

PILLARS *of* GRACE

AD 100 – 1564

A LONG LINE OF GODLY MEN

STEVEN J. LAWSON

Foreword by J. Ligon Duncan III | Afterword by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

ENDORSEMENTS

“This book will ignite and impassion your heart for the gospel and the doctrines of grace that undergird it. Dr. Lawson has done something for which we will forever be grateful—he demonstrates conclusively that the truths of Calvinism and the Reformed faith are rooted in the history of the church, from the apostles to the emergence of Martin Luther in the sixteenth century. We have, of course, always suspected this to be true, but few attempts have been made to demonstrate it, and none with such infectious zeal as is to be found in these pages. Few writers can marry church history, exposition, and sound doctrine in such a manner as this. Do not start reading this book unless you are prepared to find that you are unable to put it down. It is that good.”

— DR. DEREK W.H. THOMAS

*Chancellor's Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary
First Presbyterian Church, Senior Minister, Columbia, S.C.*

“Reading Steven Lawson’s *Pillars of Grace* is like taking a helicopter tour of a mountain range—a breathtaking survey of a series of majestic peaks all pointing upward to heaven. Each chapter offers an informative, fascinating, and accessible look at a significant teacher of God’s glorious grace, from Clement to Calvin. Read this book and discover that to be Christian and Reformed is to be rooted in the church through the ages.”

— DR. JOEL R. BEEKE

*President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

“Steve Lawson’s research takes us into the controversial and somewhat neglected area regarding the development of the doctrines of grace before John Calvin. Of special value is his large collection of quotations, which show that, yes, there were indeed a few notable TULIP flowers in the church garden before the Reformation blossomed. I especially like his challenge to imitate these heroes. I am pleased to recommend this volume and look forward to the next in the series.”

— DR. CURT DANIEL

*Pastor, Faith Bible Church
Springfield, Ill.*

“Bringing witness after witness to the stand, Steve Lawson marshals testimony about the sovereign grace of God from twenty-three specific exemplars, from Clement of Rome to Calvin of Geneva. Following a masterful overview, with the weight of original sources and helpful context from these witnesses, both clarity and unity result. Steve Lawson is to be commended for assembling such a superb cast, arranged in such useful parts—road-tested in a men’s group from his own congregation—to sing such a deep and moving chorus. Each study is useful for local church studies and libraries, for pastoral enrichment or officer training, or as fodder for illustrations, gathered by an experienced shepherd. We can rejoice over this excellent work that truly exhibits that which has been believed everywhere in all ages of true and vibrant Christianity. I join Dr. Lawson in praying that this book will cultivate a new generations of pillars.”

— REV. DAVID W. HALL

*Senior pastor, Midway Presbyterian Church
Powder Springs, Ga.*

“Dr. Lawson has produced a veritable tour de force with this historical survey of the church’s witness to the sweet doctrines of divine sovereignty. Not since the voluminous Dr. Gill has this really been attempted, and Gill’s study is seriously dated in many ways. Hence the need for this winsome and judicious work, in which Lawson shows the reader the way these golden threads of grace have wound their way through the church’s life in the Patristic, medieval, and Reformation eras. Contrary to popular thought, it can be seen that the eras prior to the Reformation were not devoid of powerful witnesses to these great truths. This is a must read for anyone interested in the way these biblical truths have been received by the church.”

— DR. MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN

*Professor of church history and biblical spirituality
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Ky.*

“Thank you, Dr. Lawson, for your labors in pulling together this rich treasury of biblical teaching on the doctrines of grace over the centuries from faithful men whom Christ appointed and the Spirit endowed for the building up of the saints for the work of service. We are your grateful debtors.”

— DR. J. LIGON DUNCAN III
Chancellor, Reformed Theological Seminary
(from his foreword)

“In this important book, Dr. Lawson has documented the teachings of many of the most important theologians, churchmen, and Christian thinkers of these centuries, showing that these men did indeed have much to say about God’s saving grace—and much that will be of great encouragement to evangelicals today.”

— DR. R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.
President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Ky.
(from his afterword)

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— *of* —
GRACE

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STEVEN J. LAWSON



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Pillars of Grace

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To R.C. Sproul—
formidable theologian, distinguished professor,
prolific author, beloved pastor,
guardian of the gospel

For the past half-century, Dr. Sproul has brought the profound truths of Reformed theology from the halls of academia to everyday people in the pew. He has been the preeminent figure used by God in this generation to usher in the present resurgence of biblical Calvinism. Having studied under Dr. Sproul, I owe an enormous debt to him in many ways. From systematic theology and expository preaching to pastoral ministry and Christian living, his influence has been indelibly stamped upon me for good. In due time, I believe that history will reveal him to be the Martin Luther of our day.

*“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

(Romans 11:36, NASB)

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FOREWORD

FROM FOUNDATIONS TO PILLARS

FROM FOUNDATIONS IN THE BIBLE
TO PILLARS IN CHURCH HISTORY

As you pick up this book and begin to become familiar with its purpose, you might be tempted to think that Dr. Steven J. Lawson is simply showing what uninspired men taught over the course of the first fifteen hundred years of church history, but that does not prove that the Bible teaches the sovereignty of God in salvation. If that is the case, here is my advice: Find a copy of Dr. Lawson's *Foundations of Grace*, the first volume in his *A Long Line of Godly Men* series, and read it.

Foundations is a *tour de force* of whole-Bible study demonstrating that “God saves sinners.” In it, Dr. Lawson piles up 544 pages of Scripture exposition, thoroughly documenting the Bible’s teaching on salvation by sovereign grace. He traverses the rich and varied terrain of the Bible to introduce readers to the one true God and His sovereign, saving love from the whole of Scripture. He shows not only that the doctrines of grace are unassailably biblical, but that they are joy-giving, life-changing, Christ-exalting, God-glorifying, missions-motivating, evangelism-encouraging, and discipleship-promoting truths.

J. I. Packer has made the point that all the tenets of Calvinism—that faithfully biblical system of theology that joyfully embraces the rich, comforting, God-exalting, self-abasing, Christ-honoring, scriptural message of the sovereignty of God in salvation and all things—reduce to one overarching

claim: “God saves sinners.”¹ Each of these words is important for understanding what the Bible teaches about salvation. First, *God* saves sinners. God, not man, saves. We do not save ourselves. Only *God* can save. Second, God *saves* sinners. He does not make us potentially savable. He does not enable us to save ourselves. He saves. Third, God saves *sinners*. He saves a multitude that no man can number out of a world of human beings who are dead in sin and in opposition to His kind and sovereign rule. He saves people who once hated Him, ignored Him, and resisted Him. In salvation, God does not help those who help themselves, because no sinner can help himself. We are not “basically good” and in a position to “get by with a little help” from God. We are “without hope save in his sovereign mercy.”² Packer concludes: “This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the ‘five points’ are concerned to establish . . . namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present, and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever.”³

In *Foundations of Grace*, Dr. Lawson shows us this truth— “God saves sinners”—from the Old and New Testaments, from the Law and the Prophets, from the Gospels and the Letters, from Genesis to Revelation.

Allow me to give just one example of this Bible truth so amply demonstrated in *Foundations*. In Ephesians 2:8–10, the apostle Paul wants us to understand that God Himself has saved us. He puts this forcefully and strikingly: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; 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, that we should walk in them.” In these three verses, Paul manages, in six distinct ways, to tell us that our salvation is not because of us but is all of God. Notice how he does it:

First, he emphasizes that *we are saved by God’s grace*. That is, the cause of our salvation is God’s free saving favor to us despite our sinfulness, which leaves us deserving of judgment. Notice that Paul juxtaposes “by grace you have been saved” with “not your own doing.” This is his way of saying that salvation comes from God, not from us. “Do you want to understand the source,

1 J. I. Packer, “Introductory Essay,” in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth, 1959), 4.

2 Presbyterian Church in America, *The Book of Church Order*, 6th Ed., first membership vow (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 2009), 80.

3 Packer, “Introductory Essay,” 4–5.

the cause of your salvation?” Paul asks. “Don’t look at yourself. Don’t look within. Look up to God. Look at the unmerited favor God has shown to you. That is what and who saved you—not something in you, something about you, or something that you did.” We do not deserve God’s saving mercy. We disqualified ourselves from communion with God by our rebellion against Him, our insurgency against Him, our alienation from Him, our indifference to Him, our walking according to the world, the flesh, and the Devil. And yet, the Lord saves us by grace and lavishes His forgiving favor on us.

Second, Paul says that *we receive our salvation by faith*. “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Salvation is not something we attain by doing; rather, it is something we receive by believing. Paul is emphasizing our passive reception of something from God. We do not get salvation because we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and grab it. It is not something we accomplish by our own might and main, by staying up late at night and keeping our noses to the grindstone. We simply receive it from God. We receive our salvation by faith rather than by doing something. In other words, we are saved through the instrument of trust. We simply trust God. We have to throw our hands up and say, “Lord God, there is nothing I can do.” In the words of the great hymn “Rock of Ages,” we have to say, “Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling.” Simply put, we are saved not by our doing and not by our worthiness, but by God’s grace, and we simply, humbly, joyfully receive that salvation *by trust, by faith, by believing God’s promise*.

Third, if he has not been clear enough already, Paul next declares that *our salvation is God’s gift*. We must understand salvation as a gift from God, not as a right, an obligation, or a payment due us from God for our performance. Look at how he puts this: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; *it is the gift of God*.” Paul’s point of emphasis is this: the whole of our salvation is God’s gift to us—not our gift to ourselves but God’s gift to us; not something we deserve but a free bestowal. He asks, “Do you want to know how you obtained salvation?” He answers, “It was by gift, by grant, by God’s grace.” So we who by grace trust in Christ need to view our salvation as a free gift from God, one we simply receive by faith.

Fourth—and this is very important for us to note, especially in light of the exegetically unsound and theologically errant views of the so-called new perspective on Paul—the apostle goes on to emphasize that *our salvation is not the effect of works in any way*. It is, he says, “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Paul is saying, in effect, “By the way, just in case you are

missing my point, let me say the same thing again, this time in the negative—your salvation is not due in any way to your works, your doings.” In other words, if we want to see how we are saved, we should not look at ourselves, our works. We are not saved by our own efforts, deeds, or actions.

Fifth, Paul says in verse 10, *our salvation is the product of God’s workmanship*. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” What an extraordinary statement. The point is this: Salvation is not the product of our workmanship; rather, it is the product of God’s workmanship. We are not saved by what we do, but by what He did. In fact, we not only are not saved *by* our good works, we are saved *in order to do* good works. We are not saved *by* doing what is right in the sight of God, but we are saved *unto* doing, with joy and gladness in gratitude for God’s free grace, all that He created us to do originally in paradise. Indeed, the very possibility of our doing anything to be saved is utterly precluded by Paul’s language of “creation.” We can be created *for* work. But we cannot create ourselves *by* work. Indeed, we cannot create ourselves at all. So by speaking of salvation as a work in which God creates us anew in Christ Jesus, Paul is affirming in the strongest possible way the divine sovereignty and monergistic power at work in our salvation. Our works may and do result from God’s saving work, but they do not and cannot cause it. The order of salvation is not “do this and live,” but “live and do this.”

Sixth, lest we make the erroneous deduction that God looked into the future and foresaw our belief in Christ and our subsequent good works, and thus based His salvation of us on foreseen faith and obedience, Paul tells us that *God saves us by grace and creates us in Christ (not by our works) in order that we should do the works He foreordained for us to do from eternity past*. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Paul is saying that even the good works we now do were prepared beforehand by our gracious God for us to do. He doesn’t save us because He foresees that we will do good works. No, the message is far more glorious and comforting than that. Indeed, it is far more staggering, even mind-boggling, than that. God saves us to “walk” in good works, to do righteousness, to live in godliness, to practice a holiness to which He predestined us from before the world itself ever existed. So our righteousness is not the means, the instrument, or the way of our salvation, it is part of God’s goal in His salvation of us. God created us to be His image, to be like Him. That image was marred in our fall into sin. In glorification, that image is fully restored, and so John can say that at the coming of our Lord,

“We shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). Thus, these good deeds in which we walk, far from being the cause of our salvation, are instead its goal, its aim. Our doing of good is itself part of God’s predestined plan for us. Paul explains this in Ephesians 1:4 by saying that God chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” So Paul emphasizes that our whole salvation is the sovereign, eternal work of God.

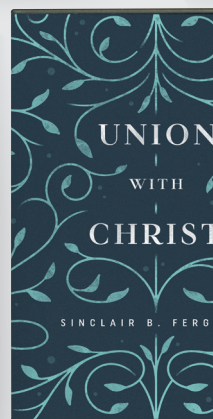
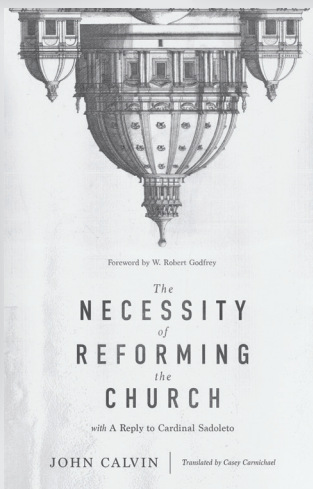
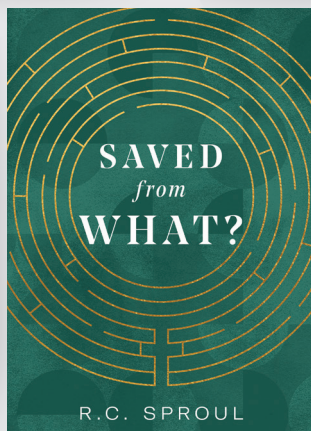
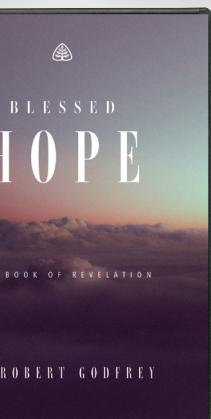
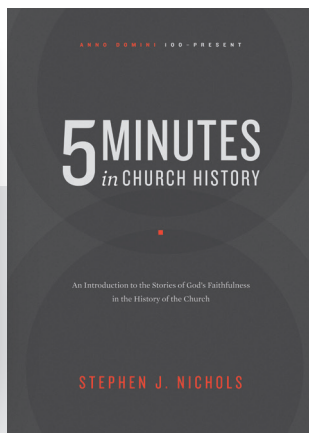
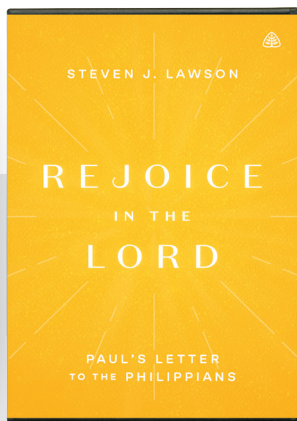
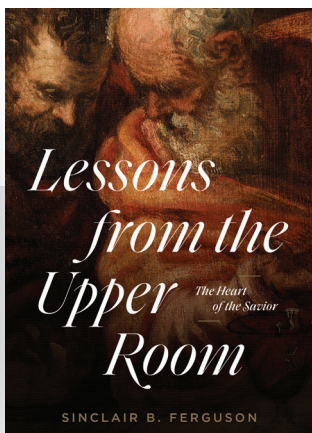
There we have it. Six times in three little but hugely important verses, Paul stresses that we are saved by God’s grace alone. Our salvation is wholly because of His saving, forgiving, transforming, undeserved, and unearned power and favor. We receive that saving favor through trust (and even that trust is the result of God’s Spirit at work in us). We do nothing to earn salvation or merit it; we simply trust God to give us something we do not deserve. It is God’s gift given freely to us, not a debt He owes us. Salvation is not accomplished by us, nor does it result from our works. Instead, we ourselves are God’s work and are saved by God’s work (rather than saved by God because of our works). Even our Christian lives, our walking in good works as saved sinners, are the result of God’s workmanship, the consequence (not the cause) of something that God pre-appointed, foreordained, predestined “before the mountains were brought forth” (Ps. 90:2).

Paul’s point is that salvation is all of grace. The totality of our salvation is from God. Understanding this is absolutely essential for healthy Christian life, ministry, and experience. This is the truth that Dr. Lawson demonstrates, voluminously, in his earlier book.

What, then, is the purpose of *this* book? What is it about and what is it for? In *Foundations of Grace*, Dr. Lawson shows us how the doctrines of grace are firmly rooted in the teaching of all the Bible. In this volume, *Pillars of Grace*, he begins to walk us through the halls of church history to show us that the church, at its best, has understood that God’s grace is sovereign in salvation.

There are at least four benefits of joining Dr. Lawson in this scintillating study. First, there is the simple and obvious opportunity to improve our knowledge of our own Christian family history. Western Christians in our day are not world famous for their grasp of the history of the church. Protestants know little about the history of the church prior to Martin Luther’s nailing of his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg church on Oct. 31, 1517. Americans, in particular, lack knowledge of and love for history in general. We are the poorer for this ignorance. But if we will walk with Dr. Lawson

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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