



LORDSHIP SALVATION CONTROVERSY

Introduction

The root of the current “lordship salvation” conflict between Reformed and Free Grace theological camps had its beginnings centuries ago. In the sixteenth century the Reformers rejected the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

The genesis of the opposing view resulted from the Roman Church’s teaching that justification before God required faith plus keeping the sacraments. The Reformers concluded the Scriptures taught that justification was by faith alone, apart from any other effort. In reaction to the Reformers’ claim of faith alone, the Roman Church alleged that this new teaching would allow believers to live anyway they wanted. Therefore the Roman Church concluded that faith alone was in fact the teaching of antinomianism (lawlessness). In reaction, the Reformers defended their faith-alone teaching, clarifying that justification was indeed by faith alone, but that faith which justifies is not alone — works are required. Responding to Rome’s assertion, the Reformers stressed the requirement for a believer to validate his justification in the form of works as a proof of salvation.¹

The formulas that were typically used to distinguish the two approaches are as follows:²

**Representative:
Basic Concept**
*Roman
Reformed*

REPRESENTATIVE FORMULAS (Basic Concept)	
Theological View	Representative Formula
Roman View	Faith + Works = Justification
Reformed View	Faith = Justification + Works

As shown, each view’s formula contains the same items, but the positioning varies. In the Roman view, faith combined with works are necessary in order to obtain justification, a righteous standing before a holy God. With the Reformed view, justification is indeed by faith, but there works are required to confirm if justification is actually a reality and if the person is really saved. In both systems faith and works are a requirement for justification.³ While the *Roman view* indicates that *justification is by faith, but not by faith alone*, the *Reformed view* says that *justification is by faith, but not by a faith that is alone*. No matter which view, if there are no works, there is in fact no justification.

In the pursuit of defending their *faith-alone* position against the antinomian charge, the Reformers opened Pandora’s box. This dilemma was created when the Reformers identified works as a proof of salvation, indicating that works were a required verifiable effect of justification. In so doing, the result of justification’s cause (faith) and justification’s effect (works) is

a second effect—heaven. On the other hand the logical cause-and-effect flow for the Roman Church has two causes (faith and works) that result in one effect—heaven. A comparison of the flow of logic for both the Roman and the Reformed approaches is as follows:

**Logic Flow:
Cause and Effect**
*Roman
Reformed*

LOGIC-FLOW FORMULAS (Cause and Effect)	
Theological View	Logic-Flow Formula
Roman View	Cause #1 + Cause #2 = Effect
Reformed View	Cause + Effect #1 = Effect #2

If you interchange faith, works, and heaven for the appropriate words in the above formula in each view, you are left not with just similar but with identical logic flows, faith + works = heaven, as revealed below:

**Logic Flow:
Explained**
*Roman
Reformed*

LOGIC-FLOW FORMULAS (Concepts Explained)	
Theological View	Logic-Flow Formula
Roman View	Faith + Works = Heaven
Reformed View	Faith + Works = Heaven

No matter how much mental gymnastics you apply, one’s eternal destiny is always the result of faith and works. Call it a cause or an effect; works are required for heaven in either theological view. In both Roman and Reformed theology salvation is so intertwined with sanctification that eternal life is obtained by works, requiring a submission and obedience to Christ’s lordship for salvation.⁴

During the twentieth century, there were those who continued to reject the teachings of the Roman Church position (faith + works = justification), but likewise spoke out in denial of the Reformed position (faith = justification + works).⁵ Their conclusion from Scripture is that justification is by faith alone, apart from any effort. But you may be saying, “Those are the exact words of the Reformers in the sixteen century.” And you are correct. The Free Grace position is exactly that—faith alone, really alone, with no works of any kind, whether a cause or an effect. Not a single work—before, during, or after justification. Salvation is a free gift by God’s gracious work, through faith with no works required.⁶

As would be expected, in reaction to the claim that justification is by faith alone, really alone, opposition occurred. Again it was charged that this new teaching would allow anyone to live anyway he pleased. Antinomianism (lawlessness) again was the claim and *license* was the label. But the cries came not from the Roman Church; they came from Protestant church leaders who were the product of the sixteenth-century Reformation.⁷ Unlike the Reformer’s response when the Roman Church charged antinomianism, the Free Grace camp did not deflect the charge. Rather, they explained the logic of their view from a correct interpretation of Ephesians 2, Romans 4, and James 2, distinguishing salvation from sanctification or discipleship.

A comparison of the logic flow for all three approaches provides perspective:

**Logic Flow:
Cause and Effect**
*Roman
Reformed
Free Grace*

LOGIC-FLOW FORMULAS (Cause and Effect)	
Theological View	Logic-Flow Formula
Roman View	Cause #1 + Cause #2 = Effect
Reformed View	Cause + Effect #1 = Effect #2
Free Grace View	Cause = Effect

When again an interchange of faith, works, and heaven is made for the appropriate words in the above formulas, the differences are revealed below:

**Logic Flow:
Explained**
*Roman
Reformed
Free Grace*

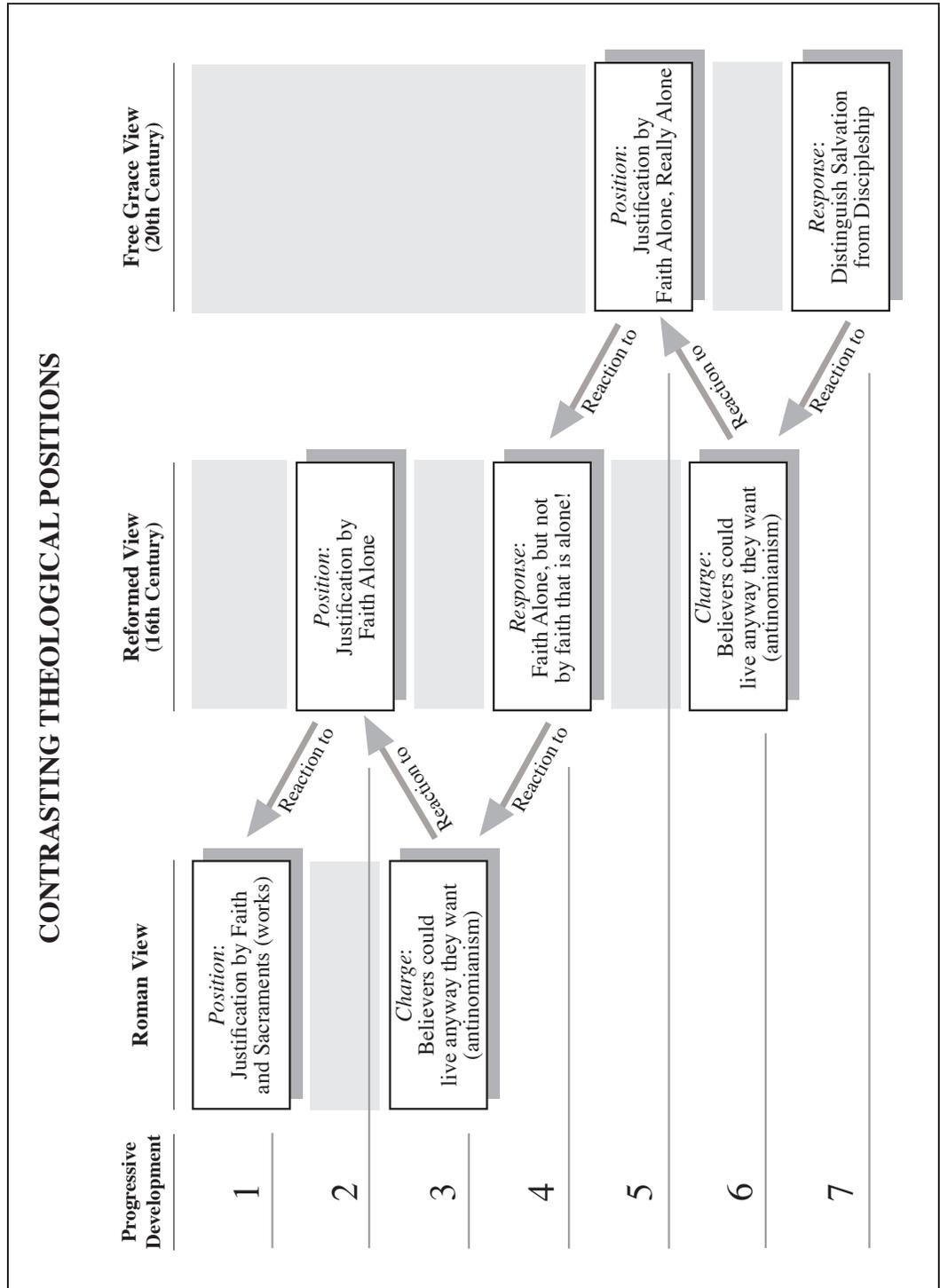
LOGIC-FLOW FORMULAS (Concepts Explained)	
Theological View	Logic-Flow Formula
Roman View	Faith + Works = Heaven
Reformed View	Faith + Works = Heaven
Free Grace View	Faith = Heaven

Conclusion

The Free Grace view eliminates the requirement of any works for justification. Salvation is the gracious work of God alone. For a perspective of the contrasting positions over time, the chart on the next page, *Contrasting Theological Positions*, provides the progressive development of the controversy.



**Contrasting
Theological
Positions**
*Progressive
Development*



Endnotes

1. Ken Neff, *Rethinking Empowerment* (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2011), pp. 169-70.
2. R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), pp. 155-156.
3. See “Myth 11: Works Required” in *Hold Fast* by Ken Neff (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2010), pp. 141-52).
4. See “Myth 1: It’s Always about Heaven or Hell” in *Hold Fast*, pp. 27-28.
5. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), pp. 371-93; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 169-81; Zane Clark Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1982), pp. 3-18; Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), pp. 271-91; and Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), pp. 113-28.
6. See “Myth 5: Good Works Are Proof of Salvation” in *Free To Choose* by Ken Neff, (St. Augustine, FL: LeaderQuest, 2011), pp. 79-93.
7. Sproul, *Faith Alone*, pp. 25, 169, 171; John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works* (Dallas: Word, 1993), pp. 94-96.