

"FREE GRACE" THEOLOGY: 7 WAYS GRUDEM
MISREPRESENTS BIBLICAL REPENTANCE
(PART 2)

A Paper

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by
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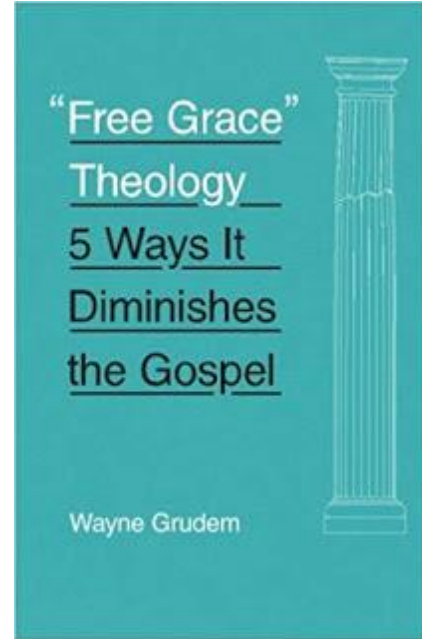
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Introduction

This article is a continuation of a previous article I wrote titled: “‘Free Grace’ Theology: 6 Ways Grudem Misrepresents Biblical Repentance”. In this follow-up article, I’m going to cite yet another example of how Wayne Grudem misrepresents both Charlie Bing and the Bible in regards to biblical repentance.

In Grudem's book “Free Grace” Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel, one of the things he says is: “In order to evaluate Bing’s ‘change of mind’ definition [of repentance], in the next two sections we need to examine evidence from Greek lexicons and from English translations of the Bible.”¹ In my previous article which I mentioned above, I showed how Grudem misrepresented the Greek lexicons. In this article I will show how Grudem misrepresents English translations of the Bible.

In evaluating Bing’s “change of mind” definition of repentance, Grudem makes a bold claim in regards to how the English translations of the Bible translate the Greek word *metanoēō*. Grudem claims that: “ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS SAY ‘REPENT!’ AND NOT ‘CHANGE YOUR MIND!’”² In the next sentence, Grudem similarly declares that “the definition of repentance as a mere ‘change of mind’ ...differs from all widely known English Bible translations.”³ Grudem then proceeds to quote several Bible verses from the New Testament which translate the Greek words *metanoēō* and *metanoia* as repent and repentance, but strangely he never once mentions how repentance is translated in the Old Testament! This is especially odd considering the fact that Grudem



is evaluating Charlie Bing's understanding of repentance as "a change of mind"—and Bing does in fact reference the Old Testament usage and translation of the Hebrew words for metanoēō. For example, under the heading "The Meaning of Metanoēō" (p. 69), Dr. Bing discusses the Hebrew word shub and the Hebrew word nacham. Concerning the latter, Bing says that "while the basic meaning [of metanoēō] is 'to change the mind,' there is sometimes implication of emotional and volitional elements, but never is a change in behavior necessary to the word itself."⁴ Then in a footnote at the bottom of the page, Bing writes the following:

In the LXX [the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament] the verb [metanoēō] often translates the Hebrew נִחַם [naham, also spelled nacham], "to be sorry, to comfort oneself" (A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament [BDB, by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, 1980], s.v. "נִחַם [naham]," pp. 636-37) which shows an emotional element. It is significant, however, that נִחַם [naham] occurs 108 times in the Old Testament, but is used only three times of the repentance of men (Job 42:6; Jer. 8:6; 31:19); and none of these refer to salvation from eternal judgment. For further discussion, see Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation, Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament," JOTGES 2 (Spring 1989): 26. (Bing, Lordship Salvation, p. 69, footnote 40.)

Interestingly, in an article titled "[The Repentance of God](#)," Lester J. Kuyper notes that in the Pentateuch the scholars who translated the Greek Septuagint (LXX) shied away from having God repent, because

"[r]epentance or changeableness seemed to be at variance with the omniscience of God. . . . This scruple, however, did not bother the Greek translators of the rest of the OT . . . The point to be made here is that the LXX apart from the Pentateuch understood this verb [NHM] to mean a change in mind or purpose which occurred when it is said that Jahweh repented." (Kuyper, L. J. "The Repentance of God". Reformed Review [Vol. 18, No. 4, May 1965], see pp. 6-7, bold added.)

Although Grudem quotes from page 69 of Bing's book, Grudem never once mentions Bing's statements on that very page about the Hebrew word nacham. Why is this? Could it be because the Hebrew word nacham (the word often translated metanoēō in the Septuagint) is used several times in the Old Testament in reference to God Himself and is translated into English in several instances as "change His mind"! For instance, the New American Standard Bible (NASB)—which by the way is a "widely known English Bible translation"⁵—translates the Hebrew word nacham (metanoēō in the Greek Septuagint) as "change His mind" in the following instances:

"And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind [metanoēsei in LXX]; for He is not a man that He should change His mind [metanoēsai in LXX]." (1 Samuel 15:29, NASB)

"For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be dark, because I have spoken, I have purposed, and I will not change My mind [metanoēsō in LXX], nor will I turn from it." (Jeremiah 4:28, NASB)

“if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better [metanoēsō in LXX] of the good with which I had promised to bless it.” (Jeremiah 18:10, NASB)

“The LORD changed His mind [metanoēson in LXX] about this. ‘It shall not be,’ said the LORD.” (Amos 7:3, NASB)

“The LORD changed His mind [metanoēson in LXX] about this. ‘This too shall not be,’ said the Lord GOD.” (Amos 7:6, NASB)

Sadly, Grudem never once mentions these relevant Old Testament Bible verses which Dr. Bing alludes to in his book.⁶ Instead, Grudem simply glosses over a few Bible verses of his own liking—none from the Old Testament—and then quickly concludes “that no committee of English Bible translators has agreed with Bing’s definition, ‘change of mind.’”⁷ But here Grudem misrepresents both Dr. Bing and the Bible by failing to mention Dr. Bing’s statements on metanoēō in the LXX and failing to mention the relevant Bible verses in the Old Testament where the Hebrew word nacham and the Greek word metanoēō (in the LXX) are both translated in several instances as “change His mind” in the New American Standard Bible (NASB)—a “widely known English Bible translation”.

Grudem makes several remarks in his book about how to arrive at the proper definition and understanding of saving faith. He correctly points out in chapter 2 that it “is simply incorrect theological reasoning” to base our understanding of saving faith on only one book in the Bible. Instead, we should take into consideration “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27)—both Old Testament and New Testament. Should we not

also appeal to both the Old Testament and New Testament when seeking to understand biblical repentance? Grudem makes the following statements and would do well do apply his reasoning equally to both faith and repentance:

The early church rightly condemned the teachings of Marcion (c. AD 85-160), whose canon of Scripture included only eleven books (no Old Testament, and in the New Testament only a shortened Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's thirteen epistles). . . . If other verses in other books of the Bible give us further teaching about the nature of saving faith [and biblical repentance], then we should use those verses as well to help us understand faith [and repentance]. These other verses are also part of "all Scripture," which is given to us by God to be "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). . . . We should use every relevant passage in the whole Bible to define the nature of saving faith [and repentance]. (Grudem, "Free Grace" Theology: Five Ways It Diminishes the Gospel, pp. 49-50, 54-55. Note: Grudem in his book affirms that repentance is implied together with faith. He writes that "we should regard repentance and faith as two closely connected parts of one overall action, parts that cannot be separated." Ibid., p. 45.)

Grudem is correct here in urging us to take into consideration both Old Testament and New Testament—"the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)—to help us understand saving faith. Should we not also appeal to both the Old Testament and New Testament when seeking to understand biblical repentance? Grudem would do well do apply his reasoning equally to both faith and repentance. But unfortunately in the chapter of his book where he deals with the subject of repentance (Chapter 2: "No Call

to Repent of Sins"), Grudem only quotes three Bible verses from the Old Testament—all from the book of Isaiah (Isa. 6:5 [Grudem quotes Isaiah 6:5 but incorrectly gives the verse reference as "Isa. 6:15.]", 55:6-7)—and provides no exegesis to show if these verses even support his understanding of repentance. In fact, thinking of Grudem's bold claim that supposedly "ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS SAY 'REPENT!' AND NOT 'CHANGE YOUR MIND!'" (p. 64)—the three Bible verses that Grudem quotes from the Old Testament don't even meet his qualification that "ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS SAY 'REPENT!'" So how did Grudem pick these three Bible verses if they don't even use the word "repent"?

The fact that the Hebrew word *nacham* and the Greek word *metanoō* (in the Septuagint) are both translated in the NASB in several places as “change His mind” (in reference to God) and not "repent" as in most English Bible translations—this poses a real problem for Grudem because his entire premise is that repentance in the Bible does not simply mean “a change of mind” but in his view it must also include things like "a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." Thus it's no surprise—but it is sad—that Grudem in his book omits any and all discussion of this relevant biblical material from the Old Testament cited by Charlie Bing which I have discussed in this article. Just more evidence that Grudem misrepresents both Dr. Bing and the Bible.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ Wayne Grudem, "Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), p.56.

² Ibid., p. 64. It's a bold claim to say that "ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS [OF THE BIBLE] SAY 'REPENT!' AND NOT 'CHANGE YOUR MIND!'" Let's examine the first half of Grudem's premise. Is it true that all English translations of the Bible say "repent" for *metanoēō* or is Grudem once again misrepresenting the facts? Let's take a closer look. Grudem in his book goes on to explain: "This verb [*metanoēō*] is translated as 'repent' in the following Bible versions: KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, NIV, NET, HCSB, NLT, RSV, and NRSV." (Ibid., p. 64.) Okay, but that's not "ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS" as Grudem initially claimed. The truth is—and this is most obvious—not all English translations of the Bible say "repent" when translating the Greek word *metanoēō*. Personally, I like how J. B. Phillips translates Matthew 3:2 (and similar verses with the word *metanoēō*). The Phillips translation says, "You must change your hearts—for the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived!" This translation of Matthew 3:2 supports Charlie Bing's understanding of repentance, and disproves Grudem's sweeping claim that "ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS SAY 'REPENT!'" In regards to the fact that the Phillips translation of Matthew 3:2 (and similar verses) supports Charlie Bing's understanding of repentance, even Grudem affirms this in a footnote in his book (p. 56, f.n. 13) when he writes: "Bing says that 'it is also accurate to translate the word repentance as a change of heart.'" Charles Bing, *Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2015), 51." So we see that contrary to what Grudem has claimed, not "ALL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS SAY 'REPENT!'"

³ Ibid., p. 64.

⁴ Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response*, 2nd GraceLife Edition (Xulon Press, 2010), p. 69. (see also

<https://www.gracelife.org/resources/dissertation/?id=3#ref40a> Last Accessed, May 2020)

⁵ Grudem, "Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel, p. 64. Grudem has good things to say about the New American Standard Bible (NASB)—although he personally prefers the English Standard Version (ESV). In an article titled "The Advantages of the English Standard Version (ESV) Translation," Grudem categorizes the NASB as an "essentially literal" translation and gives this summary: "In 1971, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) was published by the Lockman Foundation. It was precise and accurate in its word-for-word literalness, and for that reason it became especially popular among pastors who did verse-by-verse and word-for-word expository preaching." Grudem goes on to say that "the NASB, [is] widely respected for its accuracy" (pp. 8-9).

⁶ See Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, p. 69, footnote 40.

⁷ Grudem, "Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel, p. 66.