

Basics of Free Grace Theology **Part 1**

Introduction:

For most of my early life I was raised in a type of Roman Catholicism with an emphasis on Witchcraft, known as *Santeria*. While being in a family that practiced *Santeria* I saw many miraculous things. Thus, early in my life I was convinced of the existence of the supernatural. Hence the evolutionary teaching usually taught in schools was never convincing to me.

Until my late teens and early twenties I did not consider the protestant faith. It was one day a middle-aged man from the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church introduced me to Jesus Christ in a special way. Though I was still using drugs I began attending church. Not long after that I knew Jesus was the answer to many of life's questions I had, since I was always a thinker and a philosopher that never missed asking the "why" questions of life.

Although I got baptized in the *SDA* church I was never certain of my eternal destiny since the *SDA* is Armenian in its theology. Only until I left the church, got in trouble with the law, and landed in prison, was I confronted with God's free offer of eternal life. While in prison working as a Chaplain's aid I remember debating someone that unless one continuous to behave properly one forfeits salvation. To no avail—at that time at least—I remember how this older man continued to emphasize that *salvation comes by faith alone and no amount of works afterwards can contribute either to gain it or lose it*.

After getting out of prison I began attending Miami Christian College, which was soon bought by Trinity International University (the undergraduate campus of TEDS). Thus I began pursuing my purpose for living: to preach and teach God's Word which was the only thing that gave meaning to life. Interestingly, I never forgot my debate about salvation with the gentleman; though I don't have an exact time and date I remember while attending Trinity that I was certain I

had eternal life simply because Jesus promised it, as that man had once said. I remember thinking: “How wrong I was.”

While in Trinity I remember feeling a passion for studying the issue of salvation because of the confusion that existed. I started studying the debate of Lordship Salvation between John F. MacArthur and Zane C. Hodges. Reading MacArthur left me uneasy, but after reading Hodges, having taken some Greek and theology courses it all made sense to me.

I called Zane from Miami and told him I was planning to attend Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) and wanted to meet him and perhaps work for him since I had read in back of his book, *Absolutely Free*, he was the pastor at Victor Street Bible Chapel. So that is what I did. As soon as I began at DTS, Zane began to disciple me and I began preaching and teaching at Victor Street Bible Chapel.

Besides working at Victor Street I also worked in New Life Clinics formerly owned by Minirth and Meier, which today is owned by Steven Aturburn and Paul Meier.

During that time the gospel became clearer to me.

I felt the need to pastor and left to do so in Miami, Florida. There I started a church and began teaching in my old alma mater Trinity as an adjunct professor. As a result I felt in love with teaching the Word in a deeper academic level. Since I knew the impact that many professors had on me, I wanted to have that same impact for Jesus on others. Hence I returned DTS and enrolled in the doctorate program.

While I began growing more in my knowledge of Scripture, my passion for the clarity of the gospel never changed. Unfortunately what has not changed is the confusion that still exists on the gospel today, unfortunately even in our own circle of grace.

I would like to credit and thank Dr. Charlie Bing for coming up with the idea on training people on the fundamentals entailed in Free Grace Theology. I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Wilkin for providing a good part of the content below, to which I have modified and added to in many places.

I must agree with Bob's conclusion:

Free Grace theology is still being worked out. It has really taken shape in the last 25 years. The Gospel Under Siege by Zane Hodges came out in 1981 and it was a seminal work on Free Grace theology. Prior to that Free Grace theology was rather loosely defined. Even today, as we shall see, there is still work to be done to nail down all of the particulars.

I must say at the outset that the Free Grace movement is a rather large tent and that not everyone will agree with what I am about to suggest are the essentials of Free Grace theology. However, I am convinced that these things are the essentials, and I am joined by key writers like Zane Hodges, Charles Ryrie, and Jody Dillow on these points.

Eight Essentials of Free Grace Theology

Though no one has formally set out to define what are the “essential elements” (i.e., *sine qua nons*) of the Basics of Free Grace Theology, and even less publish anything of the sort, there are no doubt eight core issues that define the Basics of Free Grace theology.

What are the essential truths that one must believe to be Free Grace?

The **G**race **E**vangelical **S**ociety (GES) organization has primarily four main points of affirmation that they considered to be the essentials of Free Grace Theology:

Salvation

The sole condition for receiving eternal salvation from hell is faith (trust) in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died a substitutionary death on the cross for man’s sin and rose from the dead (*John 3:16-18; John 6:47; Acts 16:31*).

No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one’s sin, baptism or submission to the Lordship of Christ,

may be added to, or considered as a part of, faith as a condition for receiving eternal salvation (*Romans 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:5*). This saving transaction between God and the sinner is simply the giving and receiving of a free gift (*Ephesians 2:8, 9; John 4:10; Revelation 22:17*).

Assurance

The assurance of eternal salvation is based only on the promise God makes in His Word that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ alone possesses eternal life (*John 5:24; 1 John 5:9-13*). Good works, which can and should follow regeneration, are not necessary for a person to have assurance of eternal life even though they may have a secondary, confirmatory value (*Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8*).

Discipleship (Growing in Christ)

The ultimate goal of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life is to produce spiritual maturity reflected in consistent Christlike behavior and attitudes (*Galatians 5:22-25; Luke 14:25-33; Colossians 1:23-29*). Therefore, obedience to the Word of God, while not necessary for obtaining eternal salvation from hell, is the essential responsibility of each Christian (*Romans 6:12-23; Hebrews 5:13,14; 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4*). However, the Bible does not teach that this obedience will be manifested in all believers. If a believer does not yield to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his experience, failure will result, evidenced by sinful acts or even prolonged disobedience (*1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Galatians 5:16-21*).

Motivation

The believer is assured of salvation from hell and is eternally secure, since that salvation is

based solely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ (*John 10:28,29; Romans 8:38, 39*). Therefore, it is inconsistent with the Gospel and with Scripture to seek to gain or keep eternal salvation by godly living. The Scripture, however, does present several motivations for obedience in the Christian life.

1. A powerful motivation for living the Christian life is gratitude to God for saving us by His grace (*Romans 12:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; Galatians 2:20*).

2. Believers should also be motivated by the knowledge that their heavenly Father both blesses obedience and disciplines disobedience in His children (*Hebrews 12:3-11; Leviticus 26:1-45*).

3. Finally, every Christian must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, not to determine his destiny in heaven or hell, but to assess the quality of his Christian life on earth (*2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12*). Anticipating either reward or loss of reward at the Judgment Seat should also motivate believers to perseverance and to faithfulness to God's revealed will (*1 Corinthians 3:10-17, 9:24-27; James 5:8, 9; 1 John 2:28*).

Each of those four points contain more than a single idea. In agreement with Bob, who noted the first 7 points, I added an 8th point, as a necessary corollary to understanding and defining the Basics of Free Grace Theology:

1. The only condition of eternal life is simple faith in Jesus

Not faith plus anything that follows. That is the Arminian position.

Not faith that works. That is what many Reformed or 5-Points Calvinist advocate.

Here is what Arminianism and Calvinism teach in relations to this point.

Both believe that perseverance in good works is required to make it to heaven. Here are the differences:

Arminians say if a believer fails to persevere in good works, then he loses eternal life and he goes to hell.

Many (but not all) *Calvinists* say if a believer fails to persevere in good works, then he proves he wasn't a "true believer" in the first place and he goes to hell.

There really are no real differences in these views. Calvinists say you can't lose eternal life. But they essentially believe you can lose it since no believer can be sure he will make it into the kingdom until he has died. Failure to persevere proves one didn't have "true faith." More on the nature of faith and on perseverance in a moment.

The Free Grace position has as its first characteristic that simply by believing in Jesus a person has eternal life. There are no strings attached whatsoever and no necessary works that follow either to confirm or validate one's eternal status at the very moment *faith in Jesus for eternal life occurs*.

But what then is faith in Jesus?

2. Simple faith in Christ is intellectual assent

Stripped of its pejorative connotation, intellectual assent, or agreement, is a good definition of what faith is.

Do you believe that Abraham Lincoln help change the slave policy in the United States? There is nothing you do as a result of believing this. You either believe or you do not.

Do you believe people are going to stop at a red light? If so, you know what faith is from a Free Grace perspective.

There is no commitment, no decision of the will, no turning from sins, and no works that are part of faith in Christ in the promise of eternal life. It is passive. It is simply taking Him at His Word.

The Free Grace view of simple faith in Jesus is just what it states. To be convinced or persuaded about a saving

proposition concerning Jesus Christ (e.g., John 6:47) is what it means to believe in Him for eternal life. *But what specifically must we believe about Jesus to have eternal life?*

**See Part 2 for the continuation of
*Basics of Free Grace Theology***