

That's NOT Grace!

Brett Johnson

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:14-21).

Foreword

A “new” brand of anti-law theology has pervaded the churches of Christ in the past two decades. Its theory of justification seeks to pit grace against works, rather than allowing them to peacefully coexist. Its mantra is, “Grace!”

But what it stands for is not **real** grace at all. It is licentiousness.

The more that faithful, knowledgeable, and balanced Christians deal with this heresy in all its various forms, the more one thing becomes very clear. The precious grace of God is being perverted and twisted to make it a slave to the liberals’ dissolute, self-serving, and reprobate mores.

Jude describes this movement perfectly, *“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Jude 1:4). They profess that they know Christ, but in doctrine they deny Him.

They have a great show of sincerity in pious worship and social programs, *“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”* (2 Timothy 3:5). They extol a godly Christian life, but quickly disclaim it as an inefficacious ideal that in no way helps effect our salvation.

As a parasite which destroys its host, these antinomians have bloated their ranks by dividing and devouring one faithful church of Christ after another. And at the same time their poisonous anti-law gospel has subtly taken away our very reason for existing, by destroying belief in justification by works.

How? Because the unique identity of the church of Christ is in requiring Biblical authority for everything we do. But grace-only makes it unnecessary to closely follow the “fine points” of God’s law.

Without justification by works, specific knowledge of or adherence to “thus saith the Lord” becomes irrelevant.

And so does the church of Christ.

Given this, it should be no great surprise to find our numbers dwindling, the line that divides us from the denominations blurring, and our attention turning from practicing first-century Christianity to humanistic social programs and community service.

There are too many variations and instances of this heresy in the church to deal with them in a single volume, much less a tract or booklet; however, one classic example is a book by Charles Hodge, entitled *Amazing Grace*. This is a Bible class workbook that openly and vehemently attacks the Biblical doctrine of justification by works.

The book was chosen, **not** because of anything special about its author, or because it is particularly outstanding, or comprehensive in its theology, or even because it is any more liberal than the others. It was chosen because it so typically represents the attitudes and teaching of antinomians that are infiltrating our churches, and especially our brotherhood schools.

In the past several years, I have published much of this material in a booklet called “Review of Amazing Grace.” Because of the liberal climate that pervades the brotherhood, I fully expected to be primarily rebuffed or ignored. Much to my surprise and encouragement, the majority of the feedback I have gotten has been positive.

Of the small amount of criticism that has come back, the majority of it has been exactly what I expected, accusations of “brother bashing” and the like. Most of it was written in the very kind of confrontational and accusatory language that these same people disapproved in me — not atypical of the double standard that characterizes this movement. Beloved brethren, I cannot hate people made in the image of God, but I can, should, and do hate this doctrine and what it is doing to the church.

Those who do not believe it is possible to speak stern words without being “mean-spirited,” please read Matthew 23:33 and ask yourself this honest question, “Did Jesus have love in his heart for the Pharisees when He said this?” I have said nothing even remotely as harsh as our loving Savior did. God knows my heart. . . and yours. I rest my case.

I hope this exposé will be taken in the spirit in which it was intended, and I pray that it will in some small way help to expose my brethren’s hearts to themselves. And I pray it will help you see whether the “grace” that the antinomians love so much is really grace — or the freedom to trivialize or abandon the inconvenient and uncomfortable parts of the Law of Christ.

Love for the truth’s sake,

Brett Johnson

That's Not Grace!

The spirit of antinomianism (anti-law) and grace-only that the church separated itself from in the early twentieth century has come back with a vengeance since the early 1980's. A typical example of the kind of teaching this movement promotes is a Bible class book published in 1984 by Charles Hodge, entitled *Amazing Grace*.

The basic thrust of *Amazing Grace* is laid bare in these innocent-looking statements.

"Faith does not destroy good works — only the claim to justification by good works."¹
 "Salvation is simply by grace through faith!"²
 "Salvation by grace is THE basic Biblical doctrine!"³ "Sermons, lessons that fail to emphasize grace is [sic] not Gospel!"⁴

Does faith, in fact, destroy the claim to justification by good works? Listen to James.
 "Ye see then how that by works a

man is justified and not by faith only."⁵ And Paul wrote, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."⁶

The author grapples feebly with the latter passage, "The word 'work out' means 'mine out' not human attainment."⁷ This definition appears to be contrived. I have never seen a Greek dictionary, lexicon, or concordance that defines this word as "mine out." The word, *κατηργαζομαι*, 'to work fully', is a compound word made up of *κατα* (simply an intensifying preposition) and *εργαζομαι*, 'to work'. In fact, it is one of the strongest words for 'work' in the Greek language. It is never translated 'to mine out' in any version that I am aware of, but it is translated 'done',⁸ 'worketh',⁹ 'working',¹⁰ and 'wrought'.¹¹ Take the time to look these passages up. No, really! You may be shocked at what some of them say!

¹ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 28

² Ibid., p. 31

³ Ibid., p. 2

⁴ Ibid., p. 7

⁵ James 2:24

⁶ Philippians 2:12

⁷ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 20

⁸ Ephesians 6:13; 1 Corinthians 5:3

⁹ Romans 2:9, 10 — *εργαζομαι* carries much the same meaning

¹⁰ Romans 1:27

Salvation by grace is one of the great doctrines of the Bible. Without question, salvation is by grace through faith — but is it simply by grace through faith? The Bible never says so. In fact, many passages imply that there are other things involved in our salvation.¹²

The book flatly denies teaching "cheap grace."

¹³ But this does not negate the fact that the book does teach a type of cheap grace (not the very cheapest, maybe, but cheap, nonetheless.) Any version of grace that is cheaper than GOD has made it is cheap grace, no matter whether it is free or not.

At first blush, it may appear (to some who might be naïve of denominational theology) that Lesson 4 admits that works contribute to our salvation. The fact is it does little more than affirm that our works are evidence that we have grace. Nobody denies this — not even most of the denominations.

The section entitled, "Only By Grace But Not Grace Only,"¹⁴ is especially misleading to some. It is prefixed with this statement, "Christianity is not works-law; it is grace-faith."¹⁵ It then goes on to say, "But grace had to act, live, do, work! Grace without works is dead! There was no Savior until there was a cross. . . Grace had to act to give." Notice how it places the works in past tense. This is not mere coincidence. That statement may be talking about Jesus' actions, but it is unlikely that it is talking about our own, if it uses past tense.

Two of the seven scriptures quoted here could be used to prove that grace teaches us to do good works, but none of them prove that works are required to BE saved and STAY saved. And it is not as if there is a shortage of passages that could have been used to do this. A few out of many are: 1 Peter 3:21, Romans 13:2, 1 Timothy 4:15, 16, 1 Corinthians 11:29, 34, Romans 14:23, James 5:9, 12, and Matthew 23:14. (Read these, and look for words like "condemned" or "saved," etc.) It summarizes by saying, "Christianity is the only religion that makes human insufficiency the gateway to blessing. Grace teaches, touches, changes, strengthens."¹⁶ It may come as a shock to some, but even the majority of the denominations don't deny that grace changes us; they affirm this as much as we do! Like an impressionist's painting, this class book presents a murky mixture of vague statements and loosely related scriptures that can be

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 12:12; 1 Peter 4:3

¹² 1 Timothy 4:16, Philippians 2:12, 1 Peter 3:21, James 2:14, 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2, 1 Corinthians 1:21, Romans 10:10, Romans 8:24, ad infinitum

¹³ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 12

¹⁴ This is a prime example of the paradoxes that characterize both this class book and this movement.

¹⁵ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 26

¹⁶ Ibid., p.27

interpreted just about any way you want. By itself, this section says nothing to affirm that our works help effect our justification or salvation.

“Only by Grace, but not Grace Only” simply affirms that if you have grace, you will do the works. Even proponents of faith-only believe this.

It is in the next section, “Only By Faith But Not Faith Only,” that it becomes more apparent what this book is designed to teach. To support the assertion that “faith... is active,”¹⁷ it quotes John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Soren Kierkegaard.¹⁸ It is significant that **all three of these men believed in salvation by faith without works!** **Two of them believed that works are an outward manifestation of an inward grace!** Both Calvin and Luther believed that grace moves you to do good works. Calvin called it the “second act of grace,” and Luther called

it “proper righteousness.” Both of them believed that those works are nothing more than outward evidence of your salvation. All three of these men believed that those works do not help in any way to **bring about** justification.¹⁹

All this is summed up by saying, “That faith is not without obedience. One who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”²⁰ So what? Most Baptists believe that much!²¹ The point is that this is exactly what you might say, if you believe that works are “an outward manifestation of an inward grace.” This is what the denominations have taught for centuries.

“Why can part of the core teaching of John Calvin and Martin Luther be used to express what Charles Hodge means by ‘Not Faith Only’?” That is an honest, fair, and objective question. The truth is that, although he denies that he teaches “grace-only,” when it comes to the question of “**What justifies us?**” he does, in fact, believe in grace-only.

¹⁷ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 27

¹⁸ Idem

¹⁹ It may be interesting to some that the third, Soren, was an ethical and religious existentialist, **a liberal of liberals.**

²⁰ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 28

²¹ My apologies to anyone who is offended at the way I expressed this. I could not think of any other way to make my point unmistakably clear.

Amazing Grace deprecates doctrinal purity.

Christianity is a grace-faith not works-law system.... Works-law is human effort.... Grace-faith is not right answers to selected questions. Grace-faith is not the ability to pass a religious quiz at the judgment. Having to be right 'on all the issues' is shaky ground [emphasis mine]. FACE IT! No legal system can save sinners. Grace ... the cross of Christ ... terminated/eliminated the law principle (Col.2:14–17). Christianity is not another “spruced up,” “warmed over” Law of Moses.²²

Since we don't have to be “right on all the issues,” and we won't have to “pass a religious quiz” on Judgment Day, are we to understand that it will be OK at the Judgment to be wrong on any of the issues at all? How about the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage? How about the issue of instrumental music in worship? The issue of salvation by baptism for the remission of sins? Are these issues just part of a spruced up, warmed over legal system that will not save sinners? Will disobedience of (and wrong teaching on) these **not** cause a child of God to be lost? If Charles believes there are some issues besides faith and grace that will cost us our salvation, he never explains that. The way the class book treats this topic is misleading and dangerous, at best.

Equally as damaging is its treatment of “election grace.”

Abraham was an idolator in a heathen world. He was not blessed because he deserved it; he was saved by God's election grace. Man chokes on “election grace.” The Potter does have power over the clay. God will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy (Rom. 9:15)... Abraham is the father of the faithful. Yet Abraham's power was grace not self. All Abraham could make himself was an Ishmael. Abraham reveals the folly of human effort... It is hard for proud man to swallow election but God chose and blessed Israel because He wished to (Deut. 4:7,8,33,34; 6:10-12;7:6-10;9:4-7).²³

To begin with, God did not command Abraham to “make an Ishmael.” Second, it is going far beyond scripture, almost into the realm of railing accusation, to accuse Abraham of being an idolater. There is no evidence whatsoever in the Bible that Abraham, himself, ever worshipped an idol.²⁴ If he were an idolater, how could God call him the father of the faithful? And how would he differ from a pantheist? Are we to assume that other pantheists are partakers of God's “election grace,” too?

²² Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 30

²³ Ibid., p. 44

²⁴ Joshua 24:2, 3 only proves for certain that Tarah was one person named of at least two idolatrous ancestors (since ëS, “father,” in the last two cases is in the *construct state*.) But it in no way proves Abraham, himself, to be an idolater.

The book vaguely denounces the Calvinists' TULIP acrostic "on all five"²⁵ (which is a good thing), yet it uses Calvinistic-flavored expressions, like "election grace."²⁶ It never really explains what the term "election grace" means to the author, except to say that it has nothing to do with human effort.²⁷ The insinuation is that Abraham's idolatrous faith was all that was necessary to get him elected for salvation. Regardless of whether the author is "right on this issue," his treatment of it here is misleading and deadly.

In *Amazing Grace* is this sweeping assertion: "Grace that can be qualified for has ceased to be grace!"

²⁸ Even though it is clear one can never earn salvation, it does *not* follow that a person cannot qualify for God's favor, His grace. Brethren, did ancient Olympic contestants earn the crown or win it?²⁹ If, regarding grace, there is no difference between one man and another, why would some get it while others don't?

If there are no qualifications for grace (nothing you are and nothing you can do to receive God's favor) then either:

- A. grace is arbitrary, or
- B. everybody gets it.

There are no other options, to the best of my knowledge.

Now I believe that even most liberals in the church would not be willing to say that *everybody* gets God's grace. Yet, if we hold that a person must have faith to get grace, then faith itself becomes a qualification, one must have the faith in order to get the grace. We have thus defeated our own objection, since we allow faith to become a requirement, and thus a qualification. We cannot reject works on the grounds that they constitute a "qualification," and at the same time teach that a man must have faith to receive grace. That is an inconsistent argument (so typical of the shameless double standard that characterizes liberalism).

²⁵ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 18

²⁶ The phrase "election grace" never occurs in the Bible, but 2 Peter 1:10 indicates that our election is made sure (as opposed to "made manifest," cf. similar expressions in Proverbs 6:3 and Matthew 27:66) by diligently (and therefore deliberately) adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, kindness, and love to our faith.

²⁷ As opposed to Calvinism, the doctrine in this book sounds more like Martin Luther's heretical teaching on "alien" and "proper" righteousness, in his sermon, "Two Kinds of Righteousness."

²⁸ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 6

²⁹ 2 Timothy 2:5

On the question of whether good works and doctrinal purity are necessary for salvation,

the class book says that if these are required at all, then perfection is required. "Consistency demands perfection. One adherent allowed 2% error! One could be 2% off in knowledge or performance. Where is this 2% scripture? This is 'legalism gone to seed.'"³⁰ Of course, there is no 2% scripture! God doesn't deal with works and knowledge in terms of percentages. But this does not

imply that knowledge and works are not required for salvation.

If consistency demands perfection, then to keep from being guilty of maintaining a double standard, I MUST apply this rule to grace and faith as well! If consistency demands perfection, can I be 2% shy of "all faith"³¹ and still be saved? But does this imply that faith is not required at all? Hodge himself says, "Grace demands works!"³² What percent of works does grace demand? 2%? 92%? Where is this 2% scripture? This is liberalism "gone to seed." **Quantitative questions like these are nonsensical**, whether they are applied to grace and faith, or whether they are applied to works, knowledge, and the doctrine of Christ.

Charles says, "I am married. I am not a perfect husband but I am faithful. We have a great home."³³ This might be OK when applied to things like getting angry and snapping at his wife, but what if his **performance** is such that he commits **adultery**? Even if he did it "in a moment of weakness," he is now **no longer a faithful husband**. He needs to be reconciled. Do not **certain actions** make us faithful or unfaithful mates? How about faithful and unfaithful Christians?³⁴

Fictitious Mr. Legalist is characterized as a professional misinterpreter, a malicious misinterpreter.³⁵ He believes that he is saved and lost a thousand times a day.³⁶ He rejects grace

The book spends much of its time fighting a straw man, whom it has fabricated and dubbed, "Legalist."

³⁰ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 22

³¹ 1 Corinthians 13:2

³² Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 59

³³ Ibid., p. 87

³⁴ 1 John 5:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-3

³⁵ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 17

³⁶ Ibid., p. 22

on the grounds that it gives him worth; he is negative, fearful and squeamish about it.³⁷ His fear and anger toward grace are such that they even cause him to be angry with God.³⁸ (I find it hard to believe that any rational, objective person would really believe this last one, much less *make* such an allegation.) I would appreciate it if someone would point me in the direction of the poor soul this describes, because I have never met anyone in the church like him; **although, I have seen many falsely accused of such.**

Can you name someone like this? And if you think you can, would they tell me that they are angry with God because of grace? And if not, is it possible that they are being misunderstood and/or misrepresented?

Not one person that I have ever met would get on the floor in a debate, assert the statements listed above, and call them good Christianity. Of course, there are **plenty** of people who have **convinced themselves** that they **USED TO** believe this way. Not coincidentally, this kind of "confession" makes a great sales pitch. Isn't that convenient?

In reality, this book is, with its impressionistic technique, deliberately creating bad associations with the belief of justification by works,³⁹ associations that have little real base in logic, fact, or real people.

Of course, the qualities of fictitious Mr. Legalist are rightly criticized. To be a "malicious misinterpreter" or a "professional misunderstander" is no virtue. (And as irony would have it, the class book promptly provides a case in point — because these are qualities which one may see in the very way the author talks about Mr. Legalist!) It is a total misunderstanding of Christianity to believe that one is saved and lost a thousand times a day. It is wrong to deny that we are saved by grace. **But it is unfair, inaccurate, and unreasonable to intimate that all these are typical attitudes of those who believe in justification by works.** Accusations like this are a prime example of the liberals' malicious, self-serving misinterpretation and willful misunderstanding of the personal beliefs of good men who oppose their grace-only heresy.

So then... what is the difference between the fabled Mr. Legalist and one who gives **PROPER PLACE to works** in the salvation of a Christian?

It is, in fact, creating prejudice against belief in justification by works, and against anyone who holds it.

³⁷ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 71

³⁸ Ibid., p. 66

³⁹ James 2:24

Works alone (without grace, without faith, without love) can never save us; that much is certain.

I have never met **anyone** in the church who believes in salvation by works without faith, have you? Therefore, fighting a doctrine like this would be fighting a myth. That works are part of our salvation is equally as certain. One passage that liberals avoid is James 2:24, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." **By works a man is justified!** What is so evil about saying that?

Why are we hated, demonized, and maligned

for saying it? If God can say it, why can't we, as long as we use it in a proper context?

And what is the context? Abraham was justified when he offered Isaac on the altar; Rahab was justified when she sent the spies out another way. Notice at what point they were justified: when they did what God wanted them to do. It was not works only, faith only, grace only, love only, **or anything ONLY**. All these things worked **together** in a beautiful way to bring about the justification of these righteous people. And it was **not just one work**, one initial moment of faith, one irrevocable gift of the grace of God,⁴⁰ but a **lifetime** of faith, obedience, and love — and the favor/grace of God that is received by this kind of life.⁴¹ For instance, Abraham didn't do just one righteous act at the altar, but he lived his life that way. Rahab could not have remained a harlot after she married Salmon (from whom Jesus' lineage is counted), because under the Old Testament, wives who played the harlot were to be put to death.

Why, then, does the scripture say that salvation is "not of works?"

If you look at the context of the passages that say things like, "[salvation is] not of works,"⁴² and, "a man is justified ... without the deeds of the law,"⁴³ you will find that God is talking about the works and deeds of the Old Testament Law. Because when you find the Scripture talking about the law and works which do not justify us, you will also find in the context things like, "circumcision," "Jews and Gentiles," "Mt. Sinai," and so on. These are things that are part of the Law of Moses, not the Law of Christ. **In NO case does the Bible say that obedience to the Law of Christ will not save us.**

⁴⁰ Otherwise, how could Abraham be "justified" on **two separate occasions** (Romans 4:18-22; James 2:21) for **two different things**? In Romans, justification was by believing a promise, and in James, it was by sacrificing his son.

⁴¹ James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Hebrews 12:15; Ephesians 6:24 & 1 John 5:3

⁴² Ephesians 2:9

⁴³ Romans 3:28

Without exception, EVERY specific, concrete example of laws and works that will not save us is taken from the Law of Moses.

On the other hand, the one time that the Scripture says that we **ARE** justified by works,⁴⁴ in the context are explicit examples of works from the Perfect Law of Liberty,⁴⁵ as well as examples of people who were not under the Law of Moses, but who were justified by works.

To fully understand these passages about not being "justified by the law," we must understand the history and culture of that time. First of all, when the Jews spoke of "the

law and the prophets," "the law," or even simply "law" (without the definite article)⁴⁶ in a religious context, they were almost always speaking about the Law of the Old Testament. Judaism heavily influenced Christian culture and language, even as far away as Rome. Paul primarily wrote to people who (if not Jews themselves) were at least somewhat familiar with Jewish law and culture. "Law," used in a religious sense, was almost always the Mosaic Law.⁴⁷

Second, Jewish opportunists among the Gentile Christians were trying to convert them to Judaism. They took advantage of the common belief in Jehovah God. One of Paul's major jobs, given to him by God through the elders and apostles in Acts 15, was to make sure the Gentile Christians did not become just another bunch of proselyte Jews. That was the reason he and Barnabas were sent to Syria and Cilicia. Because of this, Paul's teachings abound with discussions about grace versus the Old Testament law.

If this was not immediately obvious to you when you read Paul's epistles, don't feel bad. Peter wrote by inspiration that some things written by Paul are "hard to be understood."⁴⁸ Sadly, both the unlearned and the unstable twist these scriptures to their own destruction, pitting grace against the Law of Christ and "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness."⁴⁹

Are we under law?

This book would lead us to believe that we are not under any law at all, but under grace. It says, "Because **one is not under law** [emphasis mine] does not mean that one is

⁴⁴ James 2:14-24 (Notice in verse 14 that our salvation is also part of the context.)

⁴⁵ James 2:14-17 (compare Matthew 25:34-36 and 1 John 3:17,18)

⁴⁶ J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D., *New Testament Greek for Beginners*, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Toronto, 1951), p. 141

⁴⁷ One of many places where this is clearly demonstrable is in Galatians 3:17-25.

⁴⁸ 2 Peter 3:15, 16

⁴⁹ Jude 1:4

without law."⁵⁰ This is self-contradictory double-talk. How can we have a law and not be under it? Certainly, we are under grace, and we are not under the Old Testament law. But we **are** under law to Christ, the Perfect Law of Liberty. "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law."⁵¹ Paul teaches plainly here that:

1. we are not without law (therefore, we "have" a law), and
2. we are "under" that law (the Law of Christ).⁵²

The fact of the matter is that we **are** justified by works, just as much as we are justified by faith and saved by grace. We are under grace **AND** we are under law to Christ.

In *Amazing Grace*, there are repeated charges that "legalists" are afraid of grace, that they hate grace.⁵³ While any wise Christian would hate a false doctrine that cheapens grace, and would even have a healthy fear of a doctrine like that,⁵⁴ I seriously doubt that **anyone** would say that they **don't want** God's grace, that they are angry with grace, and that they are angry with God because of grace.⁵⁵ The charge, libelously manufactured to create and promote prejudice, makes nice emotional appeal and serves to feed the liberals' prejudice against those who oppose their views, but it does not have its basis in fact.

REALITY IS that far more people feel threatened by works than grace.

(Ironically, antinomians promote their grace-only doctrine as courageous and powerful,⁵⁶ when in fact, it is cowardly and self-serving.) The necessity of doing Someone else's will in order to be saved makes my not being my own master a very real and practical thing. If I really don't have to do Someone else's will in order to be saved, then for all practical purposes, I am my own master. Mankind is notorious

⁵⁰ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 97

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 9:20, 21

⁵² In verse 20, it is obvious from the context that "the law" we are **not under** is the law of the Jews. If Paul was **not under** that law, then the law he was under had to be the Perfect Law of Liberty.

⁵³ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 91

⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 11:3; Galatians 4:11

⁵⁵ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 66

⁵⁶ cf. the title of Max Lucado's *In the Grip of Grace*, (Word Publishing, Dallas 1996)

for wanting to have his cake and eat it, too. Man wants to be his own master, but he wants God to give him all the blessings, grace, and heaven, too. This theology plays on these base, shallow, and self-gratifying desires.

On the topic of the security of the believer, it says, "'Once saved, always saved' is wrong! 'Once saved, barely saved' is equally wrong! Eternal security is wrong — but eternal insecurity is equally wrong! The possibility of apostasy must not be preached as the probability of apostasy. Don't turn the 'Good News' into 'Bad News.' Don't turn Christian joy into sorrow."⁵⁷

Justification by works is not “Bad News” and “eternal insecurity” to those who believe in God’s ability to enable us to do all His will!

⁵⁸ The preposterous, libelous accusation above is typical of the kind of fear-mongering that liberals use to try to scare us into grace-only. The most powerful Being in the universe is not willing that anyone should perish, much less His own children. We can have confidence,⁵⁹ joy, and security, knowing that, as long as we are diligently⁶⁰ and patiently⁶¹ going on unto perfection,⁶² God is pleased with us⁶³ and will work His will in us.⁶⁴ But the one who believes we are not justified by works unwittingly tells us that he is afraid of the idea that he could

⁵⁷ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 18

⁵⁸ 1 Timothy 1:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 6:10-17; 2 Corinthians 10:4,5; 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:5-7; etc.

⁵⁹ Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 6:11, 12; 1 John 3:18,19; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; Hebrews 10:35,36; 1 John 4:17; etc.

⁶⁰ 2 Peter 1:5-7; 2 Peter 1:10; Hebrews 12:15; Hebrews 11:6

⁶¹ Hebrews 10:36; Hebrews 6:12,15; Romans 2:7

⁶² Hebrews 6:1

⁶³ 1 John 3:22; Hebrews 13:16; 2 Timothy 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10

⁶⁴ See Romans 8:28, 29; Philippians 1:6; Mark 10:24-27; Ephesians 3:16,20. The point this book seems to have missed is that “human attainment” is not God’s objective, but the refining and perfecting our eternal hearts (2 Corinthians 4:16-18), in part by means of commanding us to practice our faith (James 2:22). Every verse of the Bible (i.e., “all scripture”) is in some way for that purpose (2 Timothy 3:16,17), “every part” of the body, the church, is designed for that purpose (Ephesians 4:11-16), “all things” work together for good for those who are called according to that purpose (Romans 8:28,29 + Luke 6:40), that is the ultimate purpose for teaching every man (Colossians 1:28, 29) and was the driving motive behind Paul’s mighty labor, and Christ died for that purpose (Titus 2:14; 2 Corinthians 5:15). What could God possibly have added to the statements above to be more emphatic about His ultimate purpose for us and the church?

actually **DO** something that would cause him to be lost.⁶⁵ He is afraid of justification by works, because it implies that if he does not subdue his body and bring it into subjection, he **might** be rejected.⁶⁶

Grace-only becomes an excuse for negligence.

Liberals make pie-in-the-sky promises, claiming that grace-only “demands” obedience,⁶⁷ but negligence is its practical application in the lives of its converts. As one man put it (in a Sunday morning Bible class where we were studying this very book), “Grace frees me from

feeling obligated to be here on Wednesday night.” And he lived that, too! That was one of the few days in my life I ever saw that brother at worship! In this same class (where, I remind you, our class book was *Amazing Grace*) the comment was made, “Grace makes me feel free to do things that I would otherwise find questionable.”⁶⁸ The specific example this person gave was joining hands in fellowship and worship with a denominational organization. For them, it was not just academics; they were practicing it at the time! Brethren, these are two **real, actual, and practical** examples of the ultimate effect of the kind of teaching found in this class book. **Is THIS really what you want to accomplish at your congregation?**

Rather than “demanding” obedience, **real-life** experience has taught me that those who believe in grace-only approach their lives in one of three ways, when it comes to practical application of this doctrine in their lives. A large number will abstain from sins that are highly visible and politically damaging. Most of these have a very spontaneous, emotion-driven dedication that is sporadic in varying degrees. Another smaller group, usually preachers, elders, and other church leaders, will become and remain constantly active over a period of years. These (to be very blunt) appear to be driven more by financial or political needs than by “grace.”

The rest (in varying degrees, depending on the individual) take “not under law” at face value and rarely pretend to live their lives for God. **After all, what percent of good works does grace “demand” that they do, 2%?** Given those parameters, **it doesn’t take a genius to figure out that**

MY 2% IS JUST AS GOOD AS YOUR 92%!

And how could YOU prove that it’s not!

The overwhelming majority of “non-practicing Christians” and “un-churched” in

Brethren, judge this tree by its fruit!

⁶⁵ e.g., Matthew 18:32-35, (or not do, as the case may be) 1 Timothy 5:8, ad infinitum

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:25, 27

⁶⁷ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 59

⁶⁸ Compare this attitude with Romans 14:23, “He who **doubts** is damned if he eats.”

this country believe in grace-only and NOT in justification by works.

But don't take my word for it. Do your own case studies. Recent research has shown that non-church-going Protestants are at epidemic levels today, so it shouldn't be hard to find them. These are people who believe in God, but rarely, if ever, come to church. Start asking them if they believe we are justified by works. You know what they will tell you!

It is becoming more and more apparent that grace-only, over a period of years, has caused a great exodus from church of any kind.

After the emotional buzz of "felt needs" subsides (as it does in most people over time) people converted to this doctrine tend to simply stay at home, to practice the 2% that grace "demands."

In the 1950's, when we were preaching justification by works as well as by grace through faith, we experienced phenomenal growth, faster than any religious group in America. **And we traded that for what?** Now that liberalism has become so prevalent, and an increasing number of our leaders are

liberals, the church of Christ is stagnant as a whole, if not shrinking.

So, why are so many large churches liberal? The crowds you see at the large liberal churches are (to a great extent) a combination of recruiters and transient masses. The leaders of these mega-churches hide the revolving doors at the back while their allies, the change-agents, supplement and inflate their numbers by splitting and devouring one faithful congregation after another. But the numbers that these mega-churches represent are minuscule, compared to the numbers that have already been "processed." Most Sundays (other than occasional appearances), the ever growing "un-churched" masses, converts to their 2% version of grace, are at home watching TV.

Or they are in fellowship with denominations, or they have joined civic organizations that fulfill their "felt needs" just as well or better than we do. And why shouldn't they? Many of these institutions are much bigger than we are, and the denominations are certainly much more experienced at practicing grace-only than we. If there is little practical difference between us and the denominations, why do these people need the church of Christ?

These 2% Christians are the end products of grace-only, quietly hidden and forgotten, as if they don't exist — because we never see them. The rest simply haven't put 2 and 2 together... yet.

The error in this class book, *Amazing Grace*, is Legion, so in order to avoid writing volumes, let me make two final points.

If a man is not saved by any works at all, then man is not saved by baptism, because baptism is a work.

Arguing that "baptism, apart from Christ and faith, does not save you" is beside the point. The point is that if a man "accepts Christ," "accepts grace," and has faith, but is not baptized, he will not be saved! The answer of a good conscience **IS** the work of baptism.⁶⁹ Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, but if he had not made the ark and gotten into it, he would have **received the grace of God in vain**; he would have drowned along with everyone else.

This class book seemingly attempts to argue that baptism is not really a work. Twice, it says things like, "Baptism is passive. One does not baptize himself."⁷⁰ Folks, I have never seen a person that was baptized that did not walk to where the water was, or (if they couldn't walk) at least participate in the baptism in some way. Baptism may not be a big work, but it **is** a work. Certainly the expression "be baptized" is in the passive voice, but then **so is circumcision**. Just as one does not baptize himself, a man does not typically circumcise himself. But God makes it abundantly clear that He considers circumcision to be a work of the Old Testament. Therefore, if we are not saved by works, then we are not saved by baptism.

In high school, my algebra teacher would assign us the odd problems for homework.

This was for the simple reason that the answers to all the odd problems were in the back of the book. In order to check our work as we went along, to make sure that we were doing our practice right, we would just look at the answer in the back of the book. If our answer did not match it, we knew we weren't doing the problems right. No matter how sure we were, or how well we felt that we

proved them, if the answers didn't match, we were wrong — period.

For those who would like to double-check their theories on salvation and justification, the answer is in the back of the Book. This is the answer. *"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the*

⁶⁹ 1 Peter 3:21

⁷⁰ Charles B. Hodge, *Amazing Grace*, (20th Century Christian, Nashville 1984), p. 58

dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and **they were judged EVERY man according to THEIR works**.⁷¹ Every man (*not just the unbelieving, not just the legalist who didn't accept grace*) was judged by his works.

And notice, it was by their own works, not by “alien righteousness.” What kind of works? Matthew 25:31–46 details verbatim quotes on that Day, speaking of specific works that we will have or will not have done: visiting the sick or imprisoned, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. This (along with 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10) makes it absolutely plain that we will be judged by the works that we, ourselves, do. Not only will sinners be condemned for not doing these things, but those whom Matthew calls “the righteous” will inherit **BECAUSE they did** them. “Come... inherit the kingdom... **BECAUSE** I was hungry and **YOU** gave me meat...”⁷² The words in Matthew 25 **WILL be spoken**, verbatim, without fail, on Judgment Day!

Of course we will **also** be judged by whether we believed in God's grace and were grateful for it, whether we had faith, whether we had a loving heart, whether we were baptized, and many other things, but works will have an extremely important and **dominant** role in the Judgment. In fact, every single place in the Scripture, that lists specific things by which we will be judged, our works are usually the **only** specific criterion mentioned, and they are **always** a primary and major part of our judgment — for both the saved **and** the lost.⁷³ **Any theology we contrive, which denies that the words of Matthew 25:31–46 will be spoken on Judgment Day, or makes them irrelevant to the judgment of the saved, is WRONG!** No matter how good our “proof” is.

Are law and works crucial to our salvation? The answer is in the back of the Book.

⁷¹ Revelation 20:12, 13

⁷² Luther got it backward. His version of Matthew 25 would say, “...because you were hungry and **I** gave you meat.”

⁷³ Ecclesiastes 12:14, Revelation 2:23, Matthew 16:27, 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10, etc.