obviously wants people to experience closer relationships with God. But has he really carefully examined all the Scriptures pertaining to his viewpoints?

Words have meaning and impact! Words can edify or harm. The book *Crazy Love*, through poor exegesis, consigns all lukewarm and not fully-committed Christians to hell: “To put it plainly, churchgoers who are ‘lukewarm’ are not Christians. We will not see them in

heaven” (pp. 83-84). Isn’t there bound to be fallout from such an egregious, albeit well-intentioned, misrepresentation of Scripture?

*Crazy Love* is a Christian best-seller. Its impact is destined to be substantial. Most, I fear, will have no understanding of the broad theological implications of the book as outlined in this article. My greatest apprehension is the potential for wholesale devastation of Christians’ assurance of salvation. 

*Bruce Bauer, MA, DBS, lives in Lancaster, CA.*

1. <http://www.etrinitybiblecollege.com/about/sof.html>, pp. 1-4.

2. [Http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/peopleoffaith/profiles/francischanscrazylove.html?start=2](http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/peopleoffaith/profiles/francischanscrazylove.html?start=2) (Jennifer Schuchmann, “Francis Chan’s *Crazy Love*: Why this pastor’s church gives away half its budget,” *Christianity Today’s Online Version*, *Today’s Christian*, September/October, 2008), p. 1.

\*This review was published in the Autumn 2009 (pp. 75-91) issue of the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. The entire review can be found on our website ([faithalone.org](http://faithalone.org)) under Free Resources/Journal and then click on Book Reviews at the bar at the top.



# They Will See His Face

## Revelation 22:4

By Bill Fiess

*And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads (Rev 22:3-4).*



Detail from Rembrandt's Head of Christ

In the Old Testament, to *see the face of the king* refers to having access to the king [see BDAG, p. 178 meaning #1 for *blepō*]. A prime example is Absalom. After Absalom returned from exile, his father, King David, would not meet with him: “And the king said, ‘Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face.’ So Absalom returned to his own house, but did not see the king’s face” (2 Sam 14:24). See also Esth 1:14 and 2 Kgs 25:19.

On the new earth Christ’s servants shall serve Him and shall see His face. This might refer to all believers, since all will serve

Christ in the kingdom. However, it also could refer specifically to overcomers, to those who will rule with Him (Rev 2:26; 21:7; 22:14). Possibly, Rev 22:4 means that the overcomers will have special access to the Lord Jesus. While all will see His face from a distance, maybe only the overcomers will see Him up close.

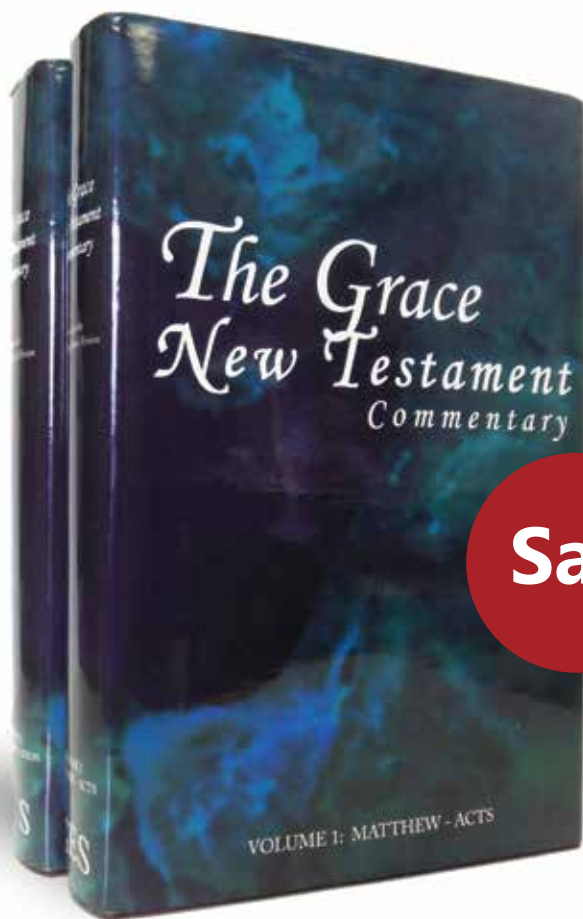
*Bill Fiess is a mathematics professor.*

## Dinner with I. Howard Marshall at ETS November 18-21

Shawn represented GES at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) annual meeting, giving a workshop on cheap law versus cheap grace and spoke on a panel discussing Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He had the opportunity to visit with several people, including Dr. Elliott Johnson, as well as the new ETS president Robert Yarbrough, who attended his session and spoke on the panel.

Shawn also had dinner with I. Howard Marshall, the famed Scottish NT professor. They talked about John 3:16 and the promise that believers will never perish. Shawn asked Dr. Marshall what that promise meant, and he answered that believers have everlasting life and won’t perish. Surprised, Shawn asked him if, as a Methodist, he actually believed we *could* lose our salvation. Marshall affirmed we could. Shawn asked how he could believe that both statements were true. Marshall replied that we must hold them “in tension.” Shawn promised to read Marshall’s book *Kept by the Power of God* and follow up. Please pray for Prof. Marshall.





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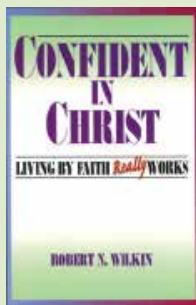
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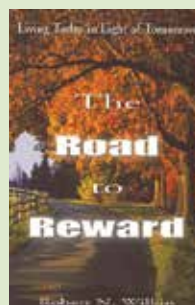
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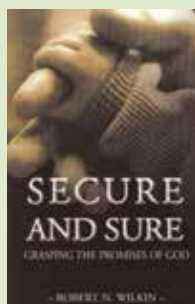
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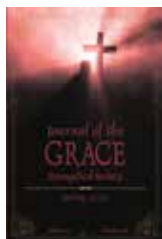
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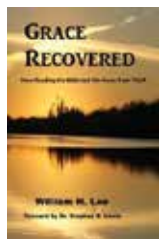
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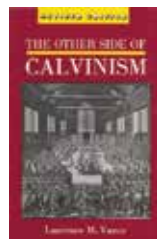


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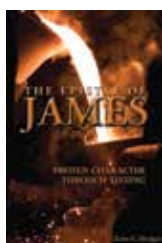


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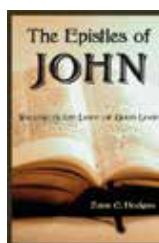


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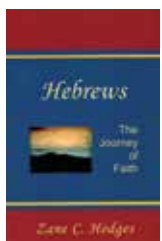


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# Did Jesus Come to Save Us *from* Our Sins Or *in* Our Sins?

By Bob Wilkin

## The Objection Raised

**Y**ou've probably heard this objection before. You're talking with someone about the grace of God and the free gift of everlasting life and they become heated. You might even sense some anger in them. They say something like this, "Jesus did not come to save us *in our sins*! He came to save us *from our sins*!"

Most people are unaware that the expression *saving from sins* is only found once in the entire Bible, in Matt 1:21. And there "His people" clearly refers to Israel. The salvation is not regeneration, but deliverance from Gentile domination and the establishment for Israel of the Messianic kingdom. The sins of Israel resulted in them being exiled, and after their return, being under Gentile control. The Lord Jesus ministered to a people who were dominated by the Roman Empire. He was born to save them from that consequence of their sins. Of course, He was also born to take away the sins of the whole world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2) and to make everyone, Jew and Gentile, savable. But that is not the point of Matt 1:21, the only verse in the entire Bible that speaks of saving people *from their sins*.

I don't know how you react when someone raises that objection to the free gift of everlasting life received simply by faith in Christ, apart from works. I find that objection to be offensive. It implies that we promote licentiousness. *Do whatever feels good; there will be no consequences; God loves you and has given you*

*everlasting life so you are now free to sin with impunity.*

That is not what we believe or teach. But people wrongly perceive us as saying that.

You might respond to this objection by talking about the fact that there are consequences for the eternally secure person. There is temporal judgment in this life. There will be rebuke and shame and loss of rewards at the Bema. Only a fool would rebel against God. Ask the prodigal son how things were in the far country.

But it dawned on me that that is only part of the answer. Even if the objector doesn't realize it, he is raising a bigger issue. And I think we should address that bigger issue too.

## The Bigger Issue of the Objector

The bigger issue is not whether a born-again person is capable of major failure. Everyone except the most extreme holiness people who believe in sinless perfection acknowledges that believers still sin and that sometimes they even sin badly.

The bigger issue isn't whether a born-again person is guaranteed to live a life characterized by godliness (even though there may be times of major failure from which he inevitably repents). While it is not true that all believers live godly lives, that is not what the objection is.

Does Jesus intend for people whom He saves to keep on sinning? That's the question.

## What the Objector Is Actually Saying

Look at it numerically. Let's say that a godly person sins only twenty times a day and an ungodly person sins 200 times a day. The ungodly person sins ten times as much. But both sin a lot.

Is the person who sins twenty times a day still a sinner? Of course.

So what the objector actually is saying, even if he doesn't realize it, is that Jesus hates sin and is determined to save us from *all our sins*. That is, He will make us fully righteous in our experience. Like Him. No more sin forever.

In other words, the objector is really saying that Jesus is determined to make us sinless.

## Salvation Is More than Regeneration

The Free Grace position affirms that Jesus indeed guarantees that we who believe in Him will be absolutely without sin forever. However, that sinlessness does not start in this life.

When will it start? The Apostle John tells us: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed





what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). That is speaking of perfection, sinlessness. That is not "now." That is future.

In this life we sin. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Only when we are glorified will we become sinless.

Salvation is more than regeneration. The new birth is not the end. It is the beginning. Now we have everlasting life. Now we are children of God. But it does not yet appear what we shall be.

Soon there will be no more sin, no more pain, no more death (Rev 21:4). Soon we will live righteously 24/7. And so will everyone else in the kingdom (i.e., on the new earth, Rev 21:27; 22:15). But that is not now.

So, yes, Jesus will deliver (or save) us from our sins. That day is coming soon. We long for it. We groan for it (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:2, 4). But it is not now.

The objector has a point. But it is much bigger than he thinks. *Jesus has not come merely to cut our sinning down. He has come to eliminate our sinning altogether.* But just as there are two comings of Christ, so there are two lives for the believer. We have this life and we will have the life to come (cf. 1 Tim 4:8). This life is one in which we sin. The life to come is one in which we will never sin.

## Our Motivation to Godliness

Now we can return to the point of consequences. What is there to motivate the child of God in the present to live a godly life? There is gratitude for the gift of everlasting life. There is a desire to be blessed

---


**"Jesus will deliver (or  
save) us from our sins.  
That day is coming  
soon. We long for it.  
We groan for it. But it  
is not now."**

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by God in this life and to avoid being cursed by Him. So too we know that the Judgment Seat of Christ is coming and we will all give an account to Christ for "the things done in the body, according to what [we have] done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). We long to hear Him say, "Well done, good servant" (Luke 19:17). We long for His approval.

I know you long with me to be sinless. Won't that be great when we are? We know that time is coming very soon.

Until then, as long as we walk by faith, we seek to be transformed day by day by the Spirit of God applying the Word of God to our thinking and our lives (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18).

But we should not give anyone the impression that we have arrived, that we are no longer sinners. That is what the objector is implying. But we all still "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Even the objector. Works salvation people sin and sin a lot. Jesus has not yet saved them *from their sins*, if by that we mean that they no longer sin or no longer sin much. Indeed, if they have never believed in Him for the free gift of everlasting life, they are not yet born again. Works salvation does not work (John 6:28-29; Gal 3:6-14; Eph 2:8-9). So when we explain things to objectors like this let's also make sure we stress that no matter how much they love the Lord and no matter how hard they are trying to please Him, if they have not yet believed in Him for the free gift of everlasting life, apart from works, then they are not yet born again. This is a matter of life and death, but not the way they think. 

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*Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.*

## GES Speakers Available

**D**o your church members have questions about assurance? Are they curious about the Millennium or need clarity in doing evangelism? Then invite a Free Grace speaker to your Church or conference!

**Bob Wilkin** (PhD, DTS) is our Executive Director.

**Ken Yates** (DMin, Erskine; ThM, PhD Cand., DTS) was a chaplain in the Army for 20 years, and retired as a Lt. Col. He lives in S.C. and is free to travel on the East Coast.

**Shawn Lazar** (BTh, McGill; MA, PhD Cand., VU Amsterdam) is the Director of Publications at GES and is free to travel all over the US and Canada.

If you would like Bob, Ken, or Shawn to speak at your church, please call us at 940-270-8827 or email [bethany@faithalone.org](mailto:bethany@faithalone.org).



# God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will: Another Look

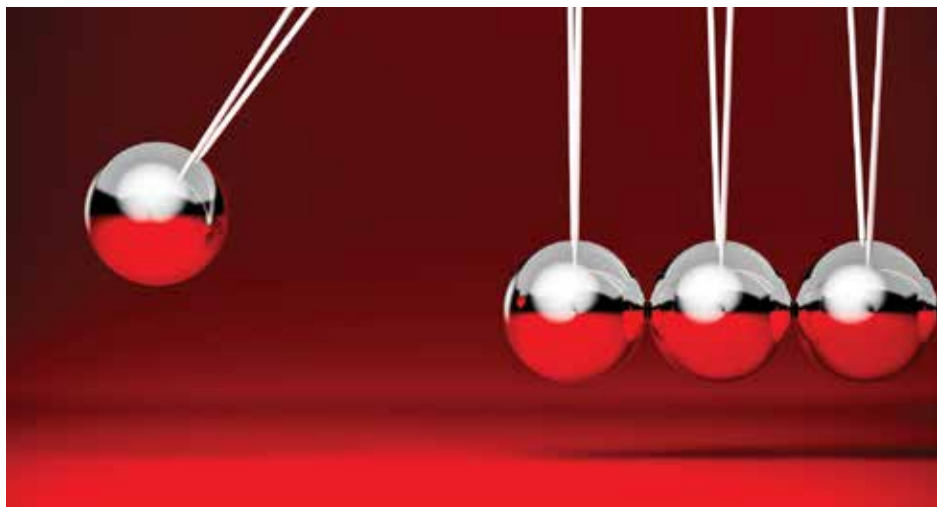
By Ron Rosso

Paul tells us, "...there is none who seeks after God" (Rom 3:11), and Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him..." (John 6:44). So at least this much is certain. If any do end up seeking God, He by some means aroused their heart (drew them) to do so.

We know from Scripture that God does direct hearts toward various causes (Prov 21:1). But when He directs peoples' hearts and actions, is it in a direction consistent with their moral tendencies, or does God cause it to go in a direction that's foreign to the basic nature of the person?

The answer can be seen in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh was characterized by obstinateness. He repeatedly hardened his own heart first (Exod 5:2; 7:14; 8:15). In hardening Pharaoh's heart, God certainly did nothing that was contrary to Pharaoh's own will or character.

Likewise, when God moved the heart of the King of Babylon to conquer Judah, was He moving him in a direction that was foreign to his basic nature or was God giving the king an opportunity to follow his own desire, so as to discipline wayward Israel? Likewise, did God force Judas to betray Jesus or did He merely furnish him with the opportunity to carry out the sort of predisposed evil that was part of his character? Certainly, it was the latter.



## God Desires All Men to Be Saved

Paul tells us plainly that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3-4). If we take this verse at face value, the problem with people being restored to God is their own. God has the desire, knowledge, and resources to bring any and all to Himself, so if some don't respond, it's because they, with their own free will, choose not to.

If God writes our names in the Lamb's Book of Life before we ever take our first breath (Rev 17:8),<sup>1</sup> what could be His basis for doing so, since we've displayed no inclinations yet, or anything else?

God knows the end from the beginning. That is, He is not bound by time in the least. Thus, He need not wait for the actual outcome of events to know the outcome. This is what predictive prophecy is all about: stating the known outcome ahead of time.

God pre-records what, in His omniscience, He already knows is going to happen. This recording doesn't cause the person to believe; it merely indicates in advance the fact that they will.

## Responding to the Light

God reveals Himself to all enough to hold all accountable, but not in a way that ensures their faith or obedience. Quantity of light given alone is not the issue; but also the response to that light. If quantity of light was the issue, those with the most light would be the most responsive to God, and those with less, would be less responsive.

But this is not consistent with what we see in Scripture. For example:

*"Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:27-31).*

Wouldn't seeing a man risen from the dead be a very special revelation? Yet, it would have no more impact on the rich man's brothers than God speaking to them through His Scriptures!

Light does not necessarily produce faith or obedience. How much light did Satan and the fallen angels have? How much light did Judas have, or the religious leaders who saw Jesus' miracles? How much light did the Exodus generation have who couldn't even trust God for the next drink or meal (Exod 15:24; 16:3)? Did Joshua and Caleb have more light than the other 2 ½ million? If not, why did only they (and the children under 20) make it to the Promised Land?

Is extra light the key to people (whether believers or unbelievers) responding properly to God, or is a willing heart more the key ("But you are not willing to come to Me [= believe in Me, compare John 6:35] that you may have life," John 5:40)?

## God Responds to Our Responses

Mark 4:24-25 shows that God deals with us according to our responses.

*Consider carefully what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you—and even more. Whoever has, will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away.*

It appears that God takes us in the direction that we insist on going. If we choose wisdom, He gives us more. If we choose to lack wisdom, He allows even what we have to vanish! But as people respond to God's initiatives, He continues to reveal Himself to them (John 14:21-23).

No person, on his own initiative, seeks after God or operates according to goodness from God's prospective (Rom 3:11; John 15:4-5). Thus, all changes start with God's initiatives, as He seeks us out (John 3:16; 6:44-45, 65; 12:32; 1 John 4:9-10). Thus, some, even some who are not yet believers (e.g., Cornelius, Acts 10:1-2), end up being described as good and as seeking after God (Luke 1:5-6; 2:25; 23:50; Acts 10:1-2; Heb 11:6).

What happens to people as they reject God's initiatives, or simply get lazy after initially responding well?

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word; you have come to require milk and not solid food. Those who partake only of milk are unskilled in the word of righteousness, for they are still babies. But solid food belongs only to the mature, who by reason of use have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil (Heb 5:12-14, see also Matt 13:3-8, 18-23).*

God will allow people to drift from growth and truth, even Christians, if they insist on doing so (though, He'll ever be seeking to get them back on course, which includes using discipline Heb 12:5-7). God allowing Christians to drift is not the same thing as revoking their eternal life, for that remains intact regardless of future developments (John 4:13-14; 5:24; 6:35-40; 1 Cor 3:10-15).

What happens to those who simply never respond favorably to God's

initiatives, thus never are born again? The Apostle Paul said,

*...although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor give thanks, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened... therefore, God gave them up to uncleanness... who exchanged the truth for the lie...for this reason God gave them up to vile passions...and even as they did not like to retain God in their Knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind... (Rom 1:21-28).*

God seeks to lead all men in the way of truth, but if we insist on lies, He gives us over to them, which is a form of judgment. But if we're responsive to truth, He blesses us with more truth (John 14:21-23).

Though we all choose good or evil, God is able to direct all actions toward His goals, which are only good. For example, God recorded in the Garden of Eden that the Lord Jesus would be killed for us (Gen 3:15). Satan and many wicked men were instrumental in killing the Christ (Luke 22:3-4). It was their own evil that motivated them. Yet, God uses the most wicked conspiracy in history to achieve the redemption of mankind. Now that's sovereignty!

### Whom He Wills He Hardens

One passage that is difficult for many to reconcile with free will is Rom 9:15-18:

*For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy...He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.*

To understand this, we must keep in mind that God has a basis in spiritual matters for choosing whether to reveal or conceal Himself, and that basis is our free will. He responds to us as we respond to Him. This fact is repeatedly stated in Romans (e.g., Rom 1:21-28). If we don't pursue God, or if we pursue Him on our own terms rather than His, like the Jews of Romans 10, He will not extend mercy to us, but rather hardening and judgment. God wills to extend mercy to all who respond to Him with

faith in Christ. He wills to harden those who reject Him.


Even in regard to earthly matters, all are not given equal opportunities. Some are rich, some poor; literate or illiterate; healthy or not; beautiful or not; slave or free; king or peasant. And yes, some are taught better, and have Christian love better modeled to them than others.

Yet God is just in righting these inequalities.

*And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not do it, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For to everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47-48).*

### Conclusion

God knows all, loves all, and reaches out to all. He only waits for us to reach back to His extended arm of grace. To those who do, He shows them, usually through other people, their need for Christ and how to receive life through Him. Then, He continues to reach out to us and, as long as we are responsive to Him, He continues to reveal Himself to us and bless us. However, as folks reject Him and His truth, He eventually gives them the delusion that they insist upon, respecting their free will.

When we read that God moves people in certain directions so as to cause certain outcomes, we know that He doesn't take them in a direction contrary to their basic character, but rather works within the confines of their free will. Thus, He didn't cause Satan, or Judas, or the religious leaders to kill Jesus. He gave them opportunity to carry out their own wicked desires, yet for our good! God expresses His sovereignty by using our actions to achieve His purposes. 

*Ron Rosso lives in NJ and came to faith through Campus Crusade.*

1. Editor's note: this is the view of many pastors and theologians. Another option is that when a person believes in Christ his name is added. It depends on how one understands Rev 17:8. Is the Book of Life from the foundation of the earth, or is the writing in the Book of Life from the foundation?



# Eating Jesus' Flesh and Drinking His Blood?

By Ken Yates

## The Present Possession of Eternal Life Is One Aspect of Jesus' Words of Life

In John 6:26ff, the Lord has an extended conversation with a large crowd of Jews. Some of the things Jesus says are easy to understand. He says that it is the will of the Father that all who believe in Him may have eternal life and that He will raise the believer up on the last day (6:40). In 6:47, the Lord says that everyone who believes in Him has eternal life. The verb “has” is in the present tense, which means that eternal life is the possession of the believer at the moment of faith. It is not something the believer has to wait for in order to acquire later.

It is clear that in these verses Jesus guarantees eternal life to anybody who believes in Him for it. Such a promise and such words are certainly *words of life*. They give a life that will never end, and cannot be lost, to anybody who hears and believes them (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35; 10:27-30; 11:26).

## Eating and Drinking Refers to Believing

However, in this conversation Jesus also says some things that are more difficult to understand. Yet as the rest of the conversation makes clear, these are also *words of life*.

After saying that He is the living bread that came down from heaven, Jesus tells the Jews that in order to have life they must eat His flesh and drink His blood (vv 51-53). These words proved hard to comprehend for the audience. In v 60, they say that what He just said is a



“difficult statement,” and basically ask who can understand it. They recognize that Jesus cannot literally give His flesh for them to eat (v 52).

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“When one believes Jesus, it is as if they are “eating” His flesh and “drinking” His blood in a figurative sense.”

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While many have seen an allusion to the Lord’s Supper in Jesus’ words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, this is not likely because the Lord’s Supper had not yet been instituted. It is clear from the passage that the Lord is using the phrases “to eat my flesh” and “to drink my blood” as illustrations. When one believes Jesus, it is as if they are figuratively “eating” His flesh and “drinking” His blood. That is, they are taking His words in.

Jesus makes it clear that He does not mean that one must literally eat His flesh and drink His blood in v 63: “It is

the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life.” It is not the eating of His literal flesh or drinking His literal blood that gives life, but *the words* that He spoke (“they are life”). In fact, He says that the literal flesh is of no profit.

In the context, Jesus is speaking about the gift of eternal life. In the same way one would eat or drink something, when one believes in the promise of Christ for eternal life, he or she appropriates that gift. The Jews who were listening to Jesus took His illustration too literally.

## Continual Eating and Drinking Refers to Abiding

For a believer, it is tempting to look at John 6 and conclude that the words of Jesus are not relevant to him other than for ongoing assurance and for evangelism, because he has already appropriated the gift of eternal life. Such a person has already learned that the words of Jesus are life.

However, a closer look at Jesus’ words shows that His words are relevant to the believer. John suggested this by recording what the Lord said in v 56: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

For John, the abiding relationship that the believer can have with the Lord involves more than simply receiving eternal life as a gift of God's grace through faith. The believer can grow in that life. He or she can experience it in an abundant way (John 10:10). In the Upper Room, after Judas leaves, Jesus tells the believing disciples that if they love Him and keep His word both the Father and Jesus will make their *abode* with them (14:23). Later, He will tell them that if they *abide* in Him, they will experience answered prayer and bear much fruit (15:7-8).

Abiding in Christ, then, involves loving Him and keeping His words. This is something believers can do. If they do, they will experience eternal life in an abundant way.

John 6 supports this notion. Jesus tells those hearing His words that if they eat His flesh and drink His blood they will abide in Him. But, as we have already seen, eating His flesh and drinking His blood means to believe His words.

Jesus certainly spoke words that involved more than believing in Him for eternal life. He spent three years teaching the Twelve and often spoke of things that accompany eternal salvation.

The crowd that Jesus spoke to in John 6 clearly included unbelievers. The Lord Himself says so in v 64. The Lord also makes this clear by saying that "some" of the crowd did not believe. Many of these unbelievers quit following Him because His words were hard to understand.

But the crowd also included some believers. John 6 also tells us that the Twelve were a part of those who heard the words of Jesus (v 67). Among the Twelve was Peter, who was clearly a believer.

One can imagine Peter listening to the words of the Lord on this occasion. As is well-known, the disciples, including Peter, often had a hard time understanding what the Lord taught them. In v 67, the Lord asks Peter and the other 11 disciples if they also will quit following Him.

From this verse we see that a believer can find the Lord's teachings so difficult that he or she can choose to quit following Him. Such a decision would involve no longer listening to Him, no longer trying to understand or obey the things He teaches.

If Peter had been completely up front with the Lord at this time, he no doubt would have said that he did not understand many of the things the Lord was teaching. John does not record if he did so. But John does record two things that Peter did say.

The first is that Peter acknowledged that he and the other 11 disciples had nowhere else to go. The reason for that is the second thing that Peter acknowledged. He understood that only Jesus had the words of eternal life (v 68):

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**“When a believer  
reads and studies the  
words of the Lord,  
that believer is hearing  
words that can produce  
fullness of life.”**

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*“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”  
(John 6:68-69; cf. 11:27; 20:31).*

Since Peter already had eternal life. He did not mean that he and the other disciples would stay with Jesus because He could tell them *how to obtain salvation from hell*. That issue was already settled the first moment they believed in Him.

Rather, Peter is making a profound statement. Jesus' words are also life for the maturing believer.

What is everlasting life like? It is not only a guarantee of eternity with the Lord in His future kingdom, or a guarantee of a present unending life. It also includes our spiritual fellowship with the Lord, and that can be quite fulfilling and rewarding. Our experience of eternal life comes in degrees. It can be abundant or not.

So when a believer reads and studies the words of the Lord, he is hearing words that can produce fullness of life. They are a source of life in the sense that when obeyed, they produce an abiding relationship with the Lord. This

relationship is one in which more and more spiritual fruit can be produced.

In v 63, the Lord did not simply say that His words are life, but that they are also *spirit*. The Spirit of God uses the words of the Lord in the life of the believer to produce Christ-likeness (2 Cor 3:18). This Spirit-produced obedience produces abundant life. Peter understands that the experience of true life could only be found by following Christ.

## Always More to Learn

The words of our Lord are life. When a person believes in Him for eternal life they receive that wonderful gift. However, His words keep giving. After we have believed, we can continue to “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood.” His words are spiritual food. No doubt, some of His teachings are hard to understand and difficult to “swallow.” But, as we hear, and through the power of the Spirit obey, we *experience* true life. As believers we never get to the point where there is nothing more to learn, where there are no longer things in our lives the Lord wants to transform into His image, and where the Scriptures do not challenge us any longer.

And, no doubt, we will find things that we do not understand or do not want to obey. But, if we will endure and allow these words to accomplish their work, we find, like Peter, that His words are the words of eternal life to all who accept them. ■

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*Ken Yates was a chaplain in the Army for 20 years and retired as a Lt. Col. He lives in S.C. and is completing a Ph.D. in New Testament at Dallas Seminary.*





# The Majority Is Not Necessarily Right

by Alfy Austin

Having grown up in a church where grace was preached, it was natural for Mary to believe one is saved by faith alone in Christ alone. As she got older she became aware that not everyone shared that understanding of the gospel. As Mary's awareness grew, it became clear that the Free Grace position she had always accepted as true was in fact a minority view, even among Evangelicals. Some opposed the grace position, even railing against it. Others simply garbled the gospel, sometimes speaking of grace while at other times speaking of commitment.

No one wants to be in the minority. The mainstream is much more appealing. From time to time Mary would wonder, "Have I been taught the gospel correctly? Can a minority be right?" At such times she would open her Bible and read treasured gospel texts and be reassured that the Word of God indeed proclaims grace. It was, for her, an inescapable conclusion.

## A Minority Report

GES represents a minority understanding of the gospel. This is true not in regard to the content of the gospel so much—which is that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification—but in regard to what constitutes a saving response to that gospel message. Mainstream Evangelical thought views some form of commitment as required in a saving response to the gospel as well as some sort of visible (measurable?) transformation in the life of one who is truly redeemed. This transformation would then serve the purpose of distinguishing genuine Christians from people who only *think* they are Christians and from others who seek to deceive regarding their spiritual condition.

The Free Grace position holds that commitment is not required for salvation. Salvation is a free gift to be received by means of faith (trust, reliance) in Jesus Christ. There are no strings attached.

## After You Believe

Regarding what happens after the reception of this most precious of gifts, the Free Grace position maintains that spiritual growth and maturity constitute the divine expectation. Continuance in sin, failure to grow, and disobedience are not permissible, but they are possible, tragically possible. But growth is not guaranteed. Spiritual progress to maturity is not inevitable.



Observing another person's life to determine that individual's spiritual condition is unreliable at best, and sinfully judgmental at worst. Seeing the Spirit's work in our own lives is cause for praise and can have a confirming value for us. But even that is an unreliable guide to personal assurance of salvation. What happens when I fail or when I don't feel spiritual? Assurance of salvation comes from the sure promises of God's Word and not from feelings or even from the observance of fruit in one's life. Those who believe in Jesus Christ have eternal life. If I believe, I know that I have eternal life. Assurance is simply taking God at His Word.

Are Numbers Evidence of Truth?

But can a minority opinion really be correct? The validity of a doctrine is determined by its support from Scripture, not by the number of supporters it has.

Let us assume for a moment that the majority is always right. With the advent of the computer we now have the technology to determine the majority view on any given issue. Simply feed the positions of all Evangelical writers on any given issue into the computer and it could end all theological debate.

This illustration is admittedly ludicrous. But is that not basically what many do when they imply that someone

cannot be right because most of the Church believes differently? What most Christians or scholars believe is not the deciding factor. What matters is what the Bible teaches.

An illustration of the penchant for appealing to the majority opinion may be found in an article by Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. in the September 22, 1989 issue of *Christianity Today*. In the arti-


“But can a minority opinion really be correct? The validity of a doctrine is determined by its support from Scripture, not by the number of supporters it has.”

cle, entitled, “How Faith Works,” Dr. Johnson appeals to the Westminster Confession of Faith as “a standard of reference that evangelicals as a whole will accept in the main.” The Westminster Confession of Faith is a venerable document, a model of theological insight. But it is a human document. Dr. Johnson



cites numerous verses from the Bible but exegetes none. The Westminster Confession is his “standard of reference”; the Bible is used as support. The inverse of this would have been a far superior approach.

If the grace position is the position of Scripture, it does not matter if it is a minority position. And, if it does not agree with Scripture, it will not make any difference should it become the majority position in the future.

Who is right? Who is wrong? Let this much be affirmed, the answer is in the Bible. 

Alfy Austin is the Pastor of World Gospel Church in Terre Haute, IN.

\*This article appeared in *Grace in Focus* in December of 1989.

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YTD Budget	\$185,918
YTD Revenue	\$165,768

# Q&A

by Staff

## How Does the Work of Christ Relate To His Person and His Promise?

**Question:** I watched some of the videos on your site, but I am still confused about what I have to do to be saved.

I am confused about what the work of Christ has to do with my salvation. I heard someone say in your video that Christ died for all sins of all people of all time. But wouldn't that mean that everyone goes to heaven then? But your site says that everyone won't go to heaven even though Christ died for all their sins. What then do I have to do to be saved? I am super confused and worried that I'm going to go to hell.

Calvinism is super confusing to me also, but I can understand that if Christ died for all my sins, then I will go to heaven, because there is nothing keeping me from it. But if Christ died for all people, and many will still go to hell, I am super confused about how the process of salvation works then.

The gospel is so mind-blowingly confusing to me, I have tried to understand it for 3 years, and still don't. My life has been pure torment because of the confusion. I wish someone could explain the gospel to me so that I understand it once and for all.

This is a quote from your beliefs page: "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." When you say that He guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him, what is it about Him that I should believe? That He died for the sins of the world? That He is God? I feel like I have to believe something about Him, but I don't know what! I used to think that I had to believe that He died for all my sins and therefore saved me, but in your view



it seems that this is not enough, because after all He died for everyone and many still go to hell!

I'm really confused about how Christ saved us, and what faith has to do with it. Why require faith if He forgave all our sins already?

—Y, email

**Answer:** You have asked several questions.

First, by His shed blood the Lord Jesus "took away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). That simply means no one will be condemned *because of his sin*. Rather, people are condemned *because they have not believed in Jesus for eternal life* and hence is not in the Book of Life (John 3:18; Rev 20:15).

Second, forgiveness of sins, though based on Jesus' substitutionary death, does not come until a person believes in Christ. And even then, what the new believer receives is fellowship forgiveness of all past sins and positional forgiveness of all sins. However, ongoing fellowship

with God means that we need ongoing fellowship forgiveness (1 John 1:7-9). We must not confuse forgiveness with the Lord removing sin as a barrier to everlasting life.

Third, whoever believes in Him has everlasting life that can never be lost. John 3:16 and many other verses are clear on this (John 5:24; 6:35; 11:26; Acts 16:31; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9).

Fourth, what we believe Him *for* is *what He promised*: everlasting life that cannot be lost.

Do you believe in Jesus?

If so, according to John 3:16 what do you have?

If you say, "Well, I believe He died on the cross for my sins and rose again, but I don't believe I have everlasting life that can never be lost," then you do not currently believe the promise of John 3:16. It's odd that anyone could believe that Jesus died on the cross for his sins and rose bodily from the dead, and yet not believe that simply by faith in Him he has everlasting life. Yet what you express



in terms of doubt is what plagues most people in Christianity today.

We just need to believe Jesus that when we believe in Him we have everlasting life. His shed blood and bodily resurrection prove that is true. It really is that simple.

Jesus does not promise wealth, health, long life, a happy marriage, a nice house, or anything like that for the one who believes in Him.

He promises everlasting life.  
I hope that helps.

—Bob

**Follow Up Question:** Correct me if I'm wrong. If I simply believe that Jesus is who He said He is (the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God), then Jesus guarantees that I have eternal life? Is that what it means to believe in Jesus?


I really appreciate your input!

—Y, email

**Follow Up Answer:** Yes, as long as you believe that in the Biblical sense.

John 20:31 uses the expression "the Christ, the Son of God."

Compare John 11:25-27. That is the only other exact use of that expression. In those verses, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God is to believe that He guarantees everlasting life that cannot be lost (v 26) and bodily resurrection into His kingdom (v 25) to all who simply believe in Him.

Compare also 1 John 5:1. There we find the same idea. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe He guarantees the eternal destiny of all who simply believe in Him. 

—Bob

Feeling Sorry?

**Question:** I read your article "A Slippery Slope: Repentance and Everlasting Life." Glad to see someone take on the misconceptions people have about repentance.

One of the most common errors I hear about repentance is that it means to feel sorry for your sins.

On 1080 AM in Miami, one preacher said on his radio show not long ago, when

asked "what is repentance?" that it means to feel sorry for your sins.

I would like to point out one inaccurate statement in your article, "Every single reference to repentance in the Bible refers to turning from one's sins." But in Hebrews 12:17 the word *repentance* (*metanoia*) can only be understood to mean "to change one's mind." In this verse, it is not Esau who refuses to repent, but Isaac. Isaac is not refusing to repent of a particular sin. He is refusing to change his mind about giving Jacob the birthright. If Isaac was to repent (change

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"Jesus does not  
promise wealth, health,  
long life, a happy  
marriage, a nice house,  
or anything like that for  
the one who believes  
in Him. He promises  
everlasting life."

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his mind) and give Esau the birthright, he would be in opposition to the will of God, since it was ultimately God's will to have Jacob receive the birthright.

—T, email

**Answer:** Thanks for the encouraging feedback.

You make several good points about Heb 12:17. Esau found no place for repentance. I take that to mean that no amount of turning from his former sin of despising his birthright would change his father's mind. Repentance there could mean "no place for changing his [or his father's] mind" if that is what *metanoia* means. It could also mean "no opportunity to turn from his sin" (with the result that his father's mind would change). The latter is the sense of *metanoia* there if it means turning from sin. Whatever is intended, this one is rather unique.

Remember the Ninevites in Jonah 3. They repented even though they did not know if it would work. It did. That is, they found a place for repentance.

I see Esau as having the same desire they had. He wanted to escape the consequence of his sin; but in his case, though he wept about it, there was no opportunity to get right with his father on the issue of the birthright. He could not escape the consequence of that sin. The Ninevites escaped the death penalty, which is what should have been the consequence of their many sins. 

—Bob

What Do I Tell a Believer  
Living With His Girlfriend?

**Question:** My brother has been living with his girlfriend for nearly 2 years. They aren't engaged and so far as I'm aware, have no plans to marry. I'm not even sure if he loves her. Neither of them are believers. But then, a few weeks ago he told me he believed in Jesus. We talked about it for a while and I think he understood Jesus' promise of eternal life and believed it, which is amazing. But now I'm not too sure about what to say about his living situation. Do I tell him about sexual purity? Do I encourage him to marry his girlfriend? Or, since he's a believer, should I tell him about God's command for people not to be unequally yoked, and that if he marries, it must be to another believer. On top of that, I'm a little nervous about throwing all these commandments on a baby Christian. I don't want to snuff his faith out with a load of rules. What would you advise?

—K.B., Baltimore

**Answer:** Thanks for asking such an easy question...Not! There is a straightforward Biblical answer to your question. But the application gets messy.

First of all, as a new believer, it is important for your brother to become grounded in some basics of the faith. He needs to know there are consequences to believing in Jesus, and he needs to work out those things for himself. So it might be helpful to slowly introduce him to the following truths, and if you can, introduce them to his girlfriend too, who is also a person whom God loves and for whom Jesus died.

For example, the first thing to do is to assure your brother of his *eternal salvation*. There are no threats of hell for him





anymore. Whatever he chooses to do, he cannot lose everlasting life. As Jesus promised, believers shall never perish (John 3:16).

However, he also needs to know that the decisions he makes in life *will* drastically impact the quality of his *fellowship with Jesus*. We are called to abide in Him (1 John 2:24-25). That doesn't happen automatically. It takes obedience. If your brother chooses to live in disobedience to God, he shouldn't expect the Lord to bless him. God is not mocked. Your brother will sow what he reaps (Gal 6:7). If he's sowing sin, then that's what's coming to him.

Your brother should also know that while many Christians today believe in "missionary dating," God forbade His people from intermarrying with pagans because it led to idolatry (e.g., Gen 24:3; Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3; Judges 3:6; Ezra 9:1-2). The unbelieving spouse would lead the believing Jew to abandon the Living God and worship an idol. I can't tell you how many times I saw that happen in college. A Christian would start dating an unbeliever under the pretense of missionary dating and became atheist in a few years. Hence, believers have an obligation to "marry in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39). Marriage is an institution meant for believers to build each other up, to support each other, and to worship together. Being "unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14) turns our most intimate relationship into one of rebellion.

Your brother also needs to be aware of what the Bible says about *God's will for sex*, i.e. that it is meant to be enjoyed in marriage. Otherwise, something

beautiful becomes twisted. Lead him to 1 Cor 6:18-19, where Paul writes,

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who*

**"Your brother should also know that while many Christians today believe in "missionary dating," God forbade His people from intermarrying with pagans because it led to idolatry."**

*commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

Lastly, your brother should know that he has a new identity in Christ. He isn't his old self anymore. He is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That's a privilege and a responsibility.

After laying that foundation, show your brother that there are at least three options that he can choose and not all are godly.


First, he can continue living in sin or he can marry his girlfriend even if she's an unbeliever. Either choice would be willful rebellion against God and your brother

should expect to experience the bad consequences that flow from that decision.

Second, if the girlfriend is a believer, the best outcome would be for them to get married right away, but they should live apart and remain celibate until that day.

Third, if she's an unbeliever, your brother should tell his girlfriend they must live apart and remain celibate until she comes to faith. Otherwise, they should go their separate ways and your brother should eventually marry a believer.

In sum, the only godly end result is to marry a believer and to remain celibate until that time. Just about anything else would be sin and would diminish his spiritual walk with Jesus. You can't experience abundant life while living in wilful sin.

Now, be careful. Don't hammer your brother over the head with these things. Be gentle. Be humble. Be patient and pray for them both. Remember that you're a sinner too and your job is to love your brother (and his girlfriend!), not to condemn him. And above all, trust in God's Word to do the work of convicting your brother of these truths. Lord have mercy on you both! 

—Shawn

*Email your questions and comments to [bethany@faithalone.org](mailto:bethany@faithalone.org).*



The earliest known Anglo-Saxon translation of the Gospels were produced at Lindisfarne.

# Faith Is Just Believing

by Art Farstad  
(1935-1998)

Near the beginning of Sir Walter Scott's classic novel *Ivanhoe*, the fool Wamba discusses the difference between good old Anglo-Saxon words (like *swine* and *sheep*) and the (then) new-fangled French words (like *pork* and *mutton*) that had been making headway in England since the Norman conquest of 1066.

Many centuries later we still use Wamba's Anglo-Saxon words—minus some

that were lost in the shuffle but augmented by thousands of near synonyms of a French-Latin origin. The result is that we who use English as our principal language speak the tongue with the richest vocabulary in the world.

The classic English Bible, the KJV, is basically Anglo-Saxon in vocabulary and completely so in structure. But the 1611 translators were not afraid to use some choice Latin-type words, especially in the theological texts: justification, salvation, faith, cross, glory, and propitiation, to name a few.

But this dual origin of English vocabulary occasionally poses a problem. Oddly enough, the most important gospel word-family in the Greek NT is obscured in English. This is because we translate the Greek verb *pisteuō* by the Anglo-Saxon word *believe*, and the related noun *pistis* by the totally unrelated

word *faith* (from the Latin *fides*, by way of French).

At least partly due to this lack of similarity, many preachers who are weak on grace are able to maintain that the Greek lying behind one or both of the English words includes a whole possible agenda of works, such as commitment, repentance, perseverance, etc.

Actually, *believe* and *faith*, as the Greek shows, are just the verb and the noun for a concept that is really no different in English than in Greek. That concept is *taking people at their word, trusting that what they say is true*.

In order to clearly demonstrate this fact, I would like to take three of the most famous “believe” verses in the NT and re-translate them a little by using the word “faith” to show they are really the same in the original.

First, the best known verse of all, the one Martin Luther called “the gospel in a nutshell”:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever has faith in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

Next, Paul’s clear, simple gospel command to the seeking Philippian jailer:

*Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).*

Third, our Lord’s wonderfully gracious promise:

*Amen, amen [lit. Greek text] I tell you, whoever hears My word and has faith in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).*

These edited translations should help show that *believe* and *faith* really convey the same meaning.

Now let’s go in the other direction. Let’s take three famous “faith” passages and re-translate a bit to bring out the fact that the word in the original is just another form of the “believe” concept.

First, the verse that gives us, not an abstract, but a working definition of faith:

*Now believing is the substantiation of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1).*

And here is probably the number two gospel text for grace-believers:

*For by grace you have been saved through believing, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9).*

And finally, another verse from that great teacher of salvation by grace through faith, the Apostle Paul:

*But to him who does not work but believes [from pisteuō] on Him who justifies the ungodly, his believing [pistis] is accounted for righteousness (Rom 4:5).*

Of course, I am *not* saying that these or any words always have the exact same meaning. Context determines a great deal. For example, *faith* in the NT is sometimes used for the body of truths that we believe, the Christian Faith (e.g., see Jude 3).



An early Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the Gospel According to Matthew

No “faith” (religion) gives nearly as much importance to *believing* the right things as does Christianity. And no wonder! Believing or having faith in


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**“Believe and *faith*, as the Greek shows, are just the verb and the noun for a concept that is really no different in English than in Greek.”**

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Christ grants us salvation. And what we believe about other things—assurance, rewards, grace, etc.—determines how we live our lives every day. What we *really* believe and what we *say* we believe are not always the same thing. When we say that people are saved through faith alone in Christ alone, we nevertheless *do* believe it has to be their genuine *faith* and not merely a nominal Evangelicalism.

God doesn’t need our money, works, or resolutions. But He would like to be taken at His word. He doesn’t like to be made out to be a liar. Neither do we. God wants to be *believed*. He wants us to have faith in Him, His Son, and His finished work on the cross for us. This is the gospel of *grace*. It is not based on works, or we might bore the saints with a “bragimony” meeting through all eternity.

*Trust me (I mean, believe me): Have faith in Christ and you will be saved!* 

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*Art Farstad was Executive Editor of the New King James Version of the Bible.*

\*This article appeared in *Grace in Focus* in June of 1991.





# Our Real Home

## A Review of Randy Alcorn's *Heaven*.

by L. E. (Bud) Brown

The book's 476 pages are distributed over 46 chapters and two appendices. The depth of Alcorn's study is attested in 363 footnotes, a thirteen page subject index, and a helpful six page scripture index. A lengthy bibliography with 140 references shows the breadth of his research, but numerous helpful works have been omitted. The material is arranged into three parts. The first is devoted to a theology of heaven. The second is arranged as a series of questions and answers ("What will the resurrected earth be like?" "What will our lives be like?" etc.). And the third is a short homily of sorts about, "Living in Light of Heaven." Two appendices, "Christoplatonism's [!] False Assumptions" and "Literal and Figurative Interpretation" complete the work.

The book's tone is reminiscent of a chat between friends or of a Sunday school lesson. It is replete with illustrations, stories and anecdotes which by themselves make the book worth the cover price!

### Misconceptions about Heaven and the New Earth

The title sets the stage for the intentional equivocation of important Biblical terms. The reader soon discovers that the book is not about heaven but about the *kingdom of God on earth*.

The truth is, in our seminaries, churches, and families, we have given amazingly little attention to the place where we will live forever with Christ and his people—the New Earth, in the new universe. This eternal Heaven is the central subject of this book (p. xv).

These two sentences suggest that heaven and the New Earth are identical, and that both refer to our eschatological destiny. This equivocation of terms is carried throughout the book, and therein lies the problem.

He understands that the kingdom of God, not the heavenly realm, is our ultimate destiny. He displays his understanding of this distinction when he writes:

The answer to the question, Will we live in Heaven forever? depends on what we mean by Heaven. Will we be with the Lord forever? Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No. In the intermediate Heaven, we'll be in Christ's presence, and we'll be joyful, but we'll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and permanent relocation to the New Earth (p. 42).

The author is aware of the difficulty posed by his equivocation and attempts to deal with the issue by arbitrarily restricting the term *heaven* to one of its several fields of meaning:

Some would argue that the New Earth shouldn't be called Heaven. But it seems clear to me that if God's special dwelling place is by definition Heaven, and we're told that the 'dwelling of God' will be with mankind on Earth, then Heaven and the New Earth will essentially be the same place (p. 45).

Throughout the book one finds provocative arguments in favor of a New Earth that is in many ways similar to this Earth.

If we can't imagine our present Earth without rivers, mountains, trees, and flowers, then why would we try to imagine

the New Earth without these features? We wouldn't expect a non-Earth to have mountains and rivers. But God doesn't promise us a non-Earth. He promises us a *New Earth*. If the word *Earth* in this phrase means anything, it means that we can expect to find earthly things there—including atmosphere, mountains, water, trees, people, houses—even cities, buildings and streets. (These familiar features are specifically mentioned in Revelation 21-22) (p. 79).

## Ruling in the Kingdom is a Reward

Free Grace adherents will be happy to note that the author recognizes that our rule in the kingdom of God will be a reward for meritorious service in this life.

All of us will have some responsibility in which we serve God. Scripture teaches that our service for him now on Earth will be evaluated to help determine how we'll serve him on the New Earth. The humble servant will be put in charge of much, whereas the one who lords it over others in the present world will have power taken away... If we serve faithfully on the present Earth, God will give us permanent management positions on the New Earth (p. 212).

## A Flawed Presentation of the Gospel Promise

A major flaw with this book is its bewildering presentation of the gospel. Free Grace adherents will be troubled by Alcorn's explanation of what is required for eschatological salvation. Proverbs 28:13, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy," is cited as proof that "if we want to be forgiven, we must recognize and repent of our sins" (p. 34). Later Alcorn writes,

Do not merely assume that you are a Christian and are going to Heaven. Make the conscious decision to accept Christ's sacrificial death on your behalf. When you choose to accept Christ and surrender control of your life to him, you can be certain that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life (p. 36).

He is right to admonish the readers that they not simply assume their eternal destiny, but he confuses them by indicating that only those who "surrender control of [their lives]" can be sure that their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

He finishes his presentation of the gospel with a question to the reader:

Have you confessed your sins? asked Christ to forgive you? placed your faith in Christ's death and resurrection on your behalf? asked Jesus to be your Lord and empower you to follow him? (p. 36).

It is an inescapable conclusion that Alcorn has conflated discipleship with eschatological salvation and has obscured the gospel in the process.

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**"Alcorn's presentation of the gospel is laced with misquoted texts, peppered with unbiblical qualifications, and fails to convey the simple message of 'salvation by faith alone in Jesus alone.'"**

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In summary it seems fair to say that Alcorn's presentation of the gospel is laced with misquoted texts, peppered with unbiblical qualifications, and fails to convey the simple message of "salvation by faith alone in Jesus alone." Free Grace adherents who recommend this book will need to issue a strong *caveat*.

## Useful for Pastors

In spite of the equivocation of important terms and the flawed gospel, there is much to commend this book for pastoral purposes, if it is read carefully and critically. It helps us visualize life in the kingdom of God as a space-mass-time universe in which the conditions established during the Creation are restored.

Our eternal destiny is not disconnected from our present experience, but is an eternal enjoyment of a future world that is imperfectly reflected in this present one.

The detailed Scripture and Subject indices make the volume useful for sermon preparation, enabling one to quickly locate wonderful illustrations for preaching and teaching purposes. Part II is a compendium of questions often encountered in pulpit and counseling ministry. The answers may prove valuable if used with discernment.

In conclusion, the book's confused gospel, equivocation of important Biblical terms, and numerous instances of inaccurate exegesis—none of which have been touched on in this review—make this book unsuitable for a general audience. Although there is value in the book, it must be read with great care. It will prove a useful addition to your personal library but you should exercise great caution when recommending it for the general Christian audience. It does not belong in the hands of the undiscerning. 

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*L. E. (Bud) Brown is President of Transition Ministries Group.*

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