

Repentance is necessary in order to receive forgiveness

Outline of this paper:

- A. Introduction – the fear of God is a necessary element for healthy Christian living
- B. Replacing the three unbiblical pillars of the Grace-without-Fear doctrine with truth:
 - 1. All of a Christian's future sins are NOT automatically pre-forgiven at the point of salvation
 - 2. God DOES judge Christians who sin
 - 3. Christians DO need to confess and repent of their sins in order to be forgiven of them
- C. Two Objections:
 - 1. 'Doesn't the Bible say there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?'
 - 2. 'Doesn't the Bible say that God sees us as holy in Christ no matter what we do?'

- A. **Introduction:** There is an unbiblical doctrine that is being taught today by a number of popular teachers and authors, which allows people to sin without fear. Though these teachers do not explicitly say that it is 'okay to sin' (and would probably be incensed to hear such an accusation), their doctrine promotes apathy towards sin and repentance within the Body of Christ because it teaches the following three unbiblical points:
- 1. That God does not judge or punish Christians who sin;
 - 2. That all of a Christian's *future* sins are automatically forgiven, the moment they come to Christ;
 - 3. That when a Christian sins, he/she does not need to confess or repent of those sins in order to be forgiven, since those sins were already automatically forgiven the moment he/she came to Christ.
- I believe that some of the men who teach this doctrine are sincere and would not intentionally give people a license to sin – yet that is what their doctrine is doing. They would argue that when a person gets a revelation of God's amazing love and grace that that person won't *want* to sin anymore. Though this sounds so wonderful and spiritual that few Christians ever challenge it, and though there is an *element* of truth contained within it, the question must be asked; where in the Bible is this 'truth' taught? Where in the Bible does it say that the only thing a believer needs in order to overcome sin is a revelation of God's love, grace and forgiveness? Nowhere. It is true that every Christian desperately needs a revelation of God's love and grace, but the Bible clearly teaches that *two things* are needed, equally, in order for a person to have victory over sin and intimacy with God: the love of God *and* the fear of God (Prov 16:6).
 - Partial truths can sometimes be just as damaging as outright falsehoods: to teach that only the love of God is needed, when in truth the fear of God is also needed, leaves Christians with only one leg to stand on in the realm of the Spirit, effectively crippling them in their Christian walk. Worse, any doctrinal paradigm that completely leaves out a healthy fear of God has the potential to send many Christians to Hell (Matt 7:21-23; Matt 7:13-14; Phil 2:12). Consider the following 7 passages, which are just a tiny sampling of the mountain of Scripture passages on the topic of fearing God:
 - 1. *By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.* – **Prov 16:6 (ESV)**
 - ◇ According to this passage how does a person turn away from evil – by the love of God or the fear of God? By the fear of God!
 - 2. *The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.* – **Prov 8:13 (ESV)**
 - 3. *And he said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'* – **Job 28:28 (ESV)**
 - 4. *For we [believers] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* ¹¹ *Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.* – **2 Cor 5:6-11 (ESV)**

- ◇ In this passage the apostle Paul talks about personally knowing the fear of the Lord and its importance as a motivation in his ministry.
 - 5. *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him [God] who can destroy both soul and body in hell. – Jesus (Matt 10:28 ESV)*
 - ◇ In this passage Jesus commands believers to fear God because of His ability to punish people in Hell. The purpose of this passage in its greater context is to keep believers from falling away from the faith on account of persecution. It is important to recognize that throughout the Gospels, in many passages just like this, Jesus often uses fear as an important and legitimate motivator to help Christians do right. Love is important, but so is the fear of God.
 - 6. *And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be salted with fire. – Jesus (Mark 9:43-49 ESV)*
 - ◇ This passage gives another example of Jesus using fear, instead of love, as the motivation for doing right. Why would Jesus do this? Because godly fear is a necessary and important component for living a godly life.
 - 7. *For if we [believers] go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge HIS people" [speaking of believers].³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. – Heb 10:26-31 (ESV)*
 - ◇ This passage clearly teaches that believers should be afraid to deliberately continue in sin, because of the consequences of what God will do to them should they not repent of their ways.
- **What does it mean to fear God?** A good analogy would be a hot oven element: I don't live my life in fear of the oven in my kitchen, but I am most definitely afraid of touching an oven element when it's hot – and that fear keeps me from doing such a stupid thing, which, in turn, saves me from serious injury. Same with the fear of God: the Bible does not teach believers to live their lives being scared of God – but we should most definitely fear the awful consequences of sinning and running afoul of God's wrath. Such a fear will keep a person safe!
 - **What about 1 John 4:17-18 and "Perfect love casts out all fear"?** It is right here that proponents of Grace-without-Fear will want to quote 1 John 4:18 about 'perfect love' casting out 'fear.' Here is the passage in its entirety: *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. – 1 John 4:16-18 (ESV)*
 - ◇ Teachers of Grace-without-Fear use this passage as the foundation of their doctrine that Christians should not have any fear in their life – no fear of God, no fear of judgment and no fear of the consequences of sinning, since perfect love drives out such fears. A correct interpretation of this passage, however, would be that Christians who have been perfected in love (ie. who live lives full of love for God and others) need not fear the Day of Judgement. But not all Christians have been perfected in love – not even close. Furthermore, this passage also isn't teaching that Christians who have been perfected in love need not fear the consequences of sinning, should they turn away from love back to a life of sin (Heb 10:26-31).
 - ◇ The problem with the Grace-without-Fear camp's interpretation of this passage lies in a lazy reading of the text; when they read verse 18, 'perfect love casts out fear' they understand the following: *That because God loves us*

with a perfect love we no longer need to fear judgment from Him. Such an understanding cannot be correct, however, because it clearly contradicts so many other passages of Scripture about the fact that God will indeed judge Christians and that such judgment is fearful (Matt 7:21-23, Rom 2:5-8 and Heb 10:26-31 for just several examples out of many). The fact that God loves us with a perfect love does NOT mean that He won't punish us when we sin.

- ◇ If a person reads one verse earlier, however, in verse 17, they will find the statement 'perfect love casts out fear' qualified: *'By this is love perfected WITH US, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also ARE WE in this world.'* In this verse we see that what verse 18 is talking about is not *GOD'S* love, but *OUR* love; in other words, when *we* love like He loves, *then* we no longer have anything to fear from Him on Judgment Day.
- ◇ A good analogy here would be of a son who is waiting for his father to come home (assume that the father is a good and loving father). The son will not have anything to fear from his father's return *IF* he has done nothing wrong while his father was away. But if, while his father was away, the son insulted his mother, beat up on his younger siblings, and disobeyed his father's instructions, then he should fear his father's return because a good and loving father will strictly punish such behaviour (Heb 12:5-11; Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13). Does the father love his son? Yes – but it is not the perfectness of the father's love, in this case, that determines whether or not the son has something to fear; it is the perfectness (or lack thereof) of the *son's* love which determines whether or not the son has something to fear. If the son is a loving and obedient boy while his father is gone (ie. has been perfected in his love), then he has nothing to fear from his father's return. In the same way Christians who live lives abounding in love for God and others need not have any fear of the Day of Judgment – but Christians who live in apathy, worldliness and unrighteousness most certainly should fear (Matt 7:21-23; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:3-6; Heb 10:26-31)!

B. Exposing the three unbiblical pillars of the Grace-without-Fear doctrine:

- In the introduction I mentioned the three primary tenets of the Grace-without-Fear doctrine:
 1. That all of a Christian's *future* sins are automatically forgiven, the moment they come to Christ;
 2. That God does not judge or punish Christians who sin;
 3. That when a Christian sins, he/she does not need to confess or repent of those sins in order to be forgiven, since those sins were already automatically forgiven the moment he/she came to Christ.
- I will now show that each of these tenets are false, by proving their opposite from Scripture.
 1. **The Truth: All of a Christian's future sins are NOT automatically forgiven at the point of salvation.** (A survey of 14 passages.)
 - a) For if we [speaking of believers, unless the writer of Hebrews was a non-Christian!] go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified [this statement proves that this passage is written to believers, because only someone who has believed could have at any point been 'sanctified'], and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. – **Heb 10:26-31 (ESV)**
 - Comment: No other passages are even needed – this one makes clear that Christians can continue to sin after believing, and that if they do they are no longer forgiven of their sins (v. 26), but condemned to Hell (v. 27).
 - b) **The parable of the unforgiving servant:** "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." – **Matt 18:23-35 (ESV)**
 - In this parable Jesus Himself refutes the whole idea that all of a person's future sins are automatically forgiven at the point of salvation. In the parable, a servant who owes an impossibly large amount of money goes to the king and begs for more time to repay his debt (v.24-26). The king responds by taking pity on the poor servant, and, in a fit of generosity, goes far beyond the servant's request by actually forgiving the entire debt (v.27); no need to repay – ever! This, of course, is a beautiful picture of what God does for each believer at the first moment of salvation: He forgives us the overwhelming debt of our sins (which would be impossible for anyone to 'pay off') by placing them under the payment of Jesus' blood!
 - But then the parable takes a twist; starting in verse 28, the forgiven servant (ie. the 'saved' servant) leaves the presence of the king and seeks out another servant who owes him a tiny amount of money. This fellow servant falls down and pleads with the forgiven servant to be given more time in which to repay the tiny debt which he owes (v.29). But, in a stunning display of ingratitude, the servant who has been forgiven much refuses to forgive

the one who owes little, and actually has the indebted servant thrown into prison (v.30). News of this despicable act soon reaches the king (v.31) and furious, he recalls the servant whom he had so recently forgiven (v.32).

- This is a critical juncture in the parable; people who believe that all of a Christian's future sins are automatically forgiven do not believe that God could ever *un*-forgive a person, no matter what they do. Yet that is exactly what happens in the parable! The enraged king recalls the forgiven servant and explicitly reverses his previous forgiveness, throwing him into prison until he should be able to pay back all of his previous debts (v.34) – which, remember, are too big for him to repay. In other words, Jesus is clearly teaching in this parable that forgiveness can be lost – a person may receive total forgiveness from God (ie. be 'saved') at one point in their life but then lose that forgiveness when they refuse to forgive others.
 - Jesus goes on to add an emphatic exclamation point to the end of the parable, finishing with this line, "So also my heavenly Father will do to *every one of you* [speaking to believers!], if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."(v.35)
- At this point we could stop already, for it has already been clearly proven that Christians are not automatically forgiven for all of their future sins, at the point of their conversion. But let us continue with a further survey of Scripture.
- c) Notice what Jesus said to the Christians at Sardis: *Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.* – **Rev 3:4 (ESV)**
- Comment: Only a few people in the church of Sardis were left who had not soiled their garments. But this means that many other people in the church at Sardis *did* soil their spiritual garments and were *no longer* worthy to walk with Jesus dressed in white. How did the majority, who were previously saved (ie. at one time had unsoiled garments), get *soiled*? The answer is that it must be possible for sin to defile a Christian after salvation. In other words, a person's future sins are not all automatically cleansed at the moment of salvation.
- d) *He [God] will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.* – **Rom 2:6-8 (ESV)**
- If Christians are automatically forgiven of all sins, regardless of whether or not they repent, why is Paul here talking about God rendering to each believer 'according to his works'? If God is going to pay back each believer for his/her works, including the bad ones ('obey unrighteousness' v.8), then obviously not all of a Christian's sins are automatically forgiven.
- e) Jesus taught that sin can drag any lustful person to hell (including Christians):*But I tell you that ANYONE who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.* – **Matt 5:28-29 (NIV)**
- Does Jesus make any exceptions in this passage? Does He say that if unbelievers lust they will go to Hell, but that if believers lust, there will be no punishment? No! He states: 'anyone' who lusts – that would include people who call themselves Christians [for good news about how to truly be forgiven see the end of point 2 below].
- f) Likewise, Jesus also stated that the stipulation for a Christian to get his sins forgiven is that he must also forgive others who sin against him. Such a teaching would be impossible if all of a Christian's future sins (including unforgiveness) were automatically pre-forgiven even before they were committed. *For IF you [speaking to believers] forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* – **Matt 6:14-15 (NIV)**
- g) *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every EFFORT to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.* – **2 Pet 3:14 (NIV)**

- Why would the apostle Peter tell Christians to make ‘every effort’ to be found spotless and blameless before the Lord, if every sin they could possibly commit was automatically pre-forgiven by God, thus rendering every Christian automatically spotless and blameless, regardless of lifestyle or effort? It makes no sense!
 - Obviously, being ‘*found spotless, blameless and at peace with God*’ is not automatic. Which Jesus also taught: *Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.* – **Luke 13:24 (NIV)**
- h) *Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.* – **1 Tim 5:22 (NASB)**
- Comment: Paul told Timothy not to be hasty in the laying on of hands, because he believed Timothy could share responsibility for those sins and consequently told Timothy to keep himself ‘free from sin.’ Such commands would be meaningless, however, if Timothy was already automatically pre-forgiven for any and all possible future sins.
 - The entire New Testament teaches this fact, even to the point of telling Christians they can *die* spiritually, through sin, and *not inherit the kingdom of God* – consider the following passages:
- i) *For if you [speaking to believers] live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* – **Rom 8:13 (ESV)**
- Comment: This warning makes absolutely no sense if Christians are automatically pre-forgiven of all sins.
- j) *But each person [this is written to Christians, see 1:2] is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.* – **James 1:14-16 (ESV)**
- Comment: How can sin bring death to people who are pre-forgiven of their sins?!?
- k) *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I WARN you, as I WARNED you before, that those who do such things [including believers – this passage is addressed to Christians] will not inherit the kingdom of God.* – **Gal 5:19-21 (ESV)**
- Comment: In this passage Paul clearly warns that believers who blatantly live a life of sin WON’T inherit the kingdom of God (ie. will go to Hell). That it is possible for Christians to not inherit the kingdom of God because of sinful living, proves that God holds Christians accountable for their sins, which proves that they are not automatically pre-forgiven of all their future sins. This point is so blindingly obvious throughout the New Testament, that it is almost painful to have to state it.
- There are other indications that a Christian's future sins are not forgiven and that sin can spiritually defile a believer, even though Jesus died for all sins nearly 2000 years ago:
 - l) *See to it that no one [speaking to believers] misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.* – **Heb 12:15 (NIV)**
 - How can believers ever be defiled if all of their sins are automatically pre-forgiven?
- m) *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us [believers] purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.* – **2 Cor 7:1 (NIV)**
- If Christians are automatically pre-forgiven of all their future sins, it would be impossible for them to ever become contaminated by sin, since all sin is immediately and automatically pre-forgiven. But in this passage Paul tells Christians to purify themselves from contamination, so obviously Paul believes that it is possible for Christians to be contaminated by sin (ie. to have sins in their life which aren’t forgiven).
- n) Also, notice the following Scripture which shows that the Apostle Paul knew of some who *wandered away* from a pure heart. In other words, they had a pure heart at one point, but now they don’t. This would be impossible if their future sins were already automatically pre-forgiven: *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to*

meaningless talk. – 1 Tim 1:5–6 (NIV)

- ◇ **Conclusion:** Not only does the Bible not teach that all of a Christian's *future* sins are automatically pre-forgiven at the point of conversion (as the above 14 passages prove), it explicitly teaches only that a person's *past* sins are forgiven at the point of repentance: *But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his PAST sins.* – **2 Pet 1:9 (NIV)**
- Similarly, Paul stated: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.* – **Col 2:13 (NIV)**
 - ◇ *All our sins* were forgiven in a moment's time when we got *born again*. If a Christian is afterward deceived or yields to the devil's temptations to sin, the following is given as a remedy: ***IF we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** – **1 John 1:9 (NIV)**
 - ◇ The Apostle John put himself in on that Scripture by using the plural pronoun *we*, so this passage is obviously addressing believers. In other words, if we *don't* confess those sins to God, which are committed after conversion, then we won't be purified from their effects.

2. **The Truth, part 2: God DOES judge Christians who sin.**

- ◇ Grace-without-Fear teachers preach that there is no more judgment or wrath for people who become Christians because of the cross. This is in direct contradiction to Scripture (here are just 8 passages):
- a) *For it is time for JUDGMENT to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us [believers], what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” – **1 Pet 4:17-18 (ESV)***
 - b) *For if we [believers] go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth [after becoming Christians], there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of JUDGMENT, and a FURY of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.”[believers] ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. – **Heb 10:26-31 (ESV)***
 - c) *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself [look for sin], then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks JUDGMENT on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died [God’s judgment today can even include killing believers!]. ³¹ But IF we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But WHEN we [believers] are JUDGED by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world [God judges us and disciplines us, sometimes severely, in order to keep us from Hell]. – **1 Cor 11:27-32 (ESV)***
 - d) *For we [Paul speaking of himself and all believers] must ALL appear before the JUDGMENT seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. – **2 Cor 5:10 (ESV)***
 - So much for the teaching that God doesn’t judge Christians. We will *all* stand before Him someday and receive our due for things done *both* good and evil. For some Christians, this judgment will end up sending them to Hell (Matt 7:21-23; Heb 10:26-31), for others this judgment will mean a severe punishment that leaves them barely making it into heaven alive (2 Cor 3:15), and for others it will mean tremendous reward (Matt 25:21).
 - e) *He [God] will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. – **Rom 2:6-8 (ESV)***
 - How can people say that there is no more Judgment for Christians when the Bible clearly teaches opposite? This passage makes clear the fact that one day God will pay back each person ‘according to his works.’ That’s what judgment is! Judgment is nothing more than paying a person back for what they have done.
 - f) *For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay EACH PERSON [no exceptions for Christians] according to what he has done. – **Matt 16:27 (ESV)***
 - g) **Ananias and Sapphira**. Consider also the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); they lied to Peter, separately, about the percentage of their offering for the church – and God killed them both, in turn, for this lie! The end result was that ‘great fear’ came upon the church (v. 6, 11). What are the Grace-without-Fear teachers to make of this passage? If there is no more judgment for believers because of the cross, how is it that Ananias and Sapphira (believers!) could be killed by God for telling a lie, a short time *after* Jesus’ death and resurrection?
 - h) **Jesus’ Parable of the unforgiving servant**. [Note to the reader: this parable was dealt with earlier in this paper, in relation to another issue and there is a fair amount of overlap.] *Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. ²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a*

king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So ALSO my heavenly Father will do to every one of you [speaking to believers], IF you do not forgive your brother from your heart." – **Matt 18:21-35 (ESV)**

- This parable clearly teaches that believers who refuse to do right will face judgment and wrath from God. The first part of the parable pictures salvation: a servant owes a king far more than he can pay back (v.24-25), so he begs for mercy from the king, who promptly forgives all of his debts (v. 26-27). This is a beautiful picture of redemption in Christ: we come to God with a sin-debt that is impossible for us to pay, so we beg Him for mercy and He forgives us our debt – and at that point we are 'saved.'
- But the parable doesn't end there. The first servant has had all his debts forgiven, which according to the Grace-without-Fear teachers understanding of salvation means all of his future debts (ie. sins) are forgiven too, regardless of whether he confesses or repents. Wrong! The parable goes on to tell of how the newly forgiven servant (ie. Christian) then refuses to forgive another servant of a much smaller debt (v. 29-30). When the king (who represents God in this parable) hears about what has happened he is furious (v.31-32) and calls the once-forgiven servant to account, *erasing* his original forgiveness and punishing him in jail (v. 33), which represents Hell.

◇ **Did not Jesus satisfy God's wrath at the cross?** Here the Grace-without-Fear teachers may protest, "But did not Jesus satisfy God's wrath at the cross?" Yes He did (Rom 3:23-26; 5:9; Eph 2:13); the problem arises when Grace-without-Fear teachers twist that phrase to mean something the Bible doesn't teach. That Jesus satisfied God's wrath on the cross DOES NOT mean that all of a Christian's future sins are automatically forgiven regardless of whether or not they confess and repent of them; it also does not mean that God won't hold His people accountable for their actions on Judgment Day, nor that He won't punish and judge His people for sinful living – the Bible is very clear that He will indeed do all of those things.

- **The Good News:** Here is what Jesus satisfying God's wrath on the cross DOES mean: Jesus paid for all of your sin-debts, and took all of the punishment for your sins, **IF** you truly repent of those deeds (with remorse) and turn from them. But repentance is not a one-time event that is good for all time into the future: if a truly repentant person at some point goes back to their wicked ways, they cease to walk in Jesus' forgiveness, and God's wrath comes on them again in all its fury (Heb 10:26-31; Eze 18:21-32; 33:12-20; Matt 18:21-35). This is why the Grace-without-Fear teachings of our day are so dangerous: by focusing (unbiblically) only on God's Forgiveness, and not on His Wrath and Holiness, they are encouraging Christians to live with a false sense of security with regards to the consequences of sin in their lives. This is in direct contrast to the teaching of the New Testament, which regularly admonishes believers everywhere to work out their salvation with 'fear' and 'trembling' and to avoid sin because of fear of judgment (Lk 12:4-5; Rom 11:20-22; 2 Cor 7:1; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim

5:20; 1 Pet 1:17; Jude 1:23).

- ◇ **Conclusion:** The words of the apostle Paul are very appropriate here, concerning the biblical relationship between a believer's confidence in God's promises and fear of God's wrath against sin: "*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves [get rid of sin] from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the FEAR of God" (2 Cor 7:1 ESV). Believers today should be confident in God's promises AND fearful of the consequences of turning away from those promises. Both the confidence *and* the fear are needed; according to Scripture fear is an important motivator that helps us move towards holiness. Grace-without-Fear teachers are often horrified when someone suggests that a believer should have fear about anything. Let me clarify: I am not here proposing that believers live in fear, only that they fear God's wrath and the consequences of sinning. A good analogy would be a hot oven element: I don't live my life in fear of the oven in my kitchen, but I am most definitely afraid of touching an oven element when it's hot – and that fear keeps me from doing such a stupid thing, which, in turn, saves me from serious injury. Same with the fear of God: the Bible does not teach believers to live their lives being scared of God – but we should most definitely fear the awful consequences of sinning and running afoul of God's wrath. Such a fear will keep a person safe.*

3. **The Truth, part 3: Christians DO need to confess and repent of their sins in order to be forgiven of them.**

- ◇ Grace-without-Fear teachers preach that once a person becomes a Christian, they no longer need to confess or repent of the sins they commit, since those sins are already pre-forgiven. This teaching has already been amply proven to be false. I will here include several passages which speak of the importance of repentance in order to procure forgiveness from God:
- a) ***IF we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 John 1:9 (ESV)***
 - b) ***IF my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then [and only then] I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. – 2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)***
 - c) [speaking to worldly believers] ***Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. – James 4:8-10 (ESV)***
 - d) ***And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. – James 5:15-16 (ESV)***
- ◇ Repentance is not just something a person does once, at the point of salvation. Repentance is an on-going lifestyle that is needed whenever sinful behaviour is engaged in. If the above passages are not enough to prove this point, consider the following examples from the New Testament where people repented of sins, or were told to repent of sins, after they had already become Christians. These examples prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that repentance is something Christians still need to do even after they get ‘saved.’
- ◇ **Examples of Christians in the New Testament having to repent of sins after conversion:**
- a) **The story of Simon: Acts 8:12-24 (ESV)** *But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip.*
 - At this point Simon is a Christian, right? He has believed and been baptized. Let’s see what happens next . . . *And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. ¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰ But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² **REPENT, therefore, of this wickedness of yours,** and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” ²⁴ And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”*
 - What further proof is needed? The Grace-without-Fear teachers preach that Christians no longer need to repent, and yet here we find the apostle Peter telling a new believer to repent of a sin that he committed after he became a believer. Furthermore, Peter clearly states that Simon must pray to the Lord and beg Him for forgiveness. Forgiveness is obviously not automatic!
 - b) **Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church: 2 Corinthians 7:9-12 (ESV)** *As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into REPENTING. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness*

to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. ¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

- In this passage Paul rejoices because his previous letter to the Corinthian Christians (which contained a stinging rebuke) had grieved them to the point of repenting of their sins.
- c) **The Corinthian church, part 2: 2 Corinthians 12:19-21 (ESV)** *Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and HAVE NOT REPENTED of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.*
- In this passage Paul fears that he may have to rebuke some of the Corinthian Christians because they have not yet repented of the sins which he had rebuked them for in his previous letter. After reading passages such as this, how can anyone claim that Christians do not need to confess or repent of their sins?
- d) **The 7 letters to the churches in Revelation . . . REPENT!** In Revelation 2-3 we have recorded seven messages from Jesus to seven churches in first century Asia. Seven times in these letters (in 5 passages), Jesus exhorts the Christians in those churches to ‘repent,’ and threatens serious consequences should they not. How can anyone seriously argue after reading these letters that Jesus does not expect His followers to continue repenting, whenever they sin, after conversion?
- 1) *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; REPENT, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, UNLESS YOU REPENT.* – **Rev 2:5 (ESV)**
 - 2) *Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.* – **Rev 2:16 (ESV)**
 - 3) *“I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to REPENT, but she refuses to REPENT of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they REPENT of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you [speaking to believers] according to your works.”* – **Rev 2:19-23 (ESV)**
 - 4) *“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “ ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and REPENT. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.’”* – **Rev 3:1-3 (ESV)**
 - 5) *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and REPENT.”* – **Rev 3:15-19 (ESV)**

C. Two Objections:

1. 'But doesn't the Bible say that there is now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus?'

- ◇ Yes it does – but the Grace-without-Fear teachers have badly twisted what it means. Here is the most famous passage about there being no condemnation for believers: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* – **Rom 8:1 (ESV)**
 - People who believe in Grace-without-Fear take this passage to mean that the moment a person becomes a Christian they are immediately freed from all past, present and future condemnation from God, no matter what they do. Thus, if a Grace-without-Fear teacher were to counsel a Christian who felt terrible because of some sin they had committed – they had lied, or looked at pornography, or committed adultery, or murdered somebody – the Grace-without-Fear teacher's counsel would not center around warning that person to fear God's wrath against sin, feel remorse, repent or turn back to righteousness; instead, their counsel would center around getting rid of the person's negative feelings ('condemnation') about their sin – ie. telling that person to *stop feeling bad* about their sin and to *stop feeling like God is angry with their sin*. Why? 'Because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'
 - ◇ Consider how opposite this type of advice is, however, when compared with what the Bible advises Christians who lapse into worldliness, apathy and sin: *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."* – **James 4:8-10 (ESV)**
- ◇ What the Grace-without-Fear teachers don't realize is that they are making two very big assumptions about Romans 8:1 – two assumptions which aren't stated in the text, and which directly contradict a vast amount of Scripture. Here are their two assumptions:
 - a) That the promise of no condemnation does not just apply to past sins, but also automatically applies to all *future* sins a Christian could possibly commit;
 - b) That being 'in Christ Jesus' applies to anybody and everybody who calls themselves a Christian and believes in their head all the proper doctrines about Christ (He is the Son of God, He died for our sins, He rose again, etc.).
- ◇ The two assumptions about Romans 8:1:
 - a) **Assumption #1: No condemnation for future sins.** We have already amply proven, throughout this paper, that assumption #1 is false. But let us attack it again from a different angle. Consider the following two verses, which both clearly teach that a Christian can fall under God's condemnation, after conversion, because of sin:
 - 1) *But above all, my brothers* [speaking to believers – only believers could be called "brothers"], *do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under CONDEMNATION.* – **James 5:12 (ESV)**
 - ◇ In this passage James instructs Christians not to take oaths. Why? Because if a Christian takes an oath and breaks it, they will 'fall under condemnation.' But this is the very thing that the Grace-without-Fear teachers say is impossible, because of their assumptions about Romans 8:1. The only way this passage and Romans 8:1 don't contradict each other is if Romans 8:1 is only talking about all of a Christian's past sins at the point of repentance. However, if a Christian sins again in the future, without repenting, they once again can come under condemnation.
 - 2) *But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry ¹² and so incur CONDEMNATION for having abandoned their former faith.* – **1 Tim 5:11-12 (ESV)**
 - ◇ This passage states clearly that young Christian widows may incur *condemnation* when they get drawn away from Christ and abandon their former faith. But, again, this is something that Grace-without-Fear teachers would say is impossible. In their doctrinal system, once a person becomes a Christian they *never* have to worry about facing condemnation ever again, no matter what they do. Obviously their teaching is wrong.

- The above two passages are enough to prove that when Paul says that there is ‘no condemnation in Christ Jesus,’ he means that there is no condemnation for past sins, when a Christian *repents* of those sins (2 Pet 1:9). But if a Christian sins unrepentantly, he/she most certainly does come under condemnation, which is God’s judgment and wrath, as the rest of this paper has already proven.
- There is a second assumption, made by Grace-without-Fear teachers in Romans 8:1, which we will now examine . . .

b) **Assumption #2: Everyone who calls himself a Christian is ‘in’ Christ.**

- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are IN Christ Jesus. – **Rom 8:1 (ESV)**
- Grace-without-Fear teachers apply this verse to anyone who believes in Jesus – therefore, if a person calls himself a Christian, and if they believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died and rose again, then Grace-without-Fear teachers will automatically apply this verse to that person, regardless of that person’s lifestyle; they will tell these people not to worry about their sins or about judgment because they are no longer under condemnation. This is an unbiblical assumption. Consider the following points:

1) **The Bible teaches that mental belief in Jesus, without obedience, does not save a person.**

- ◇ *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works [obedience] is useless? – James 2:19-20 (ESV)* In the next 6 verses James goes on to prove that mental belief that is not accompanied by obedience is useless and will not save a person – *You see that a person is justified by works and NOT by faith [ie. mental belief] alone. – James 2:24 (ESV)*
- ◇ *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will [ie. obedience] of my Father who is in heaven.²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” – Matt 7:21-23 (ESV)*
- ◇ Who calls Jesus ‘Lord?’ Only Christians! Who prophesies in Jesus’ name? Only Christians! Who does miracles in Jesus’ name? Only Christians! And here in this passage we find Jesus sending ‘many’ Christians to hell because of their disobedience. This is a sobering passage which more Christians would do well to meditate on.
- ◇ **Conclusion:** According to Scripture there are many people who mentally believe in Jesus, but who are not ‘in’ Christ. The promise of ‘no condemnation’ does not apply to any of these ‘Christians.’

2) **The Bible clearly teaches that people who sin are not ‘in’ Christ.**

- ◇ Grace-without-Fear teachers preach that once a person believes in Jesus they are ‘in’ Him, no matter what they do. That is most decidedly *not* what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that people who *act like* Jesus are in Jesus, and that those who do not, are not. Thus, a Christian who lives in sin should not be encouraged by people telling him that he is not condemned because he is ‘in’ Christ – if he is sinning and unrepentant he is *not* ‘in’ Christ, and therefore the promise of Romans 8:1 no longer applies to him. On the contrary, such a person should be warned to repent and turn from his wicked ways so that he can once again be ‘in’ Christ, and not under condemnation. Consider the following four passages:
- ◇ **1 John 3:4-10 (ESV)** *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.⁵ You know that he [Jesus] appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.⁶ NO ONE who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you [including the Grace-without-Fear teachers]. Whoever PRACTICES righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.⁹ NO ONE born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children*

of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

- (a) Can this passage be any clearer? ‘No one’ who ‘abides IN’ Christ keeps on sinning! (v.6,9,10)
- (b) Who is righteous before God, then? Everyone who mentally believes in Him? No! The righteous are those who ‘practice righteousness’ (v.7).
- (c) Conclusion from this passage: Any Christian who continues sinning without repentance is not ‘in’ Christ, and therefore the promise of Romans 8:1 (no condemnation) cannot be applied to him.
- ◇ **1 John 3:24 (ESV)** *Whoever keeps his commandments abides IN God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.*
- (a) Who is ‘in’ Christ according to this passage? ‘Whoever keeps His commandments!’
- ◇ **1 John 5:18 (ESV)** *We know that EVERYONE who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.*
- (a) Who has been born of God according to this passage? Those who do ‘not keep on sinning.’
- ◇ **Romans 8:1-14 (ESV)** Let us now go back to Romans 8, and examine the whole passage in its context: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*
- (a) Who is ‘in’ Christ? For whom is the ‘righteous requirement of the law’ ‘fulfilled’? Not just anyone who professes Christ, but rather, those ‘who walk not according to the flesh.’ In other words, Paul is not here teaching that Christians can sin without fear because they are no longer under condemnation – no; Paul is here teaching that only those who walk ‘according to the Spirit’ are ‘in Christ.’ Therefore, only those who walk ‘according to the Spirit’ can claim the promise of ‘no condemnation.’ Those who live in apathy, worldliness and sin, however, cannot! Let us continue with the rest of the passage . . .
- (b) ⁵ *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* Notice that the ‘mind that is set on the flesh’ is ‘death’ and ‘cannot please God.’ This includes Christians whose minds are set on the flesh.
- (c) ⁹ *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but **IF** [not automatic just because you’re a Christian] by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* Who are the ‘sons of God’ according to this passage? Not necessarily all those who call themselves ‘Christians,’ but rather, those ‘who are led by the Spirit of God.’ And who is led by the Spirit of God? Only those who walk in righteousness.*
- (d) **Conclusion:** Only those who walk in righteousness can claim the promise of ‘no condemnation’ from Romans 8:1, since only those who walk in righteousness can claim to be ‘in’ Christ. This means two

things, practically, for how Christians should be counselled about their sins: (1) Everyone who sins needs to repent and turn back to righteousness in order to be 'in' Christ and claim the promise of 'no condemnation;' and, (2) Christians should be afraid to sin, because sinning means they are not abiding in Christ, which can lead to terrible judgment if left unchecked (Matt 7:21-23; Lk 12:5; Rom 11:20-22; Heb 12:15-16; Heb 10:26-31, etc., etc.).

2. Objection #2: 'But doesn't the Bible say that God sees us as holy in Christ no matter what we do?'

- ◇ Answer: No, it doesn't. But here are three passages which the Grace-without-Fear teachers misapply in order to comfort sinning Christians, that they shouldn't worry too much about their sinful behaviour:
 - a) *For our sake he made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Cor 5:21 (ESV)*
 - b) *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. – Eph 1:3-4 (NASB)*
 - c) *Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ¹⁶ "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." ¹⁷ Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." ¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. – Heb 10:14-18 (NIV)*
- ◇ Grace-without-Fear teachers take these passages to mean the following:
 - a) That even when a Christian lives in sin, persists in sin, and/or intentionally sins, God *continues* to see that person as *holy*, the whole time, because He views that person as having Jesus' holiness;
 - b) Since God continues to see each Christian as holy all the time, even when they sin, there is no need for Christians to ever repent or confess their sins in order to receive forgiveness, since God views them as holy no matter what they do; in His sight there is nothing to ever forgive a Christian of, because each Christian literally wears Christ's righteousness.
- ◇ Taken in isolation these three passages could indeed be used to teach that God sees Christians as holy, even when they are not. But looking at passages in isolation is a sure way for inventing heresies. Every passage of Scripture must be interpreted in light of the comprehensive teaching of the whole Bible, rather than in isolated chunks. If there is a vast body of Scripture which conflicts with the above interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:3-4 and Hebrews 10:14-18, then the above interpretation must be wrong. Otherwise the Bible contradicts itself. Thus, the only thing that is needed in order to prove this interpretation (ie. doctrine) false is ONE passage of Scripture which shows God viewing a Christian(s) as not holy, or ONE passage of Scripture which shows God demanding that a Christian(s) repent because of sin, or ONE passage of Scripture exhorting Christians to move towards holiness (ie. assuming that they do not already possess it). We have already given dozens of such examples, so I will not be exhaustive here – but here are just a few (some of these are repeated from earlier in the paper):
 - a) *Therefore, beloved [speaking to believers], since you are waiting for these, BE DILIGENT to be found by him [God] without spot or blemish [ie. holy], and at peace. – 2 Pet 3:14 (ESV)*
 - If we are *already* holy in God's eyes why does the apostle Peter admonish us to 'be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish' (ie. holy)? Obviously, without diligence it is quite possible that some believers might be found by God *with* spots and blemishes (ie. un-holy), which means that God does NOT see believers as holy in the present.
 - It is clear from this passage that the promise of holiness is a FUTURE promise. Peter says 'since you are waiting for these.' Waiting for what? The previous verse explains: '*. . . we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which RIGHTEOUSNESS dwells*' (2 Pet 3:13b). Righteousness does not yet dwell here on the earth – it is a

promise for the future which believers are waiting for, not something anyone has already attained (see also Phil 3:12-14).

- b) *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*¹⁵ *See to it that no one FAILS to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*¹⁶ *that no one is sexually immoral or unholly like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.* – **Heb 12:14-16 (ESV)**

- If we are already holy in God's eyes, regardless of what we do, why does the author of the book of Hebrews exhort us to 'Strive for . . . holiness'? We wouldn't need to strive for it, if we already had it. Furthermore, notice that this passage also warns Christians to 'see to it' that they do not 'fail to obtain' God's grace. Thus, it is clear that Christians *can* actually *fail* to obtain grace and can become 'defiled' (v. 16), which is to say, 'NOT holy' in God's eyes. The passage identifies at least two types of sin which can 'defile' a Christian and make him/her not holy in God's eyes: bitterness and sexual immorality.

- c) *Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.* – **Rev 3:4 (ESV)**

- Throughout Scripture white/clean garments always symbolize holiness and righteousness. In this passage we find that only a few people in the church of Sardis were left who had not soiled their garments. In other words, there were only a few people left in the church of Sardis who were holy in God's eyes. But this means that many other people in the church at Sardis *did* soil their spiritual garments and were *no longer* worthy to walk with Jesus dressed in white (ie. 'holy'). Remember, that in this passage Jesus is speaking directly to the church at Sardis – this is how He (God) sees these believers! How did the majority of believers at Sardis, who were previously holy (ie. at one time had unsoiled garments), get *soiled*? Sin – the passage does not explicitly tell us which specific sin(s) soiled their garments but it is clear from this passage that Christians *can* go from holy (unsoiled garments) to unholy (soiled garments) in God's eyes. This passage alone is all that is needed in order to refute the doctrine that God views Christians as holy no matter what they do.

- d) *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* – **Heb 12:5-11 (ESV)**

- This passage clearly teaches that God brings painful circumstances into His children's lives in order to discipline them, in order that they 'may share in His holiness' (v. 10). But why would God need to do such a thing if He already saw His children as holy? If God disciplines people who are holy then He is not just. Think about this – do parents discipline their children when they have done nothing wrong? No! So the only way God can discipline His kids is if He acknowledges that they are not holy! And that is exactly what this passage teaches – it teaches that He disciplines His children so that they may *become* holy (v. 10) at some point in the future.

- e) In direct opposition to this teaching that God blindly persists in seeing Christians as holy, even when they blindly persist in sinning, are the words of the apostle Peter: *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;*¹⁶ *for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*¹⁷ *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent FEAR.* – **1 Pet 1:15-17 (NIV)**

- In this passage Peter commands Christians to do two things: (1) Live holy lives; and, (2) Live in reverent FEAR of God. And what is the motivation he provides for us to live like this? Because 'we call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially.' The Grace-without-Fear teachers preach that no matter what you do God sees

you as holy; but Peter here teaches the opposite – that God will judge each person’s work *impartially*. In other words, He won’t see something as holy if it isn’t! Hence, we should have a reverent fear, lest we sin and run afoul of God’s judgment.

f) *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. – Heb 10:26-31 (ESV)*

- This passage is impossible to reconcile with the teaching that God continues to see Christians as being holy in Christ even when they persist in sin. Quite the opposite, this passage explicitly teaches that if Christians persist in sin after conversion that Jesus’ sacrifice at the cross ceases to cover those sins (v.26)! The passage goes on to warn such Christians that the only thing they can expect from God on Judgment Day is to be cast into Hell (the ‘fury of fire’ which ‘consumes’ God’s ‘adversaries’). So much for the doctrine that God blindly sees Christians as holy even when they persist in sin!

g) There are so many other examples in Scripture (some which have already been used in this paper) which prove that God does not blindly see Christians as holy when they persist in sin – and I will not exhaustively examine all of them now. However, here are some other brief examples to look up: (1) Jesus’ rebuke to the Laodicean church that they do not have on white garments (ie. ‘holiness’) in Rev 3:17-18; John’s admonition that there is a sin which leads to death in believers (ie. separation from God) in 1 John 5:16-17; Peter’s rebuke, post-conversion, to Simon (a new believer, see Acts 8:13) telling him to repent and beg God for forgiveness so that he ‘may’ be forgiven in Acts 8:20-24; and God’s judgment of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

◇ ***How did the New Testament writers talk about themselves? Did they think of themselves as holy in God’s eyes while they lived on earth?***

- No they did not, and this should cause the Grace-without-Fear preachers to pause and reconsider what they are teaching people to think about themselves today. Before looking at several passages, let us better define what it means to be holy. At least part of what it means to be holy in God’s sight means that a person is ‘blameless’ (Eph 1:4; Col 1:22) and ‘perfect’ (Heb 10:14). Is this how the New Testament writers spoke of themselves? No – in fact the exact opposite:

1) **Paul:** *NOT that I have already obtained this or am already PERFECT, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.¹³ Brothers, I do NOT consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. – Phil 3:12-14 (ESV)*

- ◇ Paul did not yet consider himself to be perfect and holy and blameless while he was here on the earth – for him that was something which would occur in the future (v. 13b), part of the ‘goal’ and the ‘prize’ to be attained at the *end* of one’s life (v. 14).

2) **John:** *If we say we have NO SIN [ie. that we are ‘holy’], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. – 1 John 1:8-10 (ESV)*

- ◇ In this passage the apostle John expressly forbids Christians (including himself, note the use of ‘we’) to think or talk about themselves as being sinless, which is holy. His solution to the problem of sin is not, then, to teach Christians to think of themselves as holy when they are not, but to teach them to *confess their sins* whenever they have sinned.

3) **James:** For we ALL stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. – **James 3:2 (ESV)**

- ◇ James boldly acknowledges that Christians are not perfect because ‘we all stumble in many ways.’ Why do some teachers, then, insist that Christians should think of themselves as ‘holy’ in Christ? Being ‘holy’ in Christ is a promise for the *future* (as we will see shortly), not something that is ours right now. We would do better to follow the example of the apostles and think of ourselves as imperfect sinners, who must continually confess and repent of our sins, as we ‘strive’ for ‘the holiness without which no one will see the Lord’ (Heb 12:14).

4) **Peter:** [as already seen] *Therefore, beloved* [speaking to believers], *since you are waiting for these*, ***BE DILIGENT to be found by him*** [God] ***without spot or blemish*** [ie. holy], *and at peace*. – **2 Pet 3:14 (ESV)**

- ◇ If we are *already* holy in God’s eyes why does the apostle Peter admonish us to ‘be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish’ (ie. holy)? Obviously, without diligence it is quite possible that some believers might be found by God *with* spots and blemishes (ie. un-holy). Which means that God does NOT see believers as holy right now.
- ◇ The promise of holiness is a FUTURE promise. Peter says ‘since you are waiting for these.’ Waiting for what? The previous verse explains: ‘. . . *we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which RIGHTEOUSNESS dwells*’ (2 Pet 3:13b). Righteousness does not yet dwell here on the earth – it is a promise for the future.

- ◇ **Question: What, then, are 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:4 and Hebrews 10:14-18 talking about?** We have already established, from Scripture, that these three passages cannot be teaching that God continues to blindly see Christians as holy even when they blindly persist in sin. So what does it mean that Jesus has become our righteousness (2 Cor 5:21), and that God has chosen us to be holy and blameless before Him (Ephesians 1:4)? **The important thing that people must realize is that these promises are for the future and are dependent on human choices and actions in the present.**

a) For example, consider the following passage: *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* ²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,* ²³ ***IF indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*** – **Col 1:21-23 (ESV)**

- Notice two things about this passage:

1) Firstly, the promise of being holy and blameless in God’s sight is a *future* promise. It is not something which Christians possess right now, but something which the Holy Spirit and Jesus are working towards right now, so that one day we may be presented to the Father as holy and blameless in His sight (v. 22). This is confirmed in Hebrews 12, where the writer states, “*But he disciplines us for our good, that we MAY share his holiness.* ¹¹ *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but LATER it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* (Heb 12:10-11 ESV).

2) Secondly, notice that the promise of being presented to God as ‘holy and blameless’ rests on a big ‘IF’ – ‘if you continue in the faith’ (v. 23). Thus, it is clear that a person who does not continue in the faith will not be presented to God as holy and blameless. Continuing in the faith does not just entail continuing in the correct mental beliefs about Jesus – it also entails obedience to the Father’s will (Matt 7:21-23); acts of righteousness (James 2:14-26; Heb 10:26-31); and a leaving and turning away from unrighteousness (Gal 5:19-21). Thus, it is impossible for a Christian who persists in sin to claim that God continues to see them as holy, because they have not upheld their side of the bargain, which is to ‘continue in the faith.’

b) The future aspect to the Bible’s promises about holiness is also evident in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *For our sake he made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might BECOME the righteousness of God.* Does

this passage teach that because of Jesus' death on the cross Christians already *are* (present tense) the righteousness of God? No – it teaches that we 'might BECOME' the righteousness of God. Notice the word 'might' as well; becoming the righteousness of God is no sure thing – it is based on each Christian's choices and responses to God.

- c) **God's promises are always dependent on an 'IF:'** All of God's promises are this way. In the Old Testament God promised Israel the land of Israel and many blessings – yet for almost 2000 years the Jewish people (until 1948) were exiled from the land and underwent untold sufferings, which were far more terrible than anything any other nation or race in history has undergone. Was God unfaithful to His promises? No! His promises came with stipulations that the Israelites were supposed to follow, which they subsequently disobeyed, and so they no longer were entitled to enjoy the benefits of the promises. Same with all the promises God has made to Christians! Many people would be horrified by me saying such a thing, but that is exactly what the apostle Paul taught: *But if some of the branches [some of the Jewish people] were broken off, and you [Gentile believers], although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but FEAR.²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches [the Jewish people], NEITHER will he spare you [Christians].²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, PROVIDED [ie. 'if!'] you continue in his kindness. OTHERWISE YOU TOO WILL BE CUT OFF. –*

Rom 11:17-22 (ESV)

- Paul says that we should 'fear' (v. 20) because it is possible that we could be 'cut off' from the tree (ie. lose our salvation and all of its promises) if we don't 'continue' in God's 'kindness' (v. 22).
 - **Conclusion:** the promises to Christians of one day being presented holy and blameless in God's sight are based on Christians responding to God in the proper way (humility, repentance, obedience) – they are not automatically applicable to every Christian, no matter what they do.
- d) **How about Hebrews 10:14-18?** *Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect FOREVER those who are BEING MADE holy.*¹⁵ *The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:¹⁶ "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."¹⁷ Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. – **Heb 10:14-18 (NIV)***
- A lazy interpretation of the phrase 'he has made perfect forever' has caused some preachers to teach that Christians are perfect in God's eyes *right now* and forever. But finishing the sentence is enough to show that this cannot be what the author of Hebrews is teaching, because he goes on to say 'those who are BEING MADE holy.' In other words, the promise of holiness for Christians is a process, which will only be fully realized in the *future*. That this is the correct interpretation of this passage is confirmed just 8 verses later in the chapter when the author of Hebrews threatens Christians who deliberately continue sinning (in the present) with judgment and Hell (v. 27), terrible punishment (v. 29) and fearful vengeance at the hands of God (v. 30-31). Obviously Christians are not automatically holy in God's eyes, no matter what they do. Thus, any interpretation of the above passage (10:14-18), which states that Christians are *already* perfect and holy in God's eyes must be written off as contradictory and incorrect.
 - What then is this passage actually saying? The purpose of this passage is to celebrate the efficacy (ie. effectiveness) of Christ's sacrifice. We see the efficacy of His sacrifice in four ways:
 - 1) Christ's sacrifice at the cross was so effective (read also, 'powerful' and 'perfect') that no other sacrifice is needed for all of eternity; that one sacrifice lasts forever so that once a sin has been paid for by Christ's blood, that sin is paid forever. Of course, if a Christian later returns to sin, his/her newly committed sins are

not automatically forgiven without humble repentance (Heb 10:26-31). But assuming a Christian truly repents of a sin, that sin is paid for forever.

- 2) Furthermore, Jesus' sacrifice at the cross was so awesome that there is no sin so bad that it can't be forgiven: the worst imaginable sins a human being can possibly commit can all be forgiven, provided the person humbles themselves before God and repents, all because of the power and perfection of Christ's sacrifice.
- 3) Thirdly, Jesus' sacrifice at the cross was so effective that it can cover an infinite number of sins. No matter how many times a person sins each one of those sins can be forgiven by Jesus' blood (Matt 18:21-22), provided the person truly repents.
- 4) Lastly, the people who finish their lives well (ie. finish their lives submitted to and obedient to Jesus) will be saved forever because of Jesus' sacrifice. The salvation benefit of Jesus' sacrifice at the cross NEVER runs out for such people. Of course a person may, by their own choice, walk away from those benefits in this lifetime (Heb 10:26-31) – but that's their choice. As far as God is concerned, the benefits are never-ending for those who choose to continue in them.

◇ **Question: What's so amazing about the promises of 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:4 and Hebrews 10:14-18?**

- What's so amazing about these promises is NOT that they enable Christians to sin without consequences, but that they promise holiness to all those who REPENT. Whenever a Christian truly repents (ie. (1) confess; (2) remorse; (3) turn away from wickedness) these passages promise that God forgets all of his/her *past* sins (2 Pet 1:9). If that Christian, however, sins again in the future, he must then repent and turn from those sins again (1 John 1:9; 2 Chron 7:14; James 4:8-10; James 5:15-16) in order to once again claim the promises that God has made.