

GRACE **IN** **FOCUS**
www.faithalone.org
SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2013

What Is Replacement Theology?

by

Ronald E. Diprose



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Letter from the Editor

The magazine has been changing. I've heard many positive comments about what Shawn has done in regard to *the look*. In addition, we've also slightly adjusted the nature of the articles or notices that we publish.

New in this issue is a box on "News from the Grace Community." There you learn of a new ministry for a well-known Free Grace pastor (who has been helping Dr. Radmacher for many years) and of the home going of three beloved Free Grace pioneers.

Dr. Ronald Diprose writes about Israel as God's chosen people. This is the first of a series of articles in which Diprose discusses replacement theology. I think you will find the entire series very profitable (as I found his book on the same subject).

Cheap law is a new term to most of us. Shawn Lazar shows that Lordship Salvation really is preaching both cheap law and cheap grace.

John 8:30-32 is seen by many to refer to false professors. Dr. John Niemelä shows that the key issue in John 8:30-32 is abiding in Jesus' word.

Bruce Henning of Detroit gives us a challenging article on what the expressions "of God" and "not of God" mean in John's Gospel.

There is a fascinating mini-article by Bill Fiess of Virginia which sheds new light on what the Lord meant when He spoke of delivering a servant to the torturers until he paid all he owed.

Finally, I write on the meaning of "the will of the Father" in Matt 7:21.

Enjoy.




What Is Replacement Theology?

by Ronald E. Diprose

Before defining Replacement Theology, it might be helpful to give an example of how this way of thinking has been assumed in much of Christendom. There is a worldwide movement which presents itself unabashedly as replacing Israel but hardly ever encounters any criticism by doing so. I refer to the movement which has given itself the name of "Jehovah's Witnesses." When members of this movement knock on doors they rarely meet with the skepticism they deserve because of their claim to be God's special Witnesses. In reality this claim is a bit like an American citizen presenting himself or herself as a Russian Ambassador!

WHO'S WITNESSES?

Some time ago I was confronted with this claim at my front gate. My daughter-in-law had witnessed to two young members of the local Watchtower congregation, creating some doubts in their minds about

the orthodoxy of their religious profession. Consequently one of the local leaders paid us a visit. It was Saturday morning and I happened to be at home, so I went personally to talk with this gentleman. After introductions, I asked him where his organization had got its name from. He answered, correctly, that it was from Isaiah chapter 43. Then I put a series of questions to him:

"But are not the people that God addresses here descendants of Jacob? Don't the words, *'You are my witnesses' declares the Lord* refer to these people? After all, the same passage contains a significant prophecy concerning the return of Jacob's descendants to their ancient homeland after a lengthy exile, the land promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. And what do you say about the fact that when speaking of His witnesses, God contrasts the attempts of other nations to make predictions concerning the future with the certainty that what descendants of Jacob, God's special witnesses, predict will in fact happen? Are not these people the true

witnesses of YHWH (or of Jehovah, as the Watchtower literature prefers to pronounce the name of God)?"

The gentleman looked at me for a moment, deep in thought, then said, with an air of superiority: "Yes, yes, that is true, but you need to understand that we are *spiritual* Israel." I answered, "But didn't Isaiah the prophet speak of a faithful remnant *within* the nation of Israel?" Then I mentioned my meetings with messianic Jews belonging to some of the 120 Messianic Assemblies in Israel. I asked him how he would classify these descendants of Jacob, and all the other messianic congregations in the Jewish Diaspora. I asked: "Are they not *spiritual* Israel in our time?" This brought me to my last question: "And if these people are *spiritual* Israel, as I believe they are, what justification can you give for calling another group of people '*spiritual* Israel'?"

The leader of the Watchtower movement remained silent for some seconds and then said, as much to himself as to me, "Nobody has ever asked me these questions before!"

continued on p. 4

GRACE IN FOCUS

Volume 28, Number 5

© 2013, by Grace Evangelical Society

Editor: Robert N. Wilkin, Ph.D.

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Circulation Manager: Mark "The Rhymenoceros" Gray

Grace in Focus is a free, bimonthly magazine about the gospel, assurance, and related issues. For your free U.S. subscription sign up on our website or send your name and address to 4851 S I-35 E, Ste. 203, Corinth, TX 76210. If you would like to make a donation to offset the costs of printing and postage, it would be greatly appreciated.

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I answered, "That doesn't surprise me, because for many centuries the Roman Catholic Church has also identified itself as the true Israel, in the place of God's elect people. And so have other parts of Christendom. Even some Evangelical Christians make the error of considering themselves *spiritual* Israel!"

The phenomenon of religious groups, like the so-called "British Israelites" and the Mormons, who claim to be part of Israel or apply to themselves the prerogatives that properly belong to ethnic Israel, is widespread. The trend goes back to the second century A.D. when the Church tried to build its identity in the Roman world by posing as the rightful heir to all that belonged to ethnic Israel from the time of Abraham until the time of Christ. Very soon this self-identification became a theological presupposition called "supercessionism," now more commonly described as Replacement Theology. According to Replacement Theology, *the Church has replaced Israel completely and permanently in the working out of God's plan in history.*¹

There are three varieties of supercessionism: *the theology of fulfillment, retributive supercessionism, and structural supercessionism.*

THE THEOLOGY OF FULFILLMENT

Proponents of "the theology of fulfillment" are not hostile towards Israel. They simply believe that Israel's role in the plan of God terminated with the first advent of the Messiah. They believe that all prophecies concerning the future of Israel should be interpreted as having their fulfillment in the Person and work of Christ, the Savior of the world. Proponents of this view do not consider themselves supporters of Replacement Theology as they believe Israel completed her role, as God had envisaged it from eternity. However there are a number of Biblical statements which give pause to those holding this view, such as these words spoken by Peter to his fellow Jews: "Jesus...must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21). According to Peter, not all OT prophecies were fulfilled in the Person and work of Christ *during his first advent*. Peter understood all prophecies having to do with the "restoration" of

Israel as awaiting fulfillment in the context of Christ's second advent.

RETRIBUTIVE SUPERCESSIONISM


According to the second variety of supercessionism, called "retributive supercessionism," the Church has replaced Israel because Israel's disobedience made her unworthy of God's blessing and put her under God's judgment. However, this position flies in the face of statements such as these words of God through the prophet Jeremiah: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD" (Jer 31:37). At the time when Jeremiah spoke these words, God was about to send Judah into exile because of idolatry and because she had neglected to observe the sabbatical years required by the Mosaic law. But this punishment was to be followed by her return to the promised land (Jer 30:1-3). So far as such retributive judgment for disobedience is concerned, God affirmed through the prophet Amos that it is Israel's status as the only elect people that makes retribution inevitable when they sin against their God. "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3:2). Amos is telling us that divine punishment confirms Israel's position as an elect nation.

HERMENEUTICAL SUPERCESSIONISM

The third variety of supercessionism is the most radical, being structural and hermeneutical in nature. Hermeneutical supercessionism includes, but actually goes beyond, the concept of the Church replacing Israel. According to this approach, everything national and physical are mere symbols of spiritual reality. From the early second century A.D., this tendency can be seen in the allegorizing of the Old Testament. Origen, a 3rd century theologian, went so far as to identify all believers, from Genesis on, as members of the Church, of which the people of Israel were a mere type. However there are many passages in the Old Testament where such allegorizing will simply not work. Take for example this passage: "'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when people will no longer say,

"As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt," but they will say, "As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them." Then they will live in their own land'" (Jer 23:5-8). Irenaeus applied this and other such prophecies to Gentile converts (*Against Heresies*, Book V, 34), but there is no way that Gentile converts to Christ can be said to have first experienced something like the Exodus from Egypt and, at a much later date, something like the return of the Jews to Israel from all the countries to which God had banished them. The content of Biblical revelation defies such attempts to allegorize away predictions concerning the future of Israel in relation to the future of the world.

CONCLUSION

Such are the varieties of Replacement Theology. In our next article, we will see that the idea of ethnic Israel's eclipse as God's elect people was not the fruit of careful Bible study but rather the product of a historical process in which the two monotheistic faiths, Judaism and Christianity, were rivals in seeking to retain or to gain acceptance in the Roman world, following the two Jewish wars of 66-70 and 132-135 A.D. 

Ronald E. Diprose was Academic Dean at Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, Rome, for twenty five years, and is Editor of the theological journal Lux Biblica. His numerous publications include Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004).

¹For an independent survey of supercessionism in Christian Theology, see Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville, TN, Academic, 2007), especially pp. 3-8, 37-104.

Is the "Will of the Father" a Life of Obedience?

By Bob Wilkin

INTRODUCTION

My friend, Dr. Jody Dillow, a leading Free Grace theologian, does not believe that the expression *the will of the Father* in Matt 7:21 refers to believing in Christ. That's because he understands entering the kingdom here as a special reward of *abundant kingdom entrance* that only overcoming saints will receive.

Dillow describes the will of the Father in Matt 7:21 in this way, "It should be obvious to any unbiased reader that the calls to enter the kingdom are conditioned upon works" (*Final Destiny*, p. 228). A bit later he adds, "In the context of the Sermon on the Mount to do the 'will of the Father' means to obey the teaching of the sermon" (p. 273; see also p. 303, "ethical adherence to the Sermon's precepts...surpassing righteousness").

Dillow acknowledges that it is possible that *the will of the Father* refers to believing in His Son: "While 'doing the will of the Father' could possibly refer to believing in Christ for salvation (John 6:39), in the immediate context this refers to obeying the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount" (p. 302). In the latest (9th) edition of *Final*

Destiny, he says that the will of the Father refers to believing in Christ for everlasting life "once in John" (p. 306).

In *Final Destiny*, when discussing this issue, Dillow mentions me and others who hold that the will of the Father is believing in the Son. He suggests that we do so "without any proof" (p. 306). I welcome the challenge to prove my view. In this article I will give seven proofs that the will of the Father in Matt 7:21 is believing in His Son for everlasting life.

SEVEN PROOFS THAT THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN MATTHEW 7:21 REFERS TO BELIEVING IN CHRIST

The seven proofs are simple and compelling.

First, the Lord here speaks of entering the kingdom and the simplest understanding is that's what He meant. It is hard to imagine any of Jesus' listeners thinking of entering the kingdom as not referring to entering the kingdom, but instead to *richly entering it*. When the Apostle Peter, three decades later, wished to refer to a *rich* kingdom entrance he did not speak of merely *entering* the kingdom. Instead, he said,

"for so an entrance will be supplied to you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:11, emphasis added). Since the Lord is talking about kingdom entrance, then the will of the Father here refers to believing in the Son.

Second, the connection between Matt 7:15-20 and Matt 7:21-23 shows that *unbelievers* are in view. The former speaks of false prophets (v 15) who are known by their fruits, i.e., their words, their false teachings (cf. Matt 12:33-36 where *fruit* is identified as *words*). The latter also speaks of people who claim to prophesy in Jesus' name (v 22). It is reasonable to equate the false prophets of vv 15-20 with those claiming to prophesy in Jesus' name in v 22. I see no evidence that the Lord is saying that the false prophets of vv 15-20 are born again. Indeed, there is no mention of faith in Christ anywhere in Matt 7:15-23. To suggest that these are unfaithful believers being excluded from kingdom reward is not suggested by the context.

Third, that these people profess *works* in a judgment related to kingdom entrance suggests they are unbelievers. Is not the sole condition of entering the kingdom faith in Christ? Is not their basis of assurance



totally wrong? These people have failed the second question in the Evangelism Explosion program ("Why should God let you into His heaven?").

Fourth, the Lord's words, "I never knew you" suggest that these people had never come to faith in Him and hence they did not have everlasting life.

Fifth, "that day" most naturally refers to the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers (Rev 20:11-15), not the Judgment Seat of Christ where believers will be judged (2 Cor 5:9-11). If this refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ as Dillow suggests, then where is the evidence? Unlike the parables of the minas (Luke 19:11-27) and talents (Matt 25:14-30), those being judged are not called Jesus' servants. Indeed, the Lord specifically denies knowing them. This suggests lack of relationship, not lack of fellowship. Nor is the issue of ruling over cities mentioned here. It seems much more likely that the Great White Throne Judgment is in view. Indeed, there seems to be no indication that the Bema is in view.

Sixth, we know from many other texts that the will of the Father is that people believe in His Son. This is easily seen in John 6:39-40: "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Here we see the will of the Father concerning Jesus and concerning us. *With respect to kingdom entrance*, the will of the Father for humans is that we must believe in the Lord Jesus for everlasting life, and His will for His Son is that He must guarantee the eternal destiny of all who believe in Him.

The same idea is seen in John 5:24-30. The will of the Father concerning Jesus is stated in v 30: "I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." In context, that *will* is giving everlasting life to those who believe in Him: "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24, emphasis added). To believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father who sent Him to proclaim the promise of life. John 5:24 shows that the will of the Father is to believe in His Son. Jesus' listeners claimed to believe in the Father while at the same time they rejected Him. That

is impossible, the Lord is saying. To believe the Father requires believing in the Son whom He sent since it is the Father's will that people believe in His Son.

Seventh, one must do the will of the Father, whatever that is, in order to have this promised kingdom entrance, whatever that is. It is not enough to do part of the will of the Father. A person who kept most of the will of the Father, but failed in one point, would be guilty of not doing the Father's will. Isn't that what Jas 2:10 says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"?

"A person who kept most of the will of the Father, but failed in one point, would be guilty of not doing the Father's will."

See also Gal 3:10. To fail in one point of the law is to fail the entire law. Only if the will of the Father is believing in His Son can anyone actually do the will of the Father.

AN EVALUATION OF FOUR ARGUMENTS THAT THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN MATTHEW 7:21 REFERS TO A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE

Dillow gives four reasons why he is convinced that the will of the Father in Matt 7:21 concerns a life of obedience, not faith in Christ.

First, Dillow says, "They proclaim a heartfelt, 'Lord, Lord'" (p. 302). Then he reasons that since these people call Jesus "Lord," they are probably believers: "In view of the fact that Paul said no one can make such a heartfelt confession except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3), a possible interpretation of this verse suggests that these people are regenerate" (p. 302).

While he agrees the false prophets of Matt 7:15-20 are unregenerate, he says, "Starting in v 21 the scene changes" (p. 302). Several pages later, Dillow does go on to say that the prophets in Matt 7:22 are false prophets too, but he calls them "false Christian

prophets" (pp. 307-308; see also p. 300). He cites a passage from the *Didache*, an early Christian writing, which warned about false Christian prophets (pp. 307-308).

But 1 Cor 12:3 cannot possibly mean that whoever says the words, "Lord, Lord," or "Jesus is Lord" is born again. Obviously most Evangelicals have said those words many times. So do Catholics, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Are they probably believers? No. Any intelligent person, believer or unbeliever, would use those words to address the Lord Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The word *heartfelt* is not found in Matt 7:21. While it is possible they said the words "Lord, Lord" with great emotion and conviction, there is no way of knowing that.

All Paul was saying is that any honest confession that Jesus is Lord is the result of the Spirit revealing that to a person. Unbelievers can believe Bible truths, and if they do so, it is because the Spirit has done a work in their lives. This first argument is a non-starter.

Second, Dillow argues the expression "'the will of the Father' never means 'believe on Christ for salvation' in Matthew, and only once in John" (p. 306). But if it refers to believing in Jesus at least once in John, then why could it not also mean that in Matt 7:21, especially in a context dealing with kingdom entrance or exclusion (cf. "depart from Me" in v 23)?

John 6:39-40 is a passage which is widely understood to teach that the will of the Father is to believe in His Son. This is the one passage which Dillow is convinced equates the will of the Father with believing in His Son (pp. 302, 305-306). It says, "For this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life..."

Dillow's second argument is unconvincing. If we agree that the expression sometimes refers to believing in Jesus (I would say many times, but even one clear example is enough), then one cannot prove it doesn't mean that in Matt 7:21 by appealing to the expression.

Third, he suggests that since the Lord does not question their three claims, then they indeed did works that only regenerate people could do (p. 303). Dillow suggests, for example, that unbelievers could not cast out demons (p. 303).

The fact that Matthew does not tell us whether the Lord discusses their claims to have done these works does not in any

way show that they did them. Of course, we do know from Rev 20:12-14 that the Lord indeed will evaluate every claim made. He will look at every single work done by every unbeliever.

But even if they actually did these things, these are not things which unbelievers are incapable of doing. In Matt 7:15-20 the Lord spoke of false prophets. Clearly the Lord Himself said that unbelievers can prophesy in His name.

Luke tells us in Acts of "seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest," who cast out demons (Acts 19:14). Luke calls them "itinerant Jewish exorcists" (Acts 19:13). If these men had been Christians, Luke surely would not have called them "itinerant Jewish exorcists."

The fact that Matthew does not tell us whether or not the Lord questions their claims is irrelevant. The claim that unbelievers could not do such works is not true.

Fourth, Dillow argues that doing the will of the Father "is the opposite of 'those who practice lawlessness' (7:23); it is about obedience, not initial faith for salvation" (p. 306).

This is not the point. The verse is not set up as antithetically parallel to v 21. Here is an example of antithetical parallelism: "The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Ps 34:10). What is compared is lacking versus not lacking.

"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" is clearly *related* to v 21. The reason they are departing from Jesus and being sent to the lake of fire (Rev 20:15) is because they did not do the will of the Father by believing in the Son and hence they were not found in the book of life.

The words, "you who practice lawlessness [lit. you who work lawlessness]" are not the opposite of the will of the Father as Dillow suggests. *All people* work lawlessness according to Rom 3:23; Gal 3:10; and Jas 2:10—even those who do the will of the Father. We know at the Great White Throne Judgment that books of deeds will be opened and everyone present (unbelievers) will be judged according to their works: "And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Rev 20:12). Their works will show that they have no valid claim to enter the kingdom on the basis of works. By pointing out that they are sinners the Lord is making this point. Of course, the

ultimate reason why they will be sent to the lake of fire is because they did not believe in Christ, that is, they did not do the will of the Father (Matt 7:21-23; Rev 20:15).

If these people had been believers who had been unfaithful in their service, then they would *not* hear the words of v 23 ("I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"), but instead words like, "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked *servant*" (Luke 19:22, emphasis added) or "You wicked and lazy *servant...*" (Matt 25:26, emphasis added).

Dillow's fourth argument is not a compelling one.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

You may think it doesn't really matter which view is correct since both Dillow and I affirm the freeness of everlasting life conditioned solely upon believing in Jesus. And we both affirm the doctrine of eternal rewards for work done. So why even discuss this?

Clearly Dillow sees this as important. He devoted years writing *Final Destiny*, a book of over 1,000 pages. A major element in the book is this idea that kingdom entrance refers to abundance of life in the kingdom and that it is conditioned on surpassing personal righteousness. He devotes seven chapters (Chapters 18-24) or 122 pages (pp. 228-349) to this issue of entering the kingdom by doing the will of the Father.

I agree that this issue is important, though I take the opposite view that Dillow does on what entering the kingdom means and on what the will of the Father is in Matt 7:21.

Practically speaking, what difference does it make which way we understand Matt 7:21-23 and the concepts of doing the will of the Father and of entering the kingdom?

All Scripture is inspired and profitable (2 Tim 3:16-17). But—and here's the catch—God's Word is only profitable for the hearer if we use it as it was intended (Isa 55:11).

Only if we properly understand passages can we properly apply them.

First, if Dillow's interpretation of Matt 7:15-23 is right, then the correct application is to work hard to fulfill all of God's commands so that we might rule with Christ. But is that completely accurate? Is that what the rest of the NT teaches? Is not the

essential condition of ruling with Christ persevering *in our confession of Him* (Matt 10:32-33; 2 Tim 2:12)?¹ While confessing Christ is a work, that is not the same as obeying *all* of God's commands.

Second, pressed to its logical conclusion, if doing the will of the Father is obeying all of God's commands, then no one (other than the Lord Jesus) will do the will of the Father and no one will rule with Christ. Dillow is forced to conclude that the issue here is a sort of *partial* doing of the will of the Father.

Third, if Matt 7:21-23 concerns unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment, then the correct application for believers is for us to warn unbelievers that their works cannot get them into the kingdom. If they wish to spend eternity with the Lord and with His people, then they need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We could tell them about the Great White Throne Judgment. We might well walk them through Rev 20:11-15 and the books (of works) and the book (of life). We would certainly tell them that the moment one believes in Jesus for everlasting life then he has once and for all done the will of the Father and thus he will never come into judgment concerning his eternal destiny (John 5:24). Of course, in order to explain the will of the Father, I would take a person to John 3:16; 5:24; and 6:39-40.

Fourth, if the narrow way that few find in Matt 7:13-14 is the way to spending eternity with the Lord in His kingdom, then this means the majority of people will miss the kingdom. That certainly gives us a sense of urgency in evangelism.

Fifth, if the issue in Matt 7:13-14 is greatness in the kingdom as Dillow argues (see pp. 227, 242, 256, 258, 267, 279-98), then hypothetically, the majority of people could end up entering the kingdom. While that is not Dillow's position, his understanding of Matt 7:13-14 opens the way for others to conclude that. ■

Bob Wilkin is the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society.

¹ Of course, all words will be evaluated at the Bema (2 Cor 5:10). What we sow we will reap (Gal 6:7-9). The wholehearted servant has more good works and will have more cities to rule over (Luke 19:17, 19). But the minimum requirement to rule at all is enduring in our confession of Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

Not of God: The Pharisees and Election

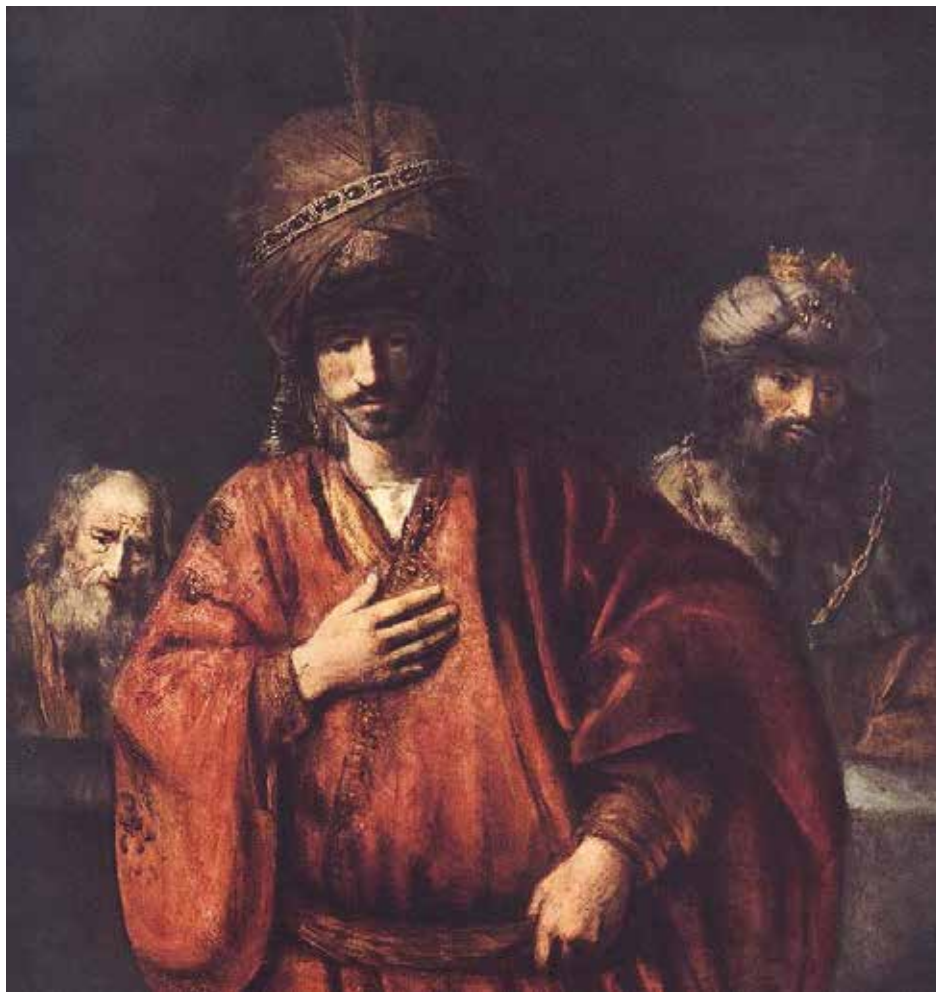
by Bruce Henning

You Pharisee!” Today, those are fightin’ words. But during the Lord Jesus’ earthly ministry, people would have seen Pharisees as the good guys. In contrast to the Sadducees, they were known for their commitment to the Law. It is no wonder then that their disbelief in Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah was a huge stumbling block for the Jews in general.

For the Apostle John, the Pharisees’s lack of faith, and their persecution and murder of Jesus, would have been a big obstacle to his Gospel’s purpose of convincing readers that Jesus is the Christ (John 20:31). If the truth about Jesus was so obvious, then why didn’t the majority of the Pharisees believe in Him? As the leaders themselves argue, “Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?” (John 7:48).

Some of the rulers did believe (John 12:42-43, 19:38), but what about the rest? How could God’s people, who studied the Scriptures in detail and looked for the Messiah, have so completely missed Him? How can it be that, “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11)?

As an effective, Spirit-led communicator, we would expect John to address this thorny problem, and he does not disappoint. Unfortunately, the passages that address the Pharisees’s unbelief are often misread as support for unconditional election. A closer examination shows that they expose the Jews’s hypocrisy in claiming to be God’s people. They reject Jesus as the Christ not because *He* isn’t who He claims to be, but because *they* aren’t who they claim to be!



SOME DID NOT BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY DID NOT BELONG TO GOD

The first conflict between the Lord Jesus and the Jews that John records occurs in chapter five. After hearing His claim to be equal with God, they seek to kill Him (5:18). The Lord defends His claim in 5:31-47, by pointing to four witnesses that should have persuaded any reasonable Jew: John the Baptist, His own ministry, God the Father, and the law of Moses.

If the problem wasn’t the evidence, it could only be one thing...*those examining it*. The Lord Jesus doesn’t restate His case or reason with them further. He knows the real problem is that they never knew God (5:37-38, 42, 44), and didn’t really understand the Law (5:39, 45-47). As long as they were blinded by a false sense of religious security, they would never see the truth.

To get a feel for the shock value of Jesus’ statement, imagine if someone were to ask a Dispensationalist, “If the Bible so clearly teaches dispensationalism, why are there

so many amillennialists?” And he answers, “Because they don’t want to know the truth. They’re completely misguided because they only care about modern trends. More than that, they aren’t even born again!” This would be a bold answer to say the least. But that’s what the Lord Jesus said to His opponents. Their problem is their stubbornness (5:40), desire to please men (5:44), an unwillingness to understand Scripture (5:39), and alienation from God (5:37). It’s not an issue of passive miscommunication; it’s active rejection of God’s Word.

In John 6:36-46 the Lord expounds more on their problem. He says, “All the Father has given to Me shall come to Me” (vs. 37) as the *reason* for their unbelief (vs. 36). He repeats Himself in verse 44, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him.” Their problem was that, despite all appearances, they did *not* belong to the Father. Jesus couldn’t be clearer: “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (6:45). They have not come, therefore they have never learned from the Father. He already covered this

in chapter five, “You do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He has sent, Him you do not believe” (5:38), and “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me” (5:46). Though these verses are often taken as proof for unconditional election, they actually continue the theme (from chapter five) of exposing the Jews’s hypocrisy.

The Lord Jesus applies what was true of the Jews in general to the Pharisees in chap. 8. Verse 19 repeats the similar refrain, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” In fact, He goes on to call them “children of the devil” (see 8:42-47).

SOME BELIEVE BECAUSE THEY BELONG TO GOD

But isn’t everyone a child of the devil before they come to Christ? Today, yes. But not at that time. The Gospel of John takes place during a great transition. When Christ came, some already had a relationship with God the Father, but many didn’t.¹ There *were* people who were of God and so heard His words (8:47). In verses like John 6:37 and 10:27, some people believe *because they already were God’s people*.

Anna and Simeon belonged to the Father before the advent of the Lord Jesus. As a

result, God ensured that when the Messiah did come they would believe in Him, even though He was only a baby! (Luke 2:25-38)

The blind man in chapter nine is the same “of God” category. He is willing and eager

“They reject Jesus as the Christ not because *He* isn’t who He claims to be, but because *they* aren’t who they claim to be!”


to believe in Christ (John 9:36). Unfortunately, the chapter break interrupts the Lord’s explanation of what has happened with the Pharisees. This is what the good shepherd discourse is all about: “The sheep hear His voice and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out” (10:3).

In 10:26, the Lord repeats why the Jewish leaders didn’t believe. Unlike the beggar, they were not of God. But it wasn’t too late. They weren’t permanently stuck as “non-sheep.” Christ soon invites them to become

His sheep (10:37-38). Doing that, however, would require seeking God’s truth above man’s opinion (5:44), and humbling themselves to admit they were blind (9:41).

APPLICATION

Throughout his Gospel, John shows that the Jew’s rejection of Jesus was *not* grounded in insufficient evidence; rather it was because although they thought they were of God, they actually weren’t. To see these passages as proof for unconditional election distracts us from the warning against vain religion.

There are many like the Pharisees today. They say they are experts in religion, yet they vehemently oppose the gospel. This cannot be. Despite degrees, appearances, or popularity, they have the same problem as the Pharisees. They are not of God. “If they were of God, they would hear God’s words” (John 8:47). 

Bruce Henning works in full time ministry in Detroit, and spends his time in evangelism, discipleship, and itinerant preaching.

¹Henning is alluding to the fact that OT saints believed in the coming Messiah for everlasting life (cf. Gen 15:6, John 5:8, Rom 4:1-8), though they did not yet know who the Messiah was.

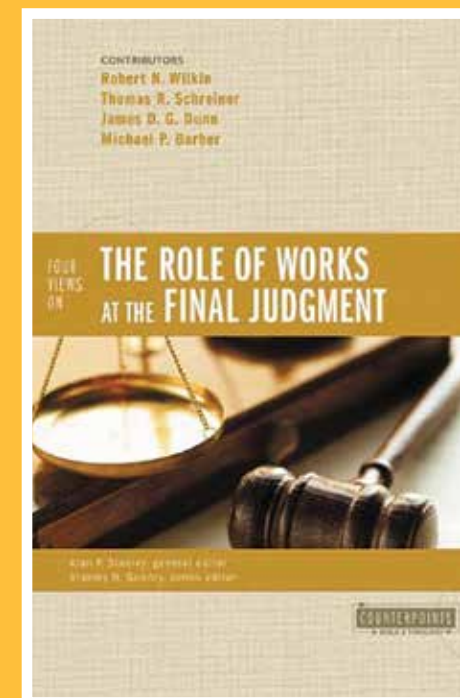
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Bob was invited to contribute a chapter to *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*. The book also includes chapters by world renowned New Testament scholars James D. G. Dunn and Thomas Schreiner. And, boy, do the sparks fly! Here’s an excerpt from the publisher’s description:

Through a discussion of Biblical texts, this book presents four perspectives on the role of works at the final judgment including: Robert N. Wilkin: Works will determine rewards but not salvation... Thomas R. Schreiner: Works will provide evidence that one actually has been saved... James D. G. Dunn: Works will provide the criterion by which Christ will determine the eternal destiny of his people... Michael P. Barber: Works will merit eternal life.

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Cheap Grace or Cheap Law?

By Shawn Lazar

In any debate, the language being used is critical in shaping opinions. Control the language, and you can often control the debate itself.

On that score, opponents of Free Grace theology may have the upper hand. They routinely describe our position as *antinomian*, *easy believism* and *cheap grace*. Every Evangelical has heard of these terms, and everyone knows they are bad.

By contrast, few people know the term “Lordship Salvation.” I’d like to turn the tables a bit and introduce a new term to describe opponents of Free Grace. Specifically, I would like to suggest why Lordship theology supports *cheap law*.

What is *cheap law*, and why should we be wary of it?

The term is inspired by the work of Gerhard Forde (1927-2005, pronounced *Fur-dee*), a Lutheran theologian who wrote extensively about the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Although he did not specifically use the term *cheap law*, he effectively described the phenomenon and strongly opposed it.

Forde helped to show that *cheap grace* and *costly grace* preaching, instead of being opposites, are actually synonymous, and both should be understood as preaching a *cheap law* that has nothing to do with God’s authentic grace in Christ.



THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Let us begin by understanding the purpose of the law. Forde derived his understanding of the law from the Lutheran reading of Romans and Galatians. Law includes more than the Mosaic law. It includes any and all commandments. If something makes a demand or an accusation, that is law. This includes the Sermon on the Mount, the command to love, the command to repent, or the moral

“The law is not a remedy for sin. As a matter of fact, it just makes sin worse.”

standard written on our hearts and conscience—all of it is law.

With that in mind, Forde pointed out how the law demanded holiness (Lev 11:45) and blamelessness (Deut 18:13). If you broke even one commandment, you were guilty of breaking them all (James 2:10). Paul emphasized that no one could be justified before God by works of the law (Gal 2:16). Such a course of action was hopeless because it was not the law’s purpose. Paul made clear that the law could

never give a person life or make them righteous (Gal 3:21). On the contrary, the law was a ministry of death (2 Cor 3:7). It does not save us from sin, but it gives us knowledge of it (Rom 3:20). Without a law to tell us the difference between right and wrong, sins like coveting would go unnoticed (Rom 7:7). Hence, Paul says that the law was actually given to *increase* sin (Rom 5:20). This was done precisely so that God’s wrath would come (Rom 4:15). In other words, the law was not meant to relieve man of sin’s burden, but to make the burden unbearable, so as to leave the sinner completely condemned before God. As Forde explained,

The law did not stop sin but only made sin worse. In so doing the law showed sin to be exceedingly sinful. The law exposed the depth of sin by showing it to be ineradicable by human power. Indeed, the law increased sin so as to bring it into confrontation with its sole remedy: that where sin abounded grace might much more abound (Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, p. 78).

Hence, the law is a not an invitation of cooperation between God and man, but an implicit denial that any such cooperation is possible. So far from acting as a *condition* for receiving God’s grace (as cheap law preachers hold), the law is meant to

dispel every thought of self-fulfillment, self-aggrandizement, self-progression, and self-deification. The law proclaims the absolute futility of all schemes of salvation by works righteousness. The law slams the door shut on salvation by works, and says, “Go another way.”

This other way to eternal salvation is nothing other than grace. It is a grace that does not complete or supplement man’s works, but excludes them entirely. As Paul said, “And if grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Rom 11:6).

THE NATURE OF CHEAP LAW PREACHING

So what is cheap law preaching and why is it bad?

Cheap law preaching *seems* pious. It rightly demands obedience to Christ. What could be wrong with that? The problem occurs when obedience to Christ is made into a requirement for eternal salvation. Cheap law preaching ignores the Biblical purpose of the law. Cheap law preachers unwittingly commit the error of thinking the law’s purpose is to save people from sin. Says Forde, “We think that the law is the remedy for sin. If we could just get our act together we could break the slavery and be free at last” (Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, p. 88). But that is something the law cannot do.

Certainly, the law can do many good things, “It can preserve society. It can restrain evil. It can even help us to reach out to give aid beyond our normal reach. It may preserve, restrain, prevent, and so forth.” But cure sin? That it can never do. The law “is not a remedy for sin. As a matter of fact, it just makes sin worse” (Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, p. 88).

Ultimately, Forde says there are three problems with cheap law preaching.

CHEAP LAW PREACHING DENIES CHRIST

First, Forde says that cheap law preaching commits a Christological error. Properly understood, the law demands perfection. But no one has ever met that demand, except for Jesus. But that was the ultimate purpose of the law all along. The law was a tutor to bring us to faith in

Christ (Gal 3:24). He is the end of the law for all who believe (Rom 10:4). Jesus is “the realization and fulfillment of that to which law can only point” (Forde, *A More Radical Gospel*, p. 60).

But cheap law preaching implicitly denies this Christological end. When grace is made to depend on some performance by the sinner (such as repentance, commitment, or good works), there is an assumption that sinners can meet the law’s demand. But that is only possible if the law is made to demand something less than Jesus’ perfect righteousness, effectively severing Christ from being the end and purpose of the law.

“God does not sell his grace. It cannot be had for any price! Rather, He gives it away freely, as a gift, through faith in His Son.”

CHEAP LAW PREACHING IS ANTI-NOMIAN

Second, Forde claims that cheap law preaching is a covert form of antinomianism. Antinomianism means being against (*anti*) the law (*nomos*). How can cheap law preaching be *against* the law, if it openly preaches it?

Forde distinguishes between two kinds of antinomianism: overt and covert.

Overt antinomianism tries to do away with the law entirely. It denies that the law is necessary, even to lead a person to Christ. Clearly, cheap law preachers don’t qualify as overt antinomians.

But covert antinomianism is a different animal. It doesn’t explicitly deny the law. But it changes it. It softens the law’s demand in order to better suit the sinner. This is antinomianism in its truest form:

What is antinomianism, after all? In essence, it is a theological attempt to bring the law to heel short of death by some kind of manipulation, overt and covert. If one can’t end the law, one seeks to tone it down, to alter it, to apply it casuistically... One disarms the law and makes it into a gentle

guide which we use in our quest for virtue. Thus domesticated as the “house pet” of the pious, the law indeed remains but it has lost its teeth. (Forde, *Justification by Faith*, pp. 47-48).

WHY CHEAP GRACE IS TOO EXPENSIVE

Third, by preaching a cheap law, one must also preach cheap grace. After all, in order for grace to be *cheap*, it must *cost* something. But that itself is the problem.

God does not sell his grace. It cannot be had for any price! Rather, He gives it away freely, as a gift, through faith in His Son.

The problem with cheap grace is not that it costs too little, but that it costs anything at all. Says Forde (echoing Hodges):

Is it not “cheap grace”? No! It’s not cheap, it’s *free*! “Cheap grace,” you see, is not improved by making it inexpensive, a “bargain basement” special. It’s *free* (Forde, *Justification*, p. 34).

God’s grace is free to us. We receive it through faith in Christ’s promise, apart from all works.

LORDSHIP SALVATION PREACHES CHEAP LAW

Lordship Salvation (whether Arminian, Calvinist, or Catholic) is a form of cheap law preaching. It denies Christ by claiming His work must be supplemented by our own efforts if we hope to be saved. It is antinomian, because it demands something less than Christ’s perfect righteousness. And it preaches cheap grace, because it offers grace on the condition of imperfect human works.

By contrast, Free Grace theology unashamedly proclaims a perfect law that could only be fulfilled by Christ, and grace that is *freely* given without demand, to all who believe in Jesus’ promise of everlasting life. Free Grace, not costly grace or cheap law, is the true foundation of Christian living. ■

Shawn Lazar is Director of Publications at GES. This is a condensed version of a talk he gave at the 2013 Conference. MP3s available.

Who Can Abide?

by John H. Niemelä

In John 8:32, Jesus promised that by abiding in Him, His disciples would experience freedom. What did He mean? How can we become free too?

ABIDING IS DISTINCT FROM BELIEVING

All interpreters recognize the Eleven as believers by the Last Discourse. Jesus urged those believers to abide (John 15:7-10):

If you abide in Me and [if] My words abide in you, you will ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit. So you will become My disciples. "Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (italics added).

Note that Jesus told the Eleven that abiding in His word was how they would become His disciples.¹ Does not this sound like John 8:31f?

Then Jesus told Judeans who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you truly are My disciples. So you shall know the truth and the truth shall free you."

In both cases (John 15 and John 8), Jesus addresses believers. In each, He urges them to abide and to become His disciples.

WHO CAN BE A DISCIPLE?

My view of the word *disciple* is probably narrower and more literal than our common usage. We talk of twenty-first



century disciples, in an application sense. But a disciple literally followed his teacher around the countryside.² Hence, John sees *disciple* as a literal *follower*. This is essential to understanding the context of what is being said. We can apply what Jesus said about disciples to our lives, but He was aiming for something that exceeds our usual application, i.e. literal followers.

Note how Jesus uses the word *follow* in John 13:36f. It is not yet Peter's time to die, so he could not follow Jesus right then.

Simon Peter told Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot *follow* Me now; but later you will *follow* Me." Peter asked Him, "Lord, why can I not *follow* You now? I will lay down my life for You!" (italics added).

In John 21:18f, Peter was told He would follow Jesus—even into death. He would give up his life in service to Christ, not again denying Christ three times. Yes, indeed, Peter would later follow Jesus—even into death.³

"Amen amen, I tell you: When you were young you used to fasten your belt and walk wherever you wanted.

But when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will fasten a belt around you and carry you where you don't want to go." *In saying this He was indicating the kind of death by which he would glorify God.* After saying this, He told him, "*Follow Me!*" (Italics added.)

What did Jesus again exhort Peter to do (21:22)? "*Follow Me!*" From John 13:36f and 21:18f, I conclude that following Jesus meant walking in His footsteps.

HOW TO ABIDE

On the other hand, John grants more flexibility to the word *abide* than to *follow* or *disciple*. In the Last Discourse, Jesus urges the Eleven to abide in Him. They could abide in Him while He was away (in the presence of the Father), even though they could not follow Him as He left them on earth. The Last Discourse makes clear that both Jesus and the Eleven were *in* the world, but neither was *of* the world. Disciples could literally follow Jesus as He *abode* [*menō*] on earth. But, when He returned to the Father, believers still can *abide* [*menō*]

continued on p. 15

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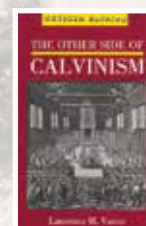
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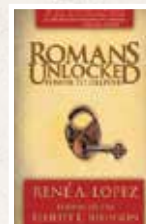
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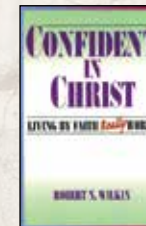
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