

EPILOGUE



HOLD FAST

*The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures** daily, to see whether these things were so.*

Acts 17:10-11

*Like newborn babes, **long for** the pure milk of the **word**, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*

1 Peter 2:2

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling the word** of truth.*

2 Timothy 2:15

CALLING IT AS YOU SEE IT!

My daughter is a money manager at an investment firm, investing large amounts of money for institutions. So when I consider making any changes to my tiny, individual retirement account, guess who I call? However, each time I must sit through a twenty-minute scenario of her expectations for the market. Frankly, I get lost in the intricacy of her eloquent presentation. At the end of the “lecture,” I say, “Honey, what’s the bottom line? What should I do?” Then she cuts to the chase and basically says, “Do you think interest rates are going to go up or going to go down in the next six months? Depending on your assumptions, that is how you should reallocate your investments.” After spending now twenty-five minutes with her on the phone, we finally have arrived at the reason I called and I ask, “What do you think? Up or down in the next six months?”

Now, I am very pleased that my daughter, who has many degrees and letters behind her name, can successfully work through financial intricacies, using her accrued knowledge and expertise, to the benefit of her clients. But every investment she chooses is based on “knowledgeable” assumptions.

In a similar way every theological system likewise contains its own “theological” positions. And just as decisions in the financial

HOLD FAST

markets are based upon informed assumptions, so decisions regarding the interpretation of Scripture are based on informed theological assumptions.

Ending at the Beginning

Proponents of any theological persuasion always present their arguments in a logical manner, using the Scriptures. As you read their material, it is presented in a way that seeks to give overwhelm-

*Depending upon
the assumptions,
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ing support and evidence for their position. As a result, you are made to feel that any other approach must be flawed. Then you read the opposing position and they too seem right on target. Here is where the tension begins. To paraphrase my daughter's statement regarding investment reallocation, "Depending on the assumptions, the conclusions vary." "Theological" assumptions form your approach to Scriptures and produce interpretations reflecting that predisposed mindset.

Significant Insignificance

A number of pertinent issues have been presented in this book so that you may have a clearer understanding of the differences between two major views: Reformed and Free Grace. Each claims equal support from Scripture. In most instances, the two positions are supported by the same passages. I have entitled the opposing views: (1) the *Giant-Step Approach* or Reformed theology and (2) the *Two-Stage Approach* or Free Grace theology. The latter view is an interpretation of Scripture supporting the position that individuals first come to Christ by faith, trusting in Him as Savior. Then a process of growth and obedience begins as, over time, the new believer allows Christ to increasingly become Lord of the many

EPILOGUE

areas of his life.¹ Hence two phases—coming to faith and walking by faith—comprise the Christian life. The first stage is a point in time, while the second is a lifelong process. On the other hand, Reformed theology or giant-step Christianity envisions initial faith to include and encompass the demands and commands addressed to any who follow Christ. This giant-step perspective encompasses everything, from the beginning to the end of the Christian life.

Some may be saying, “How exactly do these two viewpoints differ? Aren’t they essentially saying the same thing?” Yes, each has a starting point and then a period of time until the end of the believer’s life. But in giant-step theology initial salvation and a life of discipleship are seen as one. Initial salvation is the call to discipleship—one inclusive issue. In two-stage theology, however, you begin with Christ at initial salvation and then you decide if you will follow Him as a disciple—two separate issues. The significance may seem insignificant, but it is what appears insignificant to be the most significant. Reformed theology envisions a continuous line (—————) to represent their view of the Christian life, including both the point of initial salvation plus the process. But Free Grace theology sees a starting point, at the moment saving faith takes place, distinct from the life of choices that follow (●—————).

The difference between these two interpretations will become increasingly clear, as we compare the manner in which each system addresses specifics of faith. The Chart, *Theological Positions Compared*, illustrates the differences in theological thinking of these views, presented in twelve topics. The merging of initial salvation and present salvation in the giant-step view requires a faith that is complex, active and unending, causing and continually producing obedience. Surrender, repentance, and a commitment to discipleship are required at initial salvation. On the other hand, with a distinction between initial coming to faith and walking by faith, faith for the two-stage view is passive. Discipleship, surrender, and repentance are not issues at initial salvation. However, obedience in every

HOLD FAST

THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS COMPARED		
Topic	Giant-Step View (Reformed Theology)	Two-Stage View (Free Grace Theology)
Salvation Only Concerns Heaven <i>Myth 1</i>	Initial salvation merged with sanctification	Initial salvation distinguished from sanctification
Faith Is an Active Force <i>Myth 2</i>	Faith is active; the cause of obedience	Faith is passive; the basis of obedient choices
Faith Is a Tricky Word <i>Myth 3</i>	Complex concept, including content, assent, & commitment	Simply relying upon Christ and His promise of eternal life
Faith → into Head & Heart <i>Myth 4</i>	Head faith distinct from heart faith	Faith is not dissected into head and heart
Faith Causes Salvation <i>Myth 5</i>	Faith causes initial salvation	Only God causes initial salvation
Decision for Christ <i>Myth 6</i>	Saving faith = willful decision; required for initial salvation	Saving faith = persuasion in Christ and His promise of eternal life
Only Committed Need Apply <i>Myth 7</i>	Commitment to discipleship required for initial salvation	Coming to faith distinguished from walking by faith
No Salvation w/o Reformation <i>Myth 8</i>	Repentance = change in behavior; required for initial salvation	Repentance = decision to turn from sin; not required for initial salvation
Surrender All or Possess Nothing <i>Myth 9</i>	Surrendering yields control of one's life; required to be saved	Surrendering renders oneself available to God for service
Saving Faith Perseveres <i>Myth 10</i>	Saving faith expands and must endure	Saving faith is instantaneous and secure
Works Prove Saving Faith <i>Myth 11</i>	Works prove possession of saving faith	Works reveal maturity in Christian life
Co-Payments Required <i>Myth 12</i>	Entrance to heaven is costly for the believer	Entrance to heaven is absolutely free for the believer

EPILOGUE

step of the Christian walk following saving faith is necessary for developing discipleship and Christian maturity.

Connecting the Dots

The topics addressed above demonstrate that both theological positions cannot be correct. One is based on “Christian” myths and one is not. One is right and one is wrong. The differences are not just semantic; they are significant theological distinctions with eternal consequences. Issue by issue, only one, either Reformed theology or Free Grace theology, is right.

This is one of the most important decisions of your life. You decide. Connect the dots!

HOLD FAST

Epilogue, NOTES

1. John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 196, 198, 207; John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1991), pp. 251, 257, 266, 280, 281, 288; James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), pp. 16, 37.

The “two-stage” approach is so named in writings by John MacArthur, John Piper, and James Boice, who are critics of the two-stage approach.