Fulfilled Prophecies

Within The Full Preterist Camp, Is There A Consensus On The Free Grace Vs. Lordship Salvation Debate?

By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† No, there isn't a universal Full Preterist consensus on the Free Grace versus Lordship Salvation debate. Full Preterism is primarily an eschatological position concerning the fulfillment of prophecy, the coming of Christ, the resurrection, judgment, and the end of the Old Covenant age. It doesn't, by itself, establish one complete system of salvation theology.

† This means two Christians can agree that Matthew 24 was

fulfilled in the first century, that Christ's coming in judgment occurred in connection with Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, and that the Old Covenant age ended, while still disagreeing about repentance, perseverance, obedience, assurance, and the relationship between faith and works.

† The modern Free Grace and Lordship Salvation controversy developed largely within broader evangelical theology, particularly in disputes concerning what constitutes saving faith and what role repentance, obedience, and perseverance have in the Christian life. It wasn't originally a debate created by Full Preterism.

† Even within Full Preterism, published theological material demonstrates that some Full Preterists strongly emphasize sovereign grace, repentance, perseverance, and salvation producing a transformed life, while explicitly rejecting versions of Free Grace theology associated with Zane Hodges. This alone demonstrates that Full Preterism doesn't automatically settle this debate.

† Therefore, we shouldn't ask, "What must every Full Preterist believe about Free Grace or Lordship Salvation?" We should ask, "What does Scripture actually say about grace, faith, repentance, obedience, and salvation?"

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

† Paul places the foundation of salvation completely in God's grace. Salvation isn't earned through moral achievement, religious performance, law keeping, or human merit.

† Yet Paul doesn't stop after saying that salvation isn't from works. The people saved by grace are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Good works aren't presented as the price of salvation, but they belong to the life God intends for those who are in Christ (Titus 2:11-14).

† This distinction is important in the Free Grace and Lordship discussion. Scripture doesn't permit us to make works the foundation of salvation, but neither does it describe grace as permission to live without regard for Christ (Romans 6:1-2).

Romans 3:28
For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.
† Paul couldn't be clearer that justification isn't obtained through works of the Law. A person isn't declared righteous because he has accumulated enough obedience to deserve God's acceptance.
† This also has enormous importance from the fulfilled perspective. Paul's argument was written during the transition from the Old Covenant age into the fully established New Covenant order. The controversy surrounding justification repeatedly involved the question of whether people needed the works of the Mosaic Law for covenant membership (Galatians 2:16; Romans 4:1-5).
† Therefore, obedience must never be turned into another Law system by which Christians attempt to earn what Christ freely provides. Faith rests in Christ and His completed work.

Acts 20:20-21
how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was beneficial, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
† Paul didn't preach faith while treating repentance as irrelevant. He testified about repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ.
† Repentance doesn't mean earning salvation through good behavior. It's a turning toward God. Scripture presents repentance and faith together without turning either one into human merit (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25).
† This prevents us from creating an artificial choice between grace and repentance. God's grace doesn't compete with

repentance. His grace calls people away from sin and toward Christ.

Romans 10:9-10
that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.
† The gospel doesn't present Jesus as Savior while denying that He is Lord. Paul explicitly connects believing with confessing Jesus as Lord.
† This doesn't mean someone purchases salvation by reaching a certain level of obedience. Christ's lordship isn't something Christians create through their behavior. Jesus is Lord whether people acknowledge Him or reject Him (Philippians 2:9-11).
† The real question isn't whether Jesus must become Lord. He already is Lord. The question is whether our understanding of saving faith should completely separate trusting Christ from acknowledging the identity and authority of the Christ in whom we believe.

James 2:17-18
In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."
† James isn't teaching salvation by works. He is confronting a claim of faith that produces absolutely nothing.
† Paul and James aren't enemies. Paul denies that works provide the basis for justification before God, while James challenges a profession of faith that has no visible expression (Romans 4:2-5).
† Works don't purchase salvation. They demonstrate the practical reality of faith. We must preserve both truths rather than using one apostle against another.

John 3:16
For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.
† Eternal life is received through believing in Christ. Jesus doesn't say that eternal life is purchased by accumulating religious accomplishments.
† This is an essential truth emphasized by advocates of Free Grace theology, and that emphasis shouldn't be discarded simply because disagreements exist concerning other parts of their theology. Salvation is God's gift, centered upon Christ and received through faith.
† At the same time, the New Testament meaning of believing can't be isolated from everything else Jesus and His apostles taught about following Him, loving Him, repentance, and a transformed life (John 8:31; John 14:15).

Titus 2:11-14
For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds.
† Biblical grace doesn't simply forgive. Paul says grace instructs God's people concerning how they should live.
† Notice the order. Christ redeems His people, and the redeemed become a people zealous for good works. The works aren't the payment that purchases redemption. Christ is the Redeemer.
† From the fulfilled perspective, Paul's expectation concerning Christ's appearing belonged to the first-century audience awaiting the consummation of that covenantal transition (Hebrews 9:28; 10:37). Yet the character of New Covenant life remains relevant. We live after fulfillment as people belonging to

the kingdom Christ established.

Historical References

† The modern Free Grace versus Lordship Salvation controversy became especially prominent during the twentieth century. Zane Hodges became one of the major advocates of Free Grace theology, while John MacArthur became one of the best-known advocates of Lordship Salvation. Their disagreement centered substantially on saving faith, repentance, discipleship, obedience, perseverance, and assurance.

† Free Grace writers themselves acknowledge variations within their own movement, which means even "Free Grace" doesn't represent one perfectly uniform theological system.

† Full Preterism likewise doesn't require one particular position in this debate. Full Preterists come from different theological backgrounds, and at least some published Full Preterist theology explicitly embraces sovereign grace while rejecting the Free Grace theology associated with Hodges.

† The historical debate therefore shouldn't become our final authority. Neither Hodges, MacArthur, Calvinism, Dispensationalism, nor Full Preterism determines the gospel. Scripture must interpret Scripture.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We shouldn't make agreement on Full Preterism into a complete test of agreement on every doctrine. Someone can correctly understand the fulfillment of prophecy and still disagree with another Full Preterist concerning salvation theology.

† We also shouldn't turn salvation into something earned through Christian performance. We've been saved by grace through faith, not because we've accumulated enough good works to place God in our debt (Ephesians 2:8-9).

† At the same time, grace isn't an excuse for rejecting Christ's authority or living deliberately as though belonging to Christ makes no difference. We've been created in Christ Jesus for

good works (Ephesians 2:10).
† Faith, repentance, grace, obedience, and good works must remain in their biblical order. Grace is the source, Christ is the Savior, faith receives God's gift, repentance turns toward God, and obedience is the proper fruit of life in Christ (Acts 20:21; Titus 2:11-14).
† Full Preterism tells us when the promised eschatological events reached their fulfillment. It doesn't give us permission to redefine the gospel. Our doctrine of salvation must come from the whole counsel of Scripture.

Q & A Appendix
Q: Is there a universal Full Preterist position on Free Grace versus Lordship Salvation?
A: No. Full Preterism concerns the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and doesn't require adherence to one particular system within the Free Grace versus Lordship Salvation debate. Full Preterists can and do differ concerning salvation theology.

Q: Are we saved by our works?
A: No. Scripture says that we're saved by grace through faith, not from ourselves or from works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:28).

Q: Does that mean works don't matter at all?
A: No. Paul immediately says that those saved by grace are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10). Works aren't the cause or purchase price of salvation, but Scripture expects faith to produce fruit (James 2:17-18).

Q: Is repentance opposed to grace?
A: No. Paul preached repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). Scripture even describes repentance as something God grants (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25).

Q: Does acknowledging Jesus as Lord mean that we're saved by works?

A: No. Scripture explicitly joins believing in Christ with confessing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10). His lordship doesn't mean our obedience earns salvation.

Q: Which label should determine our position, Free Grace or Lordship Salvation?
A: Neither label should control our interpretation. We should affirm everything Scripture teaches about salvation by grace through faith while also affirming what Scripture teaches about repentance, Christ's lordship, obedience, and the fruit of faith (Ephesians 2:8-10; Acts 20:21; James 2:17-18).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 3:28; Acts 20:20-21; Romans 10:9-10; James 2:17-18; John 3:16; Titus 2:11-14
† Historical writers and theologians: Zane C. Hodges; John MacArthur

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