

Getting the Gospel Right

What is at Stake? What are the Issues to Consider?

I. Defining Positions

- A. Free Grace View - “The sole means of receiving the free gift of eternal life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose substitutionary death on the cross fully satisfied the requirement for our justification, and was raised bodily from the dead.”¹
- B. Lordship Salvation – “The Lordship view expressly states the necessity of acknowledging Christ as Lord and Master of one’s life in the act of receiving Him as Savior. These are not two different, sequential acts (or successive steps), but rather one act of pure trusting faith.”²

1. Deficiency in the Lordship Terminology – confusion in its usage

a. **Objective** Sense – All Orthodox Christians believe Jesus is Lord / God

b. **Subjective** Sense – Only some Christians believe submitting to the Lordship of Christ in all areas of one’s life is essential at the moment of salvation.

2. “As defined by its own advocates, Lordship Salvation could more properly be called ‘Commitment Salvation,’ ‘Surrender Salvation,’ or ‘Submission Salvation’ since in actuality the debate is not over the Lordship of Christ, but the response of a person to the Gospel and the conditions which must be met for salvation.”³

3. One Qualification – Not everyone who invites people to “accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior,” intends to use it in the way “Lordship Salvation” proponents mean.

C. Easy Believism / Cheap Grace / No-Lordship

1. Often disparaging titles are used by MacArthur and others against people of a Free Grace position.
2. John MacArthur refuses even to acknowledge the title “Free Grace” He calls it “no-lordship” movement.⁴

¹ Free Grace Alliance, “Mission and Beliefs,” <https://freegracealliance.com/mission-and-beliefs>, (accessed, 5/14/2021).

² Kenneth L. Gentry, “The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy,” Baptist Reformation Review 5 (Spring 1976): 52.

³ Bing, Charles C. *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response*. (Grace Life: Burleson, TX, 1997), 10.

⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 56.

II. Two Key Issues

- A. Must a Commitment Accompany “Saving Faith? – **Front Loading the Gospel**
- B. Will a “True” Believer Persevere Until the End? – **Backloading the Gospel**

III. Questions to Answer

- What is the condition(s) for salvation?
- What is required to “prove” that you are saved or one of the elect?⁵
- What does repentance mean? And is it a requirement for salvation?
- Are there two types of faith, a faith that saves and one that does not?
- What is the role of works in salvation?

IV. One Area of Agreement!

- MacArthur writes, “It is essential that we who proclaim God’s Word from the pulpit preach it clearly and accurately. If we confuse the message of the Gospel, whatever else we say cannot undo the damage.”⁶
- Hodges writes, “So marvelous a message should always be proclaimed without ambiguity and without compromise.”⁷
- Wiersbe writes, “Confusion about salvation means disaster, for the message of the Gospel is a matter of eternal life or eternal death.”⁸

V. The Historical Development of the Debate

- A. The first known use of the term “Lordship Salvation” is found in *Eternity* magazine in 1959.⁹
- B. The Controversy of the Late 1980’s (Charles Ryrie and Zane Hodges [Dallas Theological Seminary faculty], vs. John MacArthur)
 1. Charles Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, 1969.¹⁰

⁵ This fifth point of Calvinism is the “Perseverance of the Saints.” This view teaches that those who are true believers will persevere until their death and that they will not fall into sin for a prolonged period of time.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, “Follow Me”?*, (Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1988), xvii-xviii.

⁷ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, (Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1989), xiv.

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, “Forward” in Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ*. (Dallas: Victor Books, 1989), 9.

⁹ This term was used in a debate between an Everett F. Harrison (Presbyterian) and John Stott (Anglican / Church of England) theologian. Ironically, Stott represented the Lordship position.

2. Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 1981.¹¹
3. John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 1988.¹²
4. Charles Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation: What It Means to Believe in Jesus Christ*, 1989.
5. Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, 1989.
6. John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, 1993.

C. Wayne Grudem and the Free Grace Alliance

1. Wayne Grudem,¹³ *“Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*, 2016.
2. Grant Hawley,¹⁴ ed. *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Magnifies the Gospel*, 2016.
3. Fred Chay,¹⁵ ed. *A Defense of Free Grace Theology: With Respect to Saving Faith, Perseverance, and Assurance*, 2017.

¹⁰ Charles Ryrie was the head of the Systematic Theology department at Dallas Theological Seminary at the time of this controversy. He has also taught at the Word of Life Bible Institute on 21 different occasions, and his textbook, *Basic Theology* is used in our classes here in NY and many other teaching sites. He has been promoted to Heaven.

¹¹ Zane Hodges was also an influential professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was the chairman of the New Testament Department. He has been promoted to Heaven.

¹² John MacArthur is the pastor of Grace Community Church, and Chancellor of The Master’s College and Seminary in Sun Valley California. Prior to his articulation of his views on Lordship Salvation he spoke at the Word of Life Lodge.

¹³ Wayne Grudem is a Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary, the General Editor of the ESV Study Bible and author of an influential Systematic Theology text used in many colleges and seminaries. He is a proud 5-point Calvinist and a non-cessationist.

¹⁴ Grant Hawley is the Executive Director of the Free Grace Alliance. The Free Grace Alliance’s mission is “the clear understanding, presentation, and advancement of the Gospel of God’s Free Grace.” <https://freegracealliance.com/mission-and-beliefs>, (accessed, 5/16/2021).

¹⁵ Fred Chay is the Academic Dean of Grace School of Theology (Woodlands, TX). Prior to this he was a Professor of Theology at Phoenix Seminary for 21 years, and a colleague and friend of Wayne Grudem’s for 13 of those years.

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A Critique of “Lordship Salvation”

I. Beliefs of Lordship Salvation

A. Salvation and dedication is regarded as one act, not two subsequent steps.

1. This confuses/conflates Justification and Sanctification.
2. Those who “dedicate” their lives at a future date are often said to have gotten saved not dedicated.

B. Repentance is defined as turning from all known sin and surrendering to the Lordship of Christ.

1. Demarest writes, “We must call pre-Christians to embrace Christ as definitive Teacher, as unique Savior, and as absolute Lord.”¹⁶
2. MacArthur states, “This means that *to the best of their knowledge* penitents will forsake all known vice and cling to the Savior as their only hope of salvation.”¹⁷
3. Ryrie rightly responds to the likes of MacArthur and Demarest, “The direction of the Gospel is from Christ to me. It is never from me to Him. I do not offer Him anything. How could I? What could I possibly offer that would help meet my need? To offer the years of my life is to offer something very imperfect and something, which can do nothing to forgive my sin. To vow my willingness to change is to affirm something I will not consistently keep; and even if I could, it would not remove the guilt of my sin.”¹⁸
4. Dillow also responds, “Faith is redefined to include submission, and a man becomes Christian not by “hearing” and “believing” but by believing and promising God he will submit his life to Christ.”¹⁹
5. Ironside also agrees with Ryrie and Dillow, “The Gospel is not a call to ... amendment of our ways, to make restitution for past sins, or to promise to do better in the future. These things are proper in their place, but they do not constitute the Gospel; for the Gospel is not good advice to be obeyed, it is good news to be believed.”²⁰

C. There is saving faith and faith/belief that comes short of salvific (misinterpretation of James 2).²¹

¹⁶ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 270.

¹⁷ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 77.

¹⁸ Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation*, 41.

¹⁹ Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 10.

²⁰ Ironside, “*What is the Gospel?*”

²¹ You can listen to Learn the Word Podcast #169 with Dr. Charlie Bing for an explanation of James 2 from a Free Grace perspective. <https://learn.wol.org/podcast/>

1. The issue is not whether someone has “enough” faith but whether the object of their faith is correct.
2. The illustration given by James in chapter 2 is the belief of Demons, but this is not a discussion about eternal salvation but rather salvation from the Judgment Seat of Christ.²²

D. Perseverance of the Saints

- MacArthur writes, “Those who remain hardened in sin only demonstrate their lack of true faith.”²³
- Grudem states, “Only Those Who Persevere to the End Have Been Truly Born Again.”²⁴

II. Problems with Lordship Salvation

A. Theological Problems

1. They confuse/conflate Justification with Sanctification
2. They do not fully understand Grace and make a similar mistake made by Arminians, The Christian Church, Catholics (add Grace + something)
3. They hold to the Perseverance of the Saints and do not fully understand the deceitfulness of the human heart – Christians are capable of committing the worst sins and continue in them.
4. Assurance of Salvation is not based upon works (that’s entirely subjective anyhow); rather assurance is based upon the promises of God.
 - As Ryrie points out, “How can one quantify the amount of fruit to be truly a believer? And how much of defection can be tolerated before wondering whether one has truly believed?”²⁵
 - 1 John 5:12-13 “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

B. Exegetical Problems

1. They misunderstand the meaning of “repentance.” The word repent is not even found in the Gospel of John, a Gospel that is focused on getting people to “believe that Jesus is

²² Weaver states, “If eternal salvation were the issue in question, demons would be a horrible example since the object of their belief is not in the finished work of Christ. Rather, it is that there is one God, something that Jews, Muslims, and Mormons believe (although they deny a triune God). Additionally, demons cannot be converted, their future judgment is decreed.” Paul D. Weaver, “James” in *Surveying Hebrews through Revelation*, (Learn the Word Publishing: Schroon Lake, NY, 2019), 50.

²³ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 192.

²⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 792.

²⁵ Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation*, 47.

the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:31)

2. MacArthur, in his book *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, when speaking of the necessity to completely surrender to Christ’s Lordship, rather than dealing with the clear statements of the apostles, as his subtitle implies, he reverts back to the difficult statements of the gospels. I agree with Dr. Pyne’s sentiment, “Perhaps because of the absence of support from the apostles, MacArthur retreats to earlier arguments from the gospels when defending the idea of dedication at conversion.”²⁶
3. The greatest common denominator in all Gospel passages is “believe/trust.” See Appendix: What is the Condition(s) for Salvation?
4. Repentance is not about “submission/surrender” but has to do with an understanding that we have offended a holy God, which is the “preparation for the Gospel.”

Acts 20:21 “Testifying to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

5. They misinterpret the books of Hebrews, James, and 1 John and take them out of context. (i.e., 1 John 2:19 is speaking of a group of false teachers, not individuals who leave the church, and therefore were never believers. “They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”)

C. Practical Problems

1. Lordship Salvation muddies the Gospel
2. In some manifestations of Lordship Salvation, there is virtually no assurance of Salvation because it is viewed based upon subjective “works” rather than the promises of God.
3. Lordship Salvation can and often does become legalistic and judgmental, assigning to some the designation of an unbeliever.
4. Children are thought by some Lordship Salvation people incapable of Salvation because they don’t understand what commitment/surrendering requires.

²⁶ Dr. Robert Pyne, “Lordship Salvation” (unpublished class notes in ST104 Soteriology, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2003), 107.

²⁷ This is the 4th point in the WOL Statement of Faith.

²⁸ This is the 5th point in the WOL Statement of Faith.

²⁹ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 28.

³⁰ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 140.

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Articulation of a Free Grace Gospel

I. The Preparation for the Gospel

- A. Every person born into the world has inherited a sin nature (Rom. 5:12a).
- B. Every person born into the world has personally sinned (Rom. 5:12b).
- C. We are all condemned before God (Rom. 3:10-11).

“We believe that all have sinned and are therefore guilty before God and are under his condemnation.”²⁷

II. The Content of the Gospel – “Good News”

- A. Jesus is the Eternal God and Sinless Man (John 20:31)
- B. Jesus died (1 Cor 15:3,4)
- C. Jesus was buried (1 Cor 15:3,4)
- D. Jesus rose again (Acts 1:3; 1 Cor 15:3,4)

III. The Response to the Gospel - A Lost person Must **Trust/Believe/Have Faith** in Christ’s finished work, and that alone, as payment for sin.

“We believe that all who by faith receive Jesus Christ are born again of the Holy Spirit, therefore children of God and eternally saved...”²⁸

- See the Appendix: “What is the Condition(s) for Salvation?”

IV. Mischaracterizations of the Free Grace Position

A. The Free Grace view requires only mental assent.

- In *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur writes, “Those who hold to this view of the Gospel teach that Scripture promises salvation to anyone who simply believes the facts about Christ and claims eternal life.”²⁹
- In *Faith Works*, MacArthur writes again, “... is not much more than a cursory nod of the head. It is bare intellectual assent.”³⁰

- Ryrie responds, “Specifically, to believe in the Gospel is ‘to put one’s trust in’ the Gospel. Being convinced of something or putting one’s trust in the Gospel could hardly be said to be a casual acceptance of something.”³¹

B. Free Grace Theologians fabricated the category of “Carnal Christian”³²

- MacArthur writes, “Almost all no-Lordship theology leans heavily on the notion that there are three classes of humanity: unsaved people, spiritual Christians, and carnal Christians. This was one of the planks in the no-Lordship platform that was laid by Lewis Sperry Chafer. Chafer popularized the carnal-Christian idea in his 1918 book, *He That Is Spiritual*.³³
- Ryrie responds, “Notice that Paul does not merely say that Christians ‘can and do behave in carnal ways’ he plainly states, ‘You are carnal.’ How then can one charge that ‘contemporary theologians have fabricated an entire category for this type of person?’³⁴

C. Free Grace Theology is New

1. MacArthur ties it to Lewis Sperry Chafer founder of Dallas Theological Seminary.³⁵
2. Grudem ties it to the influence of Zane Hodges a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.³⁶
3. Chay provides clear documentation that both MacArthur and Grudem are demonstrably wrong.³⁷

D. Free Grace Theology Encourages a Lack of Commitment

1. MacArthur writes, “It promises them [sinners] they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it *encourages* people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord.”³⁸
2. Not true, because Christ’s love constrains us!

³¹ Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation*, 30.

³² MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 124.

³³ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 124-125.

³⁴ Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation*, 61.

³⁵ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 124-125.

³⁶ Grudem, “Free Grace” *Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*, 21. Grudem writes, “Where did the modern Free Grace movement come from? As far as I can tell, it stems primarily from a minority view among the faculty members at Dallas Theological Seminary. More particularly, it stems from an aggressive promotion of the Free Grace viewpoint by Zane Hodges.” First of all, it should be noted that Grudem and MacArthur cannot both be correct. Secondly, Grudem is wrong from a historical perspective as documented by Chay, thirdly, in my opinion, Ryrie’s *So Great a Salvation* was far more influential than the writings of Hodges.

³⁷ Chay, *A Defense of Free Grace Theology*, 29-31.

³⁸ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 15.

2 Cor. 5:14-15 “For Christ’s love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.”

3. Not true, because the doctrine of the Judgment Seat compels us!

2 Cor. 5:10-11 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men,”

4. Not true, because when we fully understand the Grace of God, serving Him is our reasonable response of worship!

Rom. 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

V. Where Orthodoxy Meets Orthopraxy: What you REALLY believe impacts how your REALLY behave

- A. We invite people to respond to the Gospel by faith, not faith plus something (commitment, baptism, sacraments, works, etc.).
- If you add anything to Grace alone, it is no longer Grace.
 - If you add anything to the Cross, then the Cross was not sufficient.
 - Every man-made religion boils down to works: do, do, do, Biblical Christianity is about Grace: done, done, done.
- B. Our Motivation is 1) the Love of Christ, 2) the Judgment Seat of Christ, and 3) our act of worship (see verses above).
- C. We believe children can understand the Gospel and be saved, and we invite them to make a decision for Christ (Matt. 18:3).
- D. Salvation begins the life-long pursuit of progressive sanctification. We cannot conflate Justification and Sanctification.
1. We are continually dedicating new areas of our lives as the Spirit of God makes them clear to us.
 2. Therefore, dedication services are warranted and helpful.
- E. Assurance of Salvation is possible and desired by God!
- F.

Appendix:

What is the Condition(s) for Salvation?

John 20:31 - Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that **by believing you may have life** in his name.

(98 x's John emphasizes belief)

John 1:12 - Yet to all who did receive him, to **those who believed** in his name, he gave the right to **become children of God**—

John 3:15-16 - that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

John 3:36 - Whoever **believes in the Son has eternal life,**

John 5:24 - Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and **believes him who sent me has eternal life...**”

John 6:40 - For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and **believes in him shall have eternal life...**

John 6:47 - Very truly I tell you, the one who **believes has eternal life.**

John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die

John 20:31 - But these are written that you may believe^a that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that **by believing you may have life in his name.**

Acts 4:4 - But many **who heard the message believed;** so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

Acts 8:37 - Philip said, “**If you believe with all your heart,** you may.” The eunuch answered, “**I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**”

Acts 10:43 - All the prophets testify about him that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**

Acts 11:17 - So if God gave them the same **gift** he gave us **who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ,** who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?

Acts 11:21 - The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people **believed and turned to the Lord.**

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Acts 15:7 - After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might **hear** from my lips **the message of the Gospel and believe**.

Acts 16:31 - They replied, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.**”

Acts 18:8 - Crispus, the synagogue leader, and **his entire household believed in the Lord**; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is **the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes**: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 3:22 - This **righteousness** is given **through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 10:9-10 - If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved**.

Romans 4:5 - However, to the one **who does not work but trusts God** who justifies the ungodly, their faith is **credited as righteousness**.

I Corinthians 15:1-2 - Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²**By this Gospel you are saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:11 - Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and **this is what you believed**.

John 11:43 – 45 - When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”⁴⁵ Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and **had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him**.

John 12:11 - for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and **putting their faith in him**.

Romans 3:22 - This righteousness is given through **faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

Romans 3:25a - God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—**to be received by faith**.

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