

## What is “Free Grace Theology”?

Theological labels are a convenient way to summarize belief systems. Many labels have become an established part of theological dialogue, like *Arminianism*, *Calvinism*, *amillennialism*, or *premillennialism*. Many who hear the label “Free Grace Theology” wonder what it means. Here is a brief summation.

**1. Free Grace teaches that the grace of salvation is absolutely free.** This is the obvious place to begin, though it should be unnecessary to say this since the word *grace* (Greek *charis*) essentially means a free and undeserved gift. However, since some speak of *costly* or *cheap* grace, it is necessary to clarify that grace is totally *free*. That does not mean it is free to the giver, who in this case is God, but it means that no payment or merit is required from those to whom it is offered, which would be all unsaved and undeserving sinners. Romans 3:24 distinguishes between the free gift to the recipient and the cost to the Giver: “having been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

**2. Free Grace means that the grace of salvation can be received only through faith.** Since we as sinners can do nothing to earn God’s grace, it has to be given as a gift which can only be received through faith. By *faith* (or *believing*, which is from the same Greek word) we mean the human response of accepting something as true and trustworthy. It is a conviction, an inner persuasion. This definition precludes any other conditions of works, performance, or merit (Rom. 4:4-5). Faith cannot be defined by obedience to Christian commands, baptism, surrender, commitment of one’s life to God, or turning from sins. These things can and should be the results of faith, but they are distinct from faith itself, otherwise grace ceases to be grace (Rom. 11:6). Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, not by works . . .” Faith is a simple response, but that does not mean that it is an easy one. Many who hold to Free Grace believe that repentance, as a change of mind or heart, can sometimes be used to describe the aspect of faith in which we come to a conviction or persuasion about something. Other Free Grace proponents do not think repentance (as turning from sins) has any role in salvation or saving faith.

**3. Free Grace believes the object of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ.** Faith must always have an object, because faith itself is not the effective cause of our salvation (We are saved “by grace”), but the instrumental means through which we are saved (“through faith”). The One who actually saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is not any Jesus, it is Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again and guarantees eternal salvation to all who believe in Him.

**4. Free Grace holds to the finished work of Christ.** Grace is free because Jesus Christ did all the work on our behalf. His proclamation “It is finished” on the cross means that He made the final and full payment for the penalty for our sins. It also means we cannot add anything to what Jesus accomplished. We cannot do anything to earn our salvation or to keep our salvation. Free Grace therefore teaches eternal security for the believer.

**5. Free grace provides the only basis for assurance of salvation.** Any system or belief that requires our performance cannot give assurance of salvation. Human performance is subjective, variable, unpredictable, and always imperfect. Faith must rest in Jesus Christ and His promise as revealed in the Word of God. The person and work of Christ and the Word of God are objective truths that cannot change. Therefore Free Grace offers the only basis for full assurance of salvation.

**6. Free Grace distinguishes between salvation and discipleship.** While some theological systems believe that all Christians are disciples, Free Grace understands that the condition for eternal salvation (believe) is distinct from the many conditions for discipleship (deny oneself, take up your cross, follow Christ, abide in His

Word, love Christ more than your family, etc.). Since grace is absolutely free, it cannot demand these conditions or it ceases to be grace. Free Grace believes that the commitments of discipleship should be the result of salvation, not the requirement. To make them conditions of salvation inserts works and human merit into the gospel of grace.

**7. Free Grace teaches that the Christian life is also by grace through faith.** Since we are saved by grace and kept saved by grace, we also grow by grace which is accessed through faith. Grace provides everything we don't deserve and more for anything we need. Just as in salvation, the grace to grow is available to us through faith: "through whom [the Lord Jesus Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. . ." (Rom. 5:2; compare Gal. 2:20).

**8. Free Grace provides the best motivation for godly living.** If salvation is by human performance, there is no assurance, and if there is no assurance, a motivation for good conduct easily becomes to prove we are saved or to avoid hell. Guilt, fear, and doubt can produce *good* conduct, but not necessarily *godly* conduct. Godly conduct includes the inner motivations of love and gratitude. The assurance of God's grace and the finished work of Christ allow Christians to grow in an environment of freedom and unconditional love (Titus 2:11-12).

**9. Free Grace holds that the Christian is accountable.** According to Free Grace, the believer is set free from any demands of the law or works as a basis for eternal salvation. But Free Grace also teaches that Christians should live godly lives because: 1) We should be grateful for what God has done (Rom. 12:1-2); 2) God wants us to have good works (Eph. 2:10); 3) We have a new position in Christ (Rom. 6:1-14); 4) We have a new Master—Jesus (Rom. 6:15-23); and 5) We have a new power—the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-11). Because of these things, Free Grace teaches that God will hold us accountable for the kind of lives we lead. God can discipline us in this life (Heb. 12:5-11) and we will face the future Judgment Seat of Christ where believers will give an account to God (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10). In this judgment, believers will be rewarded or denied rewards. In no way does Free Grace teach that Christians can sin without consequence.

**10. Free Grace is committed first to an accurate interpretation of the Bible.** This should go without saying, but is necessary because many have forced their theological systems on their interpretations instead of letting the Bible speak for itself. The Free Grace system is the result of a literal and plain sense approach to the Bible that considers God's various ways of administering His plan for the world through the ages, and the proper contexts of any Bible passage. The Free Grace system seeks above all to be biblical. Its first commitment is not to a theological system, but to what the Bible says, even if some particulars cannot be reconciled easily to other teachings or traditional interpretations. Therefore, the Free Grace position allows for various interpretations of some biblical passages as long as they are consistent with good principles of Bible interpretation and the clear teaching of God's free grace.

## Conclusion

Free Grace theology begins with the plain and clear teaching of the Bible that grace is absolutely free. From this, the Bible's teachings about salvation, faith, security, assurance, the Christian life, and discipleship are viewed consistent with the unconditional nature of grace. The free grace of God should motivate Christians to worship, serve, and live godly for the "God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) who "first loved us" (1 John 4:19).