

Free Grace Theology and “Easy Believism”: Is There Really Any Connection?

by Bruce Bauer

- **A Harmless Non-derogatory Term? You be the judge.**

“Easy Believism” At first glance and in one’s initial thoughts, the term might seem innocuous enough to the average Christian. After all, he might say, it should be easy to believe; it shouldn’t be difficult to become saved. Christ died on the cross for our sins, he was buried and on the third day he rose from the grave---believe this gospel, believe in this Jesus of the Bible and you’ll be saved! Take caution, however, for some in the evangelical world employ the term “easy believism” to mean something completely different than you might think.

For the advocate of Lordship Salvation teaching, the appellation “easy believism” takes on an entirely different connotation with strikingly defamatory undertones. Listen to the way that John MacArthur utilizes the designation “easy believism” to slander Free Grace theology in his book, “The Gospel According to Jesus,” 1988, 2008 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), p. 20: “Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners.” Other similar slurs have been employed regularly by Lordship Faith advocates such as, “sloppy agape” and “greasy grace.”

The whole thrust of MacArthur’s accusation, of course, is that belief in Christ alone (by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone---the gospel message of Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 4:5) for salvation, *if* not accompanied by a whole array of outwardly visible works, is not good enough (it’s not meritorious enough to save [or keep saved] the sinner); to MacArthur, simply trusting the gospel of 1 Cor. 15:1-8, John 3:16, Acts 16:30-31, et. al., is not sufficient, i.e., it is not genuine saving faith.

As Dr. Tom Cucuzza declared in his book “Secure Forever: God’s Promise or Our Perseverance” (St. Cloud, MN: Xulon, 2008) about MacArthur’s unbiblical teaching, p. 89, “Is he [MacArthur] not saying that there must be perseverance to be eternally secure? Perseverance has to do with ‘our faithfulness and works.’ This man is saying that you and I must persevere, or work, to be saved. This is why, in the same article, MacArthur calls lordship salvation, ‘working-faith salvation.’ This is clearly mixing works with faith.”

“Believism”

Words have meaning. Words have impact; they can edify or they can bring harm. I personally abhor this non-word “believism!” The suffix “ism” in itself is a very thinly-veiled slam against Free Grace theology. It implies strongly that Free Grace is no better than any prevailing cult or “ism” on the scene today. False movements or belief systems such as Hinduism, Darwinism, Mormonism, or fanaticism come quickly to mind. In my opinion, this implication is no coincidence. Furthermore, setting aside the cultic connection, when one tacks on the often “tacky” suffix “ism,” the insertion can sometimes negate, weaken or alter the thrust of the original word. Take the word “true,” for instance. Attach the suffix “ism” and what do you end up with? The word “truism,” meaning, having the general appearance of truth, or being accepted by the masses as being true, as in a politician’s rhetorical platitudes, yet in actuality or in common practice, it may or may not prove to be reliable or verifiably true at all! Similarly, “believism” could be inferred to mean, “that which has a general appearance or a facade of true

belief but in reality is not real or genuine belief at all!”

- **Is True Belief Really Easy?**

“Easy”

In exploring and parsing the meaning of the term “easy,” I feel somewhat like a grand juror at the Clinton/ Lewinsky hearings attempting to wade through the morass of Bill Clinton’s infamous convoluted testimony: “It depends on what the meaning of the word ‘is’ is. If the—if he—if ‘is’ means is and never has been, that is not—that is one thing. If it means there is none, that was a completely true statement.” Say what?? Let’s look at some options below:

Easy, meaning uncomplicated, simple, straightforward, clear, not hard, not harsh, painless, not having to work for something: When applied to the basic biblical gospel of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, the synonyms above definitely apply. Coming to Jesus to become saved is *not a complicated arduous task*. Even a child can comprehend and accept the simple message of salvation. Acts 16:30-31 says, “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Jesus beacons and welcomes all who will come to him by faith placing their trust in him alone for salvation: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). The open invitation is for everyone—2 Peter 3:9.

Easy, meaning carefree, comfortable, gentle, tolerant, soft, mild, lenient, permissive, serene, lax, benign: This is a false picture of the Christian gospel which Lordship Faith proponents wrongfully thrust upon Free Grace theology. It implies a false theology of universalism (popularized recently by the vast publication of the heretical book “Love Wins”). Free Grace rejects universalism outright! The typical accusation is that Free Grace teaches that salvation comes simply by raising a hand, reciting a formulaic prayer, accepting a few innocuous facts about the historical Jesus, walking an aisle or coming forward at a Crusade. The Bible says nothing about any of these actions as being salvific; it says instead, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”

- **Are There Any Reasons for Ever Saying that Belief Unto Salvation is Not Easy?**

1. Uncomplicated? Straightforward? Simple? Clear? Absolutely! . . . Easy? Listen to Charles Ryrie from his book “Balancing the Christian Life,” (Chicago: Moody, 1969, 1994), pp. 188-189, about the problematic quality of the word “easy” when speaking of Christian belief: “The *content* of our faith involves unbelievable demands. We are asking people to trust this unseen Person about forgiveness of sins and eternal life on the basis of the death of that Person which is said to be substitutionary. Is that easy?”
2. Stubborn unbelief. For those who, for a lifetime have obstinately and repeatedly spurned the gracious invitation of the gospel and the wooing of the Holy Spirit, for *them*, saving belief is not easy. Pharaoh was a prime example of this. God’s repeated calls through Moses for Pharaoh to repent were spurned over and over, not because the concepts of belief in the true God and repentance were too complicated for him to understand, but because of his unyielding, unrepentant, pigheaded will. Eventually, God firmed him up in his (Pharaoh’s) own willful long-term rejection of God’s grace (Romans 9).

- **A Few Pertinent Questions for Lordship Faith Advocates**

The simple clear-cut gospel message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is unmistakably biblical, as cited above (many additional texts could be shown—the Gospel of John in particular throughout declares this gospel). So for the Lordship Faith advocate who loves to slander Free Grace theology with the false nomenclature “easy believism,” I pose the following salient questions:

1. The Bible clearly presents an uncomplicated plan of salvation; why do you want to make it so difficult for a person to become saved? Why do you invent so many practical and theological hoops through which the seeking unbeliever must leap? Are you desirous of limiting salvation only to a handful of elite superchristians, the chosen few?
2. Since you declare that true saving faith must be accompanied by a lifetime of strong commitment to God evidenced by a collection of clearly visible “good works,” how many good works must one do? For how many years? Are any periods of backsliding allowed? For how long are they permitted?
3. If visible good works must accompany true saving faith, how can one know whether she has truly made it (to heaven)? Can there ever be any real assurance of salvation?
4. How do you explain clear Bible examples of long-term or lifetime backslidden believers, such as Lot (called by Peter a righteous man, 2 Peter 2:7), or the Corinthian church whom Paul called brothers in the Lord, or what about the Laodicean Church of Revelation 3, clearly believers whom Jesus loved, rebuked and disciplined (cf. Hebrews 12:5-6).

(For a more detailed development of some of these thoughts, see, for one example, the article “Grace Baiting,” at <http://www.freegracealliance.com/pdf/baiting.pdf> OR

<http://expreacherman.wordpress.com/2010/09/02/macarthur-grace-baiting-an-article-by-bruce-bauer/>