

Does Free Grace Theology Lead to False Assurance?

Free Grace theology teaches that those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died on the cross for their sins, rose from the dead, and guarantees eternal salvation are saved. These who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior can know for sure that they are saved.

But some object that it is not that simple or easy. They say the Free Grace view gives people false and damning assurance on the basis of their profession of faith. After all, they may not have believed with all their heart, turned from all their sins (in their of repentance), or done enough good works.

Some theologies cannot give full assurance.

The Free Grace perspective is unique because it emphasizes on God's free, unconditional grace in salvation. We are saved by what God has done, which means all we must do is believe—there is nothing else we can do.

Other theological perspectives require some aspect of human performance before a person who professes faith in Christ can be sure that they are saved. Even then, their assurance is not absolutely full or certain. Three leading theologies fail to give the believer full assurance.

Reformed Calvinism teaches that since God must give the elect the faith to believe and regenerate them before they can believe, that divine faith guarantees deep repentance (turning from sins), a changed life (evident good works), and perseverance in faithfulness until the end of their lives. Professing believers can have assurance only to the extent that they exhibit these things to the satisfaction of their own subjective judgment.

Arminianism teaches that those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior have the freedom of will to reject Christ and lose salvation or can lose salvation because of sin. Therefore, those who believe can only have a present assurance of present salvation, but not a present assurance of future salvation.

Lordship Salvation believes that to be saved, people must surrender and commit their lives to Jesus Christ as their Master. This view is found among both Calvinists and Arminians. Since Christians are those who are submitted to Christ, their lives will show it by turning from sins, doing good works, and continuing in obedience to Christ. Anyone who is living in this way can have a measure of assurance, but not absolute assurance, because the future is unknown.

So while the Reformed Calvinist believes that once they are saved, they are always saved, they cannot be sure they were once saved. The Arminian believes that they are presently saved, but cannot be sure that they will remain saved. Lordship Salvation adherents claim a tentative assurance. Only the Free Grace position allows full assurance based on salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Know what saves us

We are saved by what God has done for us by providing Jesus Christ as our Savior. Salvation is by grace, a gift of God. It does not depend on our performance. We must believe in Christ, but it is not faith that saves us—Jesus saves us. Faith is how we appropriate the promise of eternal salvation. Turning from sins, submitting to Christ as Master, and doing good works cannot save us if we do not believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. Our assurance comes from trusting what God has done for us, not what we do.

Those who are taught that they can have assurance by looking at their faith can be deceived, because they can have great faith in some facts about Jesus Christ, but not believe in Him and His promise of eternal life. They can turn from sins, be surrendered to Christ, and serve Him as Master, but not believe in Him as Savior (cf. Matt. 7:21-23). Ironically, these performance-based systems of assurance can give a dangerous false assurance of salvation, something that the Free Grace viewpoint is accused of.

Know what assures us

It is true that those who hold to the Free Grace perspective can give someone a false sense of assurance if they counsel someone who does not understand the gospel and is not saved. But if someone reflects a clear understanding of the gospel and trusts in Jesus Christ as their Savior, then it is reasonable and practical to help that person know that they are saved. God wants us to know that we are saved (cf. 1 John 5:11-13). The New Testament authors knew that they and their readers were saved, even though many readers were not living godly lives (e.g., the Corinthians; see 1 Cor. 6:11).

We are assured of our salvation by the testimony of God and Jesus Christ through the Scriptures. Whoever believes in Christ has everlasting life, will not come under judgment for their sins, and has passed from death to life (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47). These things are certain and final. We are assured by God's promise of grace, because grace guarantees that the security of our salvation is up to God, not us (Rom. 4:16).

The very nature of faith also assures us. Faith is being convinced and sure of something (Heb. 11:1). Since the Bible says that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life, the assumption is that we can know when we believe something. We know that we are saved in the same way we know that we believe $2 + 2 = 4$ or we know that we believe Jesus is God.

Some use a three-legged stool to illustrate how we can know we are saved. One leg is the testimony of God's Word, another is our good works, and the third is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. But the testimony of God's Word alone is sufficient assurance. If His Word says that we are saved, then our works or our perception of the Holy Spirit within us are only secondary corroborating evidences. The subjective evaluation of our works and the Spirit's inner testimony are imperfect and can change, but God's Word never changes.

Know what is at stake

If we have full assurance of salvation, we can live at peace and confidence that God has accepted us. That secure foundation gives us a strong motivation to grow in our relationship with God. We can live confidently, die confidently, love confidently, and share the gospel confidently with others. This is not presumption or false assurance; it is as true as God's Word.

Those who look within to judge whether they have believed in the right way, repented in the right way, or committed themselves to God enough can never be absolutely sure of their salvation. They lose peace, confidence, security, and a foundation for a healthy relationship with God. They are subject to doubts, unhealthy guilt, and the burden of legalism (trying to find acceptance with God by what we do).

Conclusion

Any theological system that requires us to look at the quality of our faith or performance cannot give full assurance of salvation. The Free Grace view, because it is the biblical view, offers full assurance based on the objective truth of what God says about who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He promises. Those who take their focus off of these objective facts and subjectively focus on themselves will not find full assurance. Faith, repentance, commitment, and perseverance are not our Savior; Jesus Christ is our Savior!