

## Is the Free Grace Position Really Free?

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The message and reception of God's grace and salvation into one's life is based upon God's favor and kindness – not man's works or legalism. In the words of the late Charles Ryrie, "It's absolutely free!" This means that salvation is received as a free gift based upon the expression of God's grace alone.



Thank God that grace and salvation can be freely received and experienced in our daily lives (Rom. 3:24; 6:23; 8:32; 1 Cor. 2:12; Rev. 21:6; 22:17). However, I'm amazed when those who call themselves "free gracers" will try and refute the most obvious meanings of some Bible texts that teach repentance

for salvation and transformation in the life of a born again child of God (Luke 24:47; Acts 26:20; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 John 3:9-10, 14; 5:18-20; John 15:1-6). It is repentance and transformation of living that introduce this new expression of grace and freedom into our lives. If one can deny the Gospel, live like the devil, be considered a child of the devil, and still be saved, then this is actually a distortion of free grace. How can people experience true freedom if they no longer embrace the liberating message of the Gospel, grace, and new life in Christ?

Free gracers shoot themselves in the foot many times by pushing "free grace" to the outer limits and creating a radical disconnect from the teaching of Biblical repentance and a transformation of living that is supported by the Bible. The message of the Gospel and grace



reminds us that we can be free from sin's penalty and power through Christ alone (Rom. 3:24; Titus 2:11-12), but if we reject this message of grace and freedom, by concluding that we can live in constant sin, rebellion against God, and deny the faith like an apostate (2 Peter 2), then we lose the basis or foundation of grace and freedom.

The Bible clearly teaches that living as an apostate is not freedom but bondage (2 Pet. 2:14-20) and that apostates distort the true meaning of grace (Jude 4). It always distinguishes Christians from apostates (1 John 2:19; Heb. 6:9; 10:39) who do not possess the Holy Spirit (Jude 19; Rom. 8:9), who deny Christ (2 Pet. 2:1), and who are repeatedly said to be going to hell (2 Pet. 2:1, 3, 12, 17; Jude 12-13). These are not descriptions of Christians! We must allow the language of Scripture to speak for itself and not superimpose our belief systems upon it, attempting to find a textual pigeonhole to meet our required theological standard. Harry Ironside once wrote, "It is important to realize that there is a vast difference between spiritual declension (backsliding) and apostasy."

How can we truly be free if we reject the message of freedom (John 8:32, 36) that Jesus taught? If "free grace" means I don't need to repent or possess a general desire to be freed or released from the power of sin and the very penalty of sin (hell), if I don't need to be delivered from my pseudo belief systems (Muslim, Atheist, etc.), I don't need to continue to believe in the Gospel after I am saved, or I can live my Christian life as a "hell raiser" for the rest of my life and still be saved, then we have no freedom! How can we be liberated if we reject the message of liberty? How can we be freed by grace if we live a life of constant rebellion against the One who died to free us?

Grace is freely offered to us at the time of our conversion (Rom. 3:24), but if we are not willing to repent, then we are not ready to receive it by faith and cannot be saved (Luke 13:3, 5; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:20-21;

16:11). Grace is to be a life-transforming reality in our Christian life (Romans 6:1-14), but if we fail to tap into it and our life never changes, then we are not one of God's children (1 John 3:8, 10; John 8:44; Eph. 2:1-3).

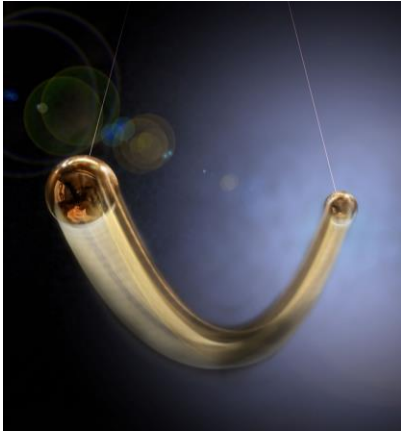
We want to talk about free grace, and rightly so. But to be truly freed by God's amazing grace, we must personally embrace the message of freedom from sin's penalty and power which begins through Biblical repentance and faith, or as the Scriptures themselves teach: "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" – Acts 20:21.



Think of it this way. To conclude that a genuine Christian can live in total rebellion against God and depart from the basic tenants of truth, or the Christian faith, and even deny his faith in Christ and still be saved, would mean there is no more freedom left in free grace! If a person can come to Jesus Christ without repentance, refusing to admit that he is a sinner and reject God's call to repentance from sin's hold over his life (Luke 5:32), then how can he be free from sin? If a person can live in open rebellion against God, walk away from faith in Christ alone for his salvation, and apostatize, while being saved, as some free-gracers claim, then what freedom is left in grace?

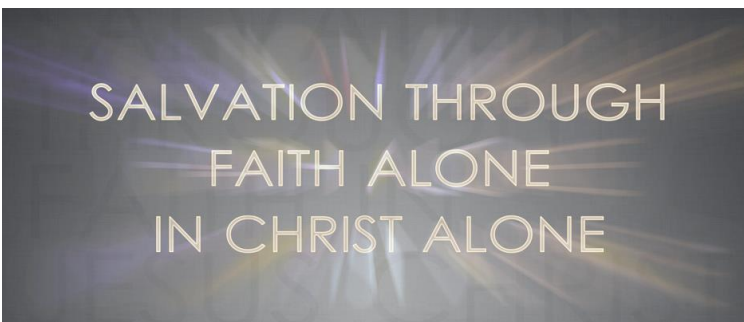
In my humble opinion, those who teach this radical form of free grace are opening the door for "sham" or counterfeit conversions. They are also committing "voodoo exegesis" on various Bible texts that clearly teach repentance for salvation and transformation of living, or a sanctifying change that occurs in the life of a genuine believer (Eph. 2:10; 1 John 2:17, 29; 3:7; 5:18) which is rooted in the sanctifying work of grace (Titus 2:11-12). In an attempt to counter the extreme forms of

Reformed Theology and the teaching of Lordship Salvation, many free-gracers have created their own extreme form of Grace Theology which is an aberrant teaching that cannot be supported from the Bible. It is not “Grace in Focus” as many claim, but grace out of focus.



“The pendulum swings,  
ridiculous extreme,  
Bypassing the truth  
which lieth between.”

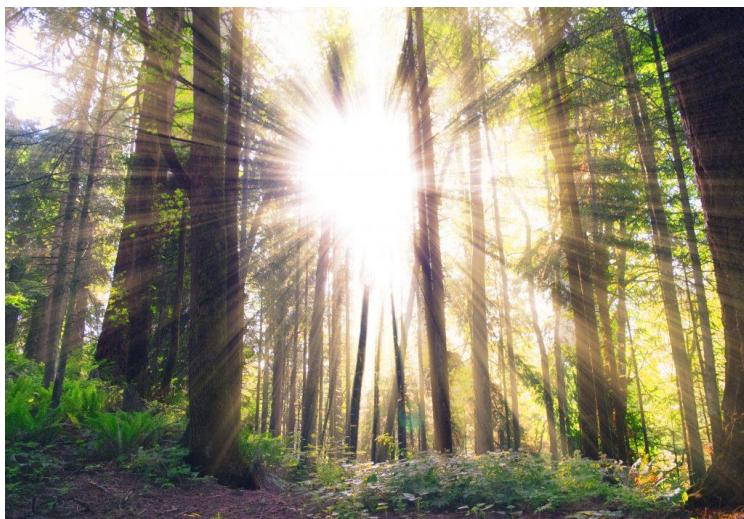
God’s grace does freely justify and redeem us (Rom. 3:24) and repentance (a change of mind and attitude about God, Christ, sin, salvation, and our rebellion against God) does not take away from the glorious message of “free grace.” It is an integral part of our freedom brought about by grace (Luke 4:18). How can grace be “free” without a person repenting of his sin and rebellion against God and desiring to be released from his sins? How can a person be free without repenting of his legalism (human effort to be justified before God) and his warped worldview of God and Jesus Christ? No person can be saved without repentance. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). I’m sticking with what Jesus says!



Here is something very important to consider. Sinners cannot get to “faith alone in Christ alone” until they repent of their former belief

systems which may be related to a works/justifying/salvation and which separate them from God (Heb. 6:1). Sinners cannot get to “faith alone in Christ” until they repent of their pluralism (there are many ways to God). After all, Jesus said that He was the only way to Heaven (John 14:6). If a sinner cannot get passed this basic truth and axiom, then he cannot express genuine faith in Christ. A lost sinner cannot get to “faith alone in Christ” unless they repent (change their thinking and heart) and accept the fact that they are a dreadful sinner that has transgressed against God (Rom. 3:23; Luke 15:10). A sinner cannot be saved “by grace alone through faith alone” unless they actually desire Christ’s forgiveness and pardon for their acts of rebellion against God (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Acts 17:30).

For instance, unsaved people cannot and will not express genuine faith in Christ (John 5:40) unless they repent about following another Jesus, another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4), a works-based religion, their Atheism, Pantheism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or their general rebellion against God (Acts 17:30). Repentance, changing one’s inward belief system – a reversal of one’s thinking regarding sin, the Savior, and salvation, gets people to “faith alone.” Both Jesus and the apostles knew this as they presented the message of repentance and faith in Christ’s person and work (Luke 24:47; Acts 20:21).



In Acts 26:18, Paul declared that he came with the Gospel “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified

by faith that is in me.” Now this is repentance! A person is not ready to express “faith alone in Christ” until they receive the light of God’s revelation and are ready to be saved by turning away from the darkness of sin, Satan, and the realm of unbelief.

Jesus taught in Luke 4:18 that He came “to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” True liberty and freedom is the desire to be released from the power of sin that once kept a person in bondage and slavery. Any message that lacks repentance does not bring this freedom into a person’s life (Matt. 13:6). Hence, it is not a message of genuine “free grace” for it keeps a person bound to their sins and former lifestyle. Grace sets people free from their sins by transforming their lives (Titus 2:11-12).



Free gracers are constantly worried that people will lack the assurance of their salvation if they must repent and look to their good works for assurance. Stop worrying about this! None of these conclusions accurately reflect the true, Biblical position. First, faith is not bound to works in the sinner’s conversion experience – it is diametrically opposed to it (Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 11:6). Second, we are called upon to look to Christ for the assurance that we possess eternal life (John 3:14-18) and believe in the promise that Jesus gave to us (John 6:47; 1 John 5:11-13). Third, repentance is essentially a change of mind regarding one’s previous belief system(s) that keep a

person from expressing faith in Christ and consists of a general desire to be freed from sin's penalty (Rom. 2:4-5) and power (Luke 15:7; 24:47). The best thing we can do is get out of the way and let sinners repent!

God does not ask us to *do* something, *become* something, or even *promise* something (the Lordship Salvation position) in order to be saved. He simply asks us to repent. Repenting before God and pledging something to God for salvation are two different things. I do not have to cooperate with Christ's program of discipleship, or make a contract with God, which involves obeying the commands of Jesus and making a commitment to Christ's lordship, as a necessary condition of eternal life. This is *frontloading* the Gospel with works. Nor do I have to base my assurance of salvation on my performance instead of my faith in Christ (this is *backloading* the Gospel with works).

Fourth, the ROOT of repentance is a changed mind and heart about sin, the Savior, and salvation. But the RESULT of repentance is fruit or the transformation of living. Let's reflect on this for a few moments. Acts 26:20 declares that Paul "shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at



Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God (the root of repentance - a desire and willingness to turn away from sin), and do works meet for repentance (the fruit of repentance which comes after salvation). As Jesus taught, a saved person was to "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Free gracers never seem to separate these two aspects of repentance, the root and the

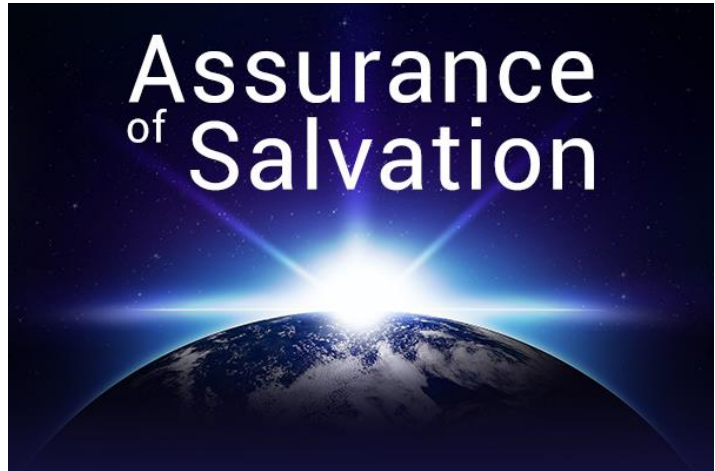
fruit, or the root and the result of repentance. Instead, they argue for a “no repentance” conversion of a sinner, since they wrongly associate repentance with Lordship Salvation, legalism, and works.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 declares, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols (the root of repentance - an inward turning away from former belief systems and a desire to be freed from one’s sins – this is conversion) to serve the living and true God (the fruit of repentance that comes after salvation). In summary, works have nothing to do with the actual conversion experience. The *root* of repentance is the change of mind that occurs at conversion, while the *fruit* of repentance is what occurs after one is saved and becomes a confirmation of their salvation (Eph. 2:10; Matt. 13:8). In spite of what the Free Grace Movement is teaching today, everyone who comes to genuine faith in Christ has repented of their sins and of anything that has become a barrier that keeps them from expressing faith in Christ. Repentance paves the way for faith to occur.

Repentance does not override the message of free grace (Rom. 3:24). Biblical repentance brings a person to the place where they realize their need for grace. Repentance is the recognition that a person is a sinner, that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, and that, as a condemned sinner, he is on a broad road that leads to hell (Matthew 7:13-14). As it relates to salvation and conversion, faith and works are contrasted to one another (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:28; Titus 3:5). Faith has nothing to do with works. The same is true regarding repentance and works. Repentance, which is simply the recognition of a person’s sinfulness before God, the desire for pardon and release from the power of sin and Satan, is not a legalistic work, any more than faith is a work. In essence, repentance and faith work synergistically together in bringing a person to Christ. They complement one another and are a free grace response of a sinner coming to Christ for salvation.



Yes, the Bible teaches I can have *complete assurance* that I am saved apart from my works (Eph. 2:8-9; John 3:14-18; 6:47; 1 John 5:13; Isa. 45:22). And yes, the Scriptures also teach that I can also have a *secondary confirmation* that I am saved by the way God has been



changing or transforming my life (John 15:1-8; 1 John 3:7-10; 5:18-20; 2 Pet. 1:10) and when I continue to embrace the basic truths related to Christ and my salvation (Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:38-39; 1 John 4:15; 5:1). I conclude as a Christian, “I know I’m not always what God wants me to be, but I thank God that I’m not what I used to be!”



I think many free gracers have thrown the baby out with the bathwater! How can the offer of grace at the time of one’s salvation (Titus 2:11) and the transformation that grace brings which follows a person’s salvation (Titus 2:12) be considered “free” if it keeps people bound to their former sins and belief systems which once separated them from God? This is

why repentance is a necessary prerequisite and compliment to saving faith in Christ. It should be noted that this extreme free grace position of “no repentance” and “no transformation” has never been historically embraced by traditional dispensationalism. George Zeller is correct when concluding that it is “a distorted mutation of what true dispensationalists taught and believed.”

Repentance and faith are like the heads and tails on a coin (Acts 20:21). They cannot be separated in respect to the sinner's response to God in salvation. Whenever the



Bible speaks of faith in Christ, it cannot be absent from repentance, or else that person would never get "to faith alone in Christ alone" for his or her salvation. Whenever the Bible speaks of repentance in relation to salvation (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30; Rom. 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:9), it cannot be absent from faith, or else the sinner would never get to the place of trusting in Christ as his Savior. So, let's settle for both heads and tails, when it comes to repentance and faith, as being part of the sinner's conversion response to God. Even John's Gospel, which speaks of belief in the Son of God, and which free gracers so avidly point to in order to confirm their position of no repentance, teaches that men reject coming to Jesus on the basis of an unrepentant heart ("men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil" – John 3:19).

Yes, we are justified freely by God's grace alone (Rom. 3:24), in Christ alone, by faith alone (John 3:16, Gal. 3:26). But here is the flip side. We must also desire to be freed from our warped belief systems and wretched acts of rebellion against God, when coming to Christ by grace alone and through faith alone (John 3:19; 5:40; 2 Pet. 3:9). Repentance will always coincide with a genuine expression of faith in Christ. There will be a change of mind and heart regarding a person's rebellious ways and ideas which run contrary to God's revelation of himself (Rom. 3:23) and salvation through Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12).

A lost sinner cannot be saved if they want to merely "try Jesus" while at the same time believing in reincarnation or karma. They cannot be

saved if they still embrace the delusion that there are many pathways to Heaven (John 14:6). The sinner will not say, “Jesus, I’m coming to you on my own terms. I’m not such a bad person after all. I’ve done many good things throughout my lifetime. This whole idea that ‘there is none righteous;’ well, I just can’t accept it. It won’t fly with me. And surely, I’m not as bad as an Adolph Hitler or Osama bin Laden.”

A person must repent of their pagan philosophies and rebellion against God before they can understand the Biblical concept and need for eternal life (John 6:47) and before they can commit their faith alone to Christ for salvation (2 Tim. 1:12). No, we cannot be truly free from sin and unbelief without wanting freedom and experiencing it through the saving and life-transforming grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-12).



“I’m free from the fear of tomorrow, I’m free from the guilt of the past,  
For I’ve traded all my shackles, For a glorious song,  
I’m free, praise the Lord, free at last!”