

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

THE TRAGEDY OF THE CROSSLESS GOSPEL (Pt. 1)

by Tom Stegall

There has been a pink elephant standing in our living room for some time now. Yet, as odd as that may seem, what is even more peculiar is the awkward silence about it. I've noticed something else very strange lately. The emperor has no clothes on. Again, to my surprise, no one is talking about it. Somebody ought to speak up and tell the poor fella don't you think?! Such proverbial images barely do justice to the current state of affairs within the Free Grace movement regarding the Gospel. To invoke another Americanism borrowed from the Apollo 13 near-tragedy, "Houston, we have a problem." Free Grace movement—we have a MAJOR problem!!! Let's be honest: in the last few years things have changed doctrinally. The content of the saving Gospel has been tampered with. As tragic as that fact is, it gets worse. Peculiar new doctrines are also beginning to evolve along with the new gospel. I believe it is time to break the silence.

You might be saying, "These are very serious claims. What do you mean the Gospel has been changed?" There was once virtual unanimity among us in the Free Grace position that in order for a lost sinner to receive eternal life, he *must* believe that Jesus Christ is God-incarnate who died for his sins and rose again to save him forever. However, today there are a growing number in our camp who no longer believe these are essential as part of the saving Gospel that is necessary to be believed for eternal salvation. That *old* Gospel is now considered "flawed."¹ It is something that some Free Grace advocates now consider to be "adding to the gospel"² and something which makes them "shutter"³ and feel "extremely uncomfortable."⁴

As one who considers himself Free Grace in soteriology and opposed to the false teachings of Lordship Salvation, I am *deeply* disturbed by such sentiments and by the shocking statements coming from leading representatives of the Free Grace movement these days.

¹ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.1," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 8.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ Robert N. Wilkin, "Justification by Faith Alone is an Essential Part of the Gospel," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 18 (Autumn 2005): 14.

⁴ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.2," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 9.

The following is but a brief sampling of what I'm talking about:

*"I know that I trusted Christ for salvation before I realized that Jesus was the Son of God." I was surprised because I had never heard anyone say this before. But I did not quarrel with that statement then, nor would I quarrel with it now.*⁵

*John keeps the signs distinct from the message of life, so evangelicals must not confuse them either. John does not set forth the sign of the cross-and-resurrection as the message that one must believe in order to receive eternal life.*⁶

What do you mean the Gospel has been changed?

*Neither explicitly nor implicitly does the Gospel of John teach that a person must understand the cross to be saved. It just does not teach this.*⁷

*The simple truth is that Jesus can be believed for eternal salvation apart from any detailed knowledge of what He did to provide it.*⁸

*Without the name of Jesus there is no salvation for anyone anywhere in our world. But the flip side of the coin is this: Everyone who believes in that name for eternal salvation is saved, regardless of the blank spots or the flaws in their theology in other respects. Another way of saying the same thing is this: No one has ever trusted that name and been disappointed. In other words, God does not say to people, "You trusted my Son's name, but you didn't believe in His virgin birth, or His substitutionary atonement, or His bodily resurrection, so your faith is not valid." We say that, but God's Word does not.*⁹

⁵ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.1," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 5.

⁶ John Niemelä, "The Message of Life in the Gospel of John," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 7 (July-Sept. 2001): 18.

⁷ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.1," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 7.

⁸ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.2," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 12.

⁹ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.1," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 9.

What is now being taught as the new, simplified Free Grace gospel is that a lost person receives eternal life by “faith alone in Christ alone,” yet without needing to believe in, or even know about, Christ’s person and finished work. According to the *new and improved* gospel, someone doesn’t need to believe in Christ’s deity, substitutionary death for sin, or bodily resurrection to be truly born again. As long as that person believes in the name of “Jesus,” even without an understanding of who He is or what He’s done, such a “believer” will receive eternal life and become justified by God’s grace—just as long as he believes this “Jesus” can guarantee him eternal life. This is now the new twist and meaning to the popular Free Grace slogan, “by faith alone in Christ alone.” This gutted, crossless, resurrectionless, deityless gospel is the tragic birth child of today’s changing Free Grace theology. But this has not always been the position of the Free Grace movement, nor is it the doctrinal position of many in our camp. Thus, it is my contention that there has been an intentional doctrinal shift in the last decade or so—a radical change for the worse.

THE CHANGING FREE GRACE GOSPEL

This change within the Free Grace movement is real and not just imagined. One prominent Free Grace leader personally acknowledged to me that his views on the Gospel shifted throughout the decade of the 90’s. Another prominent Free Grace leader, Zane Hodges, openly admits there has been a change in his views over the years as well:

In recent years I have become aware of a way of presenting the gospel invitation that troubles me. I believe I have heard it from my earliest years, and I admit it didn’t really bother me for a long time. Now it does. I have heard people say this: “In order to be saved you must believe that Jesus died on the cross.” In the context of our present discussion, I mean that this is their summary of the requirement of faith. It is not just one item, among others, to be believed. Whenever I hear that nowadays, I get extremely uncomfortable.¹⁰

Despite Hodges’ personal dislike for this cross-centered approach to evangelism, the apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, certainly had no such

¹⁰ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.2,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 9.

antipathy. He summarized his Gospel presentation as centered in the cross-work of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians, Paul repeatedly made the summary statement that his message “to those who are perishing” was “the message of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:18). And though he initially preached other Gospel truths to the Corinthians besides the cross-work of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4), in recounting the message of his initial evangelization of them, he did not hesitate to summarize by saying, “And I brethren, when I came to you. ...determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1-2). This was also how he summarized his evangelistic message towards all Jews and Gentiles, not merely the Corinthians, since he boldly declared, “we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). It was through the “foolishness” of this “message preached”—this “message of the cross” (1:18)—that God would “save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

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In his article, Hodges then goes on to explain even further:

Now I know that the statement I am evaluating leaves a lot of things unspoken that are still implied by the speaker. Most of the time people who say you are saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross mean that He died for our sins. Indeed the phrase “for your sins” is often added. But even with that addition, there is still unspoken material that the person usually has in mind. They usually mean to say, for example, that this belief in Christ’s death is all that is necessary for salvation. Thus they are normally proclaiming salvation by faith alone. Also unspoken, but usually implied, is the idea that Christ’s work on the cross is sufficient to provide for our salvation. Thus they mean to say that we are trusting in the sufficiency of His work for salvation. Let me be honest. I don’t like this way of presenting a gospel invitation.¹¹

Hodges later concludes, “I would like to see grace people abandon this form of invitation to faith.”¹² It is apparent from their numerous books, journal articles, newsletters, and public speaking on this subject that these Free Grace leaders are absolutely convinced of their *new* gospel and they are actively promoting it. They would like the rest of us to “abandon” our old approach

¹¹ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.2,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 9-10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

to the Gospel. Personally, I would NOT like to see Free Grace people abandon this form of Gospel invitation because the apostle Paul didn't!

Unfortunately, the desire recently expressed by Hodges to "abandon" the cross as an essential part of the Gospel to the lost is now gradually gaining momentum within the Free Grace movement, though thankfully the majority still have not embraced the new view. Hodges' stated desires from his 2000-2001 articles are becoming a reality, as the *new crossless* gospel has gone from the realm of theory into practice. I find more and more in the Gospel presentations of Free Grace advocates today that the person and work of the Savior are being downplayed, if not entirely neglected at times, so as to emphasize the promise of eternal life aspect of the Gospel. One example of this can be found in the book titled *Road to Reward* by Bob Wilkin, the Executive Director of the Grace Evangelical Society. In the first two chapters of his book, Wilkin appropriately offers an evangelistic appeal to faith in Christ before delving deeply into the subject of rewards for Christians. However, there is a glaring and obvious omission in these two chapters: the death of Christ for our sins and His resurrection are NEVER mentioned—only appeals to believe in Christ as the guarantor of eternal life. The cross of Christ and His glorious resurrection have dropped out completely in this "evangel-less" approach to evangelism. Ironically, the first chapter is titled, "The Disaster of Poor Communication."

In a subsequent book by Wilkin, *Secure and Sure*, he states no less than 113 times throughout the book in almost mantra-like fashion that a person receives eternal life simply by believing in Jesus for it, or some varied form of the same expression. Yet NEVER ONCE in his entire book, despite 113 occasions to do so, does Wilkin state that by believing in Jesus for eternal life he means someone must believe that Jesus is God-incarnate who died for his sins and rose again. This is not an accidental oversight on his part. It is intentional and in keeping with the *new crossless gospel*.

He tells us frankly in one place that "*biblical faith in Jesus is not faith that He existed, nor faith in His deity, nor even faith that He died for our sins and rose again. In the Bible, to believe in Jesus is to be convinced that He who died and rose again guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him.*"¹³ It may at first seem

¹³ Robert N. Wilkin, *Secure and Sure* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), 28.

overly critical to see a distinction between saying a person must believe "in Him *who* died and rose again" versus saying he must believe *that* Christ died and rose again. Yet, such a distinction is deliberate and is enormously significant, for it is precisely the point at hand: though Wilkin and certain Free Grace leaders *do* believe that Christ was God-incarnate who died for all our sins and rose again, they do *not* believe that the lost sinner must believe in Christ's deity, death for sin, and bodily resurrection in order to truly "believe in Him" for eternal life.

Nor are they ambivalent or accepting of these so-called "extra" elements of the Gospel to the lost. In their estimation, requiring a person to believe in Christ's deity, humanity, death for sin, and resurrection in order to receive eternal life is requiring *too much* theological content. In fact, they even contend that to preach the Gospel in this manner creates a stumbling block that may hinder the unsaved from believing in Christ as the guarantor of eternal life. They claim we are actually "adding to the gospel" in the same way the Lordship Salvationist adds extra-biblical conditions to "faith alone" in Christ alone. Zane Hodges addresses this concern in one of his articles under the heading, "ADDING TO THE GOSPEL." He writes:

*Most of us deplore efforts made by Lordship people to add provisos to the message of faith in Christ. According to them, true faith has not occurred if it is not accompanied by surrender or by a commitment to live for God. We rightly reject such ideas. But in our own circles, there is a tendency to add theological information to our message of faith.*¹⁴

What then follows is a straw man argument against requiring belief in Christ's virgin birth before someone can be born again, along with a denial of the necessity to believe in Christ's death and resurrection in order to have eternal life. Let's put aside for a moment the red herring of requiring belief in Christ's virgin birth, which we all agree is absolutely doctrinally true but is nowhere presented in the New Testament as part of the saving message preached to the lost called the Gospel. Yet, it is simply egregious to claim that we are somehow "adding to the Gospel" by preaching a Gospel that necessitates belief in Christ's deity, humanity, death for our sins, and resurrection.

¹⁴ Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.1," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 7-8.

I find more and more in the Gospel presentations of Free Grace advocates today that the person and work of the Savior are being downplayed, if not entirely neglected at times...

It appears that the Grace Evangelical Society and others within the Free Grace movement started out in the later 1980's nobly contending with and combating the extra-biblical CONDITIONS to "faith alone," but now they have turned their sights upon what they consider to be the extra-biblical CONTENT of that faith. Throughout the 80's and 90's the battle was waged over the sole condition and nature of faith for salvation. The emphasis was upon defending the "faith alone" portion of the slogan, "faith alone in Christ alone." But now, since at least 1999, the emphasis seems to have shifted towards clarifying what it means to have faith "in Christ alone." Many of us in the Free Grace movement were in solid agreement with the initial doctrine and direction of these men in addressing the extra-biblical requirements to faith, such as commitment to serve and surrender, which Hodges previously mentioned. But now we must protest the major changes taking place to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their aim was true and biblical to begin with, but now they have gone too far.

Crossless gospel teachers have become like a person who is initially intent on becoming healthier through diet and exercise but somewhere along the line becomes manically obsessed with getting leaner. Initially, he does become healthier as he burns off unnecessary excess fat, but then by obsessive diet and exercise he actually becomes *unhealthy* as his body begins to metabolize muscle instead of fat. When the Grace Evangelical Society began, we were all in favor of stripping away the fat of Lordship Salvation "works" from the Gospel of God's grace. But now the G.E.S. and others in the movement have gone to an unhealthy extreme, and they are consuming muscle off the bone—the precious contents of the Gospel itself, namely our Lord's deity, humanity, substitutionary death, and resurrection from the dead. This is the terrible tragedy of the *new crossless gospel*.

There will likely be two defining issues for the Free Grace movement in the next decade. These issues will determine the entire course and effectiveness of our ministry for the Lord Jesus Christ as they revolve around the message we preach and the doctrinal error we confront or fail to confront. First, we must answer the question of what exactly a person must believe about Christ in order to truly believe in Him for eternal life. Secondly, we must answer definitively the simple question of "What is the Gospel?" These two questions are inextricably linked and must be answered together. There is a desperate need right now for honest, soul-searching definition that is biblical and unequivocal. If we can no longer agree among ourselves on the very definition of the contents of "the Gospel," then our movement will be effectively paralyzed.

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The years ahead will require us to define what is the *sine qua non* of the Gospel of grace, just as dispensationalism had to do a generation ago.¹⁵ In the forthcoming articles, I will seek to defend what I believe are the essential, defining elements of the Gospel which must be believed for one to receive eternal salvation in this age. I will summarize them for now as follows:

- 1) Jesus Christ is God ("Son of God" and "Lord").
- 2) Jesus Christ is human ("Son of man").
- 3) Jesus Christ died for (*huper* – i.e., in a substitutionary sense) our sins.
- 4) Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead.
- 5) Salvation is by God's grace, apart from works, through faith in Jesus Christ and His work alone.

These elements comprise the Gospel of Christ as it has historically been understood from Scripture by Free Grace advocates. We have not changed, the Gospel itself has not changed, but some key advocates of Free Grace theology have moved away from us. Now within the Free Grace camp there are multiple gospels for eternal life being preached under the banner of grace. At a recent Free Grace conference, one pastor facetiously remarked, "We ought to define what 'the Gospel' is. I think I've heard three or four of them since I've been here."

THE NEW MEANING OF "THE GOSPEL"

To many Free Grace leaders today, the Gospel is no longer considered a technical term, defining what elements of truth about Christ must be preached to the lost for their eternal salvation. Instead, "the Gospel" has become a broad, all-inclusive, catch phrase for good news of any kind. Claiming that the Gospel is not a technical term in the New Testament has had the effect of opening the door to re-defining the Gospel in such a way as to strain out the truths of Christ's deity, humanity, sacrificial death, and resurrection. For some Free Grace advocates, these truths are simply facts surrounding the Gospel but not part of the Gospel itself. For others, these truths comprise the Gospel to the Christian, which is necessary for practical sanctification but not the message which must be preached to the lost for justification before God.

The result of all of this has been the emergence of a "mini" gospel which contains just the minimal, essential

¹⁵ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 38-41.

truth necessary to be believed for eternal life. This is in contrast to the “full gospel message”¹⁶ which includes Christ’s substitutionary death and resurrection. The new mini gospel goes something like this: “God gives eternal life to all who simply believe in Jesus for it.” This too is now considered a legitimate definition of “the Gospel,” which is why Bob Wilkin says, “*You can believe many biblical concepts and still miss the one truth that is saving—the truth of the gospel. For example, you can attest to Jesus’ deity, His virgin birth, and His bodily resurrection, and yet not believe Jesus’ promise to give you eternal life freely if you just believe in Him for it. There is only one truth that will save: Jesus’ guarantee that anyone who believes in Him for eternal life has it.*”¹⁷

This also explains why in 2005 the Grace Evangelical Society advertised the sale of coffee cups with “the gospel” supposedly printed on one side. That “gospel” turned out to be simply one verse, John 6:47, which says nothing about Christ’s deity, death for sin, resurrection, or even His name.

For many within the Free Grace camp, there is now, at best, confusion regarding the meaning of the Gospel. At worst, there is deliberate re-definition. In either case, the Gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:13) has certainly been changed. This can be easily seen in the following quotes from some current Free Grace leaders:

*You see, as we noted previously, the facts surrounding the gospel message—such as the death and resurrection of Christ—are important facts for what they tell us about the reasons for trusting Christ. But believing these facts doesn’t save anyone. People are only saved when they believe that Jesus gives them eternal life the moment they believe in Him for that.*¹⁸

Sometimes [the term] “gospel” is narrowly related to “what must I do to have eternal life?” but quite often it’s the big picture and it’s

¹⁶ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.1,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): 11. Hodges actually uses this phrase when he writes, “*But more often than not, we have difficulty leading them to Christ, unless we lead them through the full gospel message.*” In the context of this statement, Hodges says that the “full gospel message” includes Christ’s payment for sin on the cross. But does this not imply that there exists a legitimate “gospel” which does not contain the cross, which is not the “full gospel message”?

¹⁷ Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 10.

¹⁸ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.2,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 12.

*actually what’s preached to the Christian. We’re preaching the “good news” to the Christian.*¹⁹

*The good news in First Corinthians is the good news that Paul preached to the believers, not unbelievers, in the church in Corinth. The good news message he preached was Christ crucified. This was a sanctification message that a divided church needed to hear badly. . . . The reason we don’t find justification by faith alone anywhere in 1 Cor 15:3-11 is because this was sanctification good news.*²⁰

For many within the Free Grace camp, there is now, at best, confusion regarding the meaning of “the Gospel.”

*When I hear people point to 1 Cor 15:3-11 and boldly proclaim that is the precise evangelistic message Paul preached, I shutter. How could we get it so wrong? Yes, Paul did tell unbelievers about Jesus’ death and resurrection. But that was not the sum total of his evangelistic message. Nor is Paul’s evangelistic message the point of 1 Cor 15:3-11.*²¹

*In 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul defines the Gospel he had preached and the Corinthians had believed, he is telling the good news about sin, salvation and Christ’s sacrifice. He added some elements in his gospel that we normally don’t. But he could have added many more elements as well. In fact, the entire Bible is the Gospel, because it’s all good news.*²²

*So what is the gospel? It can easily be proved from Scripture that the gospel is more than faith alone in Christ alone. Much more. The gospel “is not a consistent and clearly definable term which we can express in a brief formula.” The gospel includes elements of the kingdom of God on earth. It includes facts about justification, sanctification, glorification, security in heaven, contentment on earth, and eternal reward. The gospel includes all of this.*²³

¹⁹ Robert N. Wilkin, “The Three Tenses of Salvation Reconsidered,” audiotape EDW 211, Grace Evangelical Society, 2003.

²⁰ Robert N. Wilkin, “Justification by Faith Alone is an Essential Part of the Gospel,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 18 (Autumn 2005): 13 (ellipsis added).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² Jeremy D. Myers, “Just the Gospel Facts P’s” (www.tillhecomes.org, 2005; last accessed 3/6/2006)

²³ Jeremy D. Myers, “The Gospel is More Than “Faith Alone in Christ Alone”,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 19 (Autumn 2006): 50.

Based on what has been learned, it is easy to see why many evangelistic presentations can become so convoluted and involved. If someone tries to share all that the NT includes in the gospel they must share the entire NT (and probably the OT as well).²⁴

By using the term “gospel” in Rom 1:16, Paul is not limiting his thoughts to those central truths by which a person is given eternal life. For Paul, his gospel included such matters as justification by faith (3-5), sanctification through the Spirit (6-8), and God’s future for Israel (9-11). In fact, the gospel gathers together all the truths that are found in Romans.²⁵

Thus, the gospel encapsulates the message found in the entire book of Romans (i.e., justification, sanctification, glorification, and a future for Israel). Usually unrecognized, the term gospel also includes the unconditional promises to Israel that will be fulfilled in the future (10:15-16; 11:26-32).²⁶

After reading these shocking statements as to what constitutes the Gospel and the contents of faith required for salvation, can we question any longer whether a significant change has occurred? This was NOT the message being proclaimed when the Free Grace movement began responding to Lordship Salvation in the 1980’s when the Grace Evangelical Society was formed. A significant doctrinal shift has definitely occurred. According to the *new* Free Grace theology, the Gospel can be something as broad as the Epistle of Romans, or even the entire Bible, while at the same time it can be narrow enough to exclude the so-called “sanctification” truths of Christ’s deity, substitutionary death and resurrection. The result is that there can now exist a “mini gospel” that is preached to the lost which doesn’t contain Christ’s deity, substitutionary death and resurrection, and there can also exist a “full gospel” which considers these elements necessary only for the sanctification-salvation of the Christian. This is a radical departure from the one, true, saving Gospel of Christ described in the Scriptures and historically preached by grace-oriented brethren.

²⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵ John F. Hart, “Why Confess Christ? The Use and Abuse of Romans 10:9-10,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 12 (Autumn 1999): 17.

²⁶ René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, Missouri: 21st Century Press, 2005), 31-32.

THE GRACE GOSPEL OF THE PAST

To see that a dramatic departure from the Gospel has actually occurred within the Free Grace movement, note the contrast between the preceding statements about the Gospel and the following statements from grace preachers of the past who are now in the presence of the Lord:

Harry Ironside

No man preaches the Gospel, no matter what nice things he may say about Jesus, if he leaves out His vicarious death on Calvary’s Cross.²⁷

M. R. DeHaan

The gospel means “good news.” According to Paul it is the good news concerning the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This indeed is good news for the sinner. Man by nature is lost, depraved, helpless and hopeless. But God sent His Son to bear our sins on the Cross, and declared His complete satisfaction with the work of the Son of God by raising Him from the dead on the third day. And now the poor, hopeless, helpless sinner can be saved, simply by receiving in faith the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁸

Saving faith is, first of all, faith in the work of Christ on the Cross!

Lewis Sperry Chafer & John Walvoord

Jesus in His death was actually the substitute dying in the place of all men. Although “substitute” is not specifically a biblical word, the idea that Christ is the sinner’s substitute is constantly affirmed in Scripture. By His substitutionary death the unmeasured, righteous judgments of God against a sinner were borne by Christ. The result of this substitution is itself as simple and definite as the transaction. The Savior has already borne the divine judgments against the sinner to the full satisfaction of God. In receiving the salvation which God offers, men are asked to believe this good news, recognizing

²⁷ H.A. Ironside, “What is the Gospel?” in *God’s Unspeakable Gift: Twelve Select Addresses on Evangelical Themes* (Adrian, MI: Lifeline Philippines, n.d.), 35.

²⁸ M.R. DeHaan, *Studies in First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1956), 167.

that Christ died for their sins and thereby claiming Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.²⁹

Lance Latham

Saving faith is, first of all, faith in the work of Christ on the Cross! It is impossible for us to understand the delivering nature of the Gospel and the assurance that He is ours in Christ because of His grace, without also considering the significance of His glorious Resurrection. When the Apostle Paul explains the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 he reminds us that: Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. Forgiveness comes to us because of the death of Christ on the cross. But we must remember, however, that this forgiveness could not be assuredly ours apart from the testimony of the Resurrection. The Resurrection of Christ is linked inseparably with His death on Calvary. Our destiny for eternity depends upon our knowing who He is, and having put our faith in what He accomplished on the Cross. ...The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great proof that Jesus is truly God and the Son of God. How majestically God speaks in Romans 1:4, telling us that Christ was . . . declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Believing this truth is absolutely necessary for our salvation.³⁰

Many may well believe that we encourage others to just believe the facts of Christianity, that

²⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer and John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 60.

³⁰ Lance B. Latham, *The Two Gospels* (Streamwood, IL: Awana Clubs International, 1984), 31-32 (ellipsis added). It should be noted that though Doc Latham's book is entitled, *The Two Gospels*, nowhere in his book does he advocate that Christ's death for sin and resurrection are a second, larger gospel for the Christian's sanctification and therefore not necessary for the unsaved to believe, as today's crossless gospel advocates are teaching. Latham taught that the unsaved must believe those specific, precious truths of the gospel for their justification. He then went on to teach that God has "good news" for Christians—that our sanctification is also wholly by God's grace and based on the very same death and resurrection of Christ that was proclaimed in the gospel for our justification. In spite of Latham's title, not once in his entire book does he cite a verse of Scripture containing the word "gospel" to teach that the sanctification truths of the Christian life are part of what the Bible calls "the gospel."

Christ is the Son of God and that He died for the sins of the world. We do have this as our basis. However, when we tell them to put their faith in Christ as the Son of God who bears our sins, we mean they are to place their reliance for eternity upon what was done for them and to individually rest their hope there.³¹

Adding any condition to Christ's being crucified and risen would destroy the truth of the Gospel. The great center of the truth of the Gospel is that God accepts us just as we are once we believe that JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD, and rest our hope in the fact that God paid the price in full for our sins when Jesus paid the full price at Calvary. God will allow nothing added to Calvary as our hope!³²

C. I. Scofield (and editors)

The word "gospel" means good news. As used in the NT, the word deals with different aspects of divine revelation.

Absolutely essential to man's salvation is the Gospel of the grace of God (Rom. 2:16, refs.). This is the good news that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world, that He was raised from the dead on account of our justification, and that by Him all who believe are justified from all thing. . . .The word "gospel," therefore, includes various aspects of the good news of divine revelation. But the fact that God has proclaimed the good news of the Gospel of grace, the Gospel of the coming kingdom, and the everlasting Gospel of divine judgment upon the wicked and deliverance of believers does not mean that there is more than one Gospel of salvation. Grace is the basis for salvation in all dispensations, and is under all circumstances the only way of salvation from sin.³³

In vv. 1-8 the apostle outlines the Gospel of God's grace. (1) It concerns a Person—the Christ of the Scriptures and history. (2) It concerns His death—"for our sins according to the Scriptures." And (3) it concerns His resurrection—likewise "according to the Scriptures." His burial is asserted as the

³¹ Ibid., 61.

³² Ibid., 99 (capitalization original).

³³ New Scofield Study Bible, footnote at Revelation 14:6 on "THE GOSPEL."

These statements clearly reveal that the new, crossless gospel is in conflict with the Gospel preached by the great grace teachers of the past.

evidence of His death; and that He was seen alive is declared as the proof of His resurrection. This is the Gospel that Paul preached; that the early Church accepted; and by which men are saved (vv.1-2).³⁴

*And what is the Gospel? Is it the Gospel that One came from the glory up yonder, the uncreated Son of God, the Word which was in the beginning with God and was God, and that He was made flesh and tabernacled among us? Yes, that is part of it. That makes the Gospel possible, but that is not the Gospel. The Gospel is that One who was in the beginning with God and was God, was made flesh and tabernacled among us, and then went upon the cross and bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and died for us, and there faith begins. And there our faith, all faith must begin.*³⁵

These statements clearly reveal that the new, crossless gospel is in conflict with the Gospel preached by the great grace teachers of the past. In fairness to the Free Grace movement as a whole, it must be stated that not all who presently consider themselves “Free Grace” and opposed to Lordship Salvation would be in agreement with those who are advocating the new crossless gospel. In fact, it is fair to say, thankfully, that it appears the majority within the Free Grace camp still do not advocate the new crossless gospel view.

THE GRACE GOSPEL OF THE PRESENT

The views of this majority are reflected in the following quotes which represent the general tenor of the Free Grace movement as a whole, including older teachers and younger teachers, some well-known and some lesser known, but all committed to the true Free Grace Gospel. Notice again how different the Gospel is in the following quotes from the new crossless gospel being advocated today:

Charles Ryrie

The very first statement in the Gospel concerning the new birth makes it dependent upon faith (John 1:12). The verse also mentions the object of faith, Christ. Thus it is throughout

³⁴ New Scofield Study Bible, footnote at 1 Corinthians 15:1.

³⁵ C.I. Scofield, *Where Faith Sees Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Reprinted 1967), 14-15.

*the Gospel—the Son as the bearer of salvation must be the object of faith (3:15-16, 18, 36; 4:29, 39; 7:38; 8:24; 20:29, 31; 1 John 3:23; 5:1, 12). Faith involves the most thorough kind of appropriation of the person and work of Christ as the basis for the believer’s confident persuasion for salvation. The figure of eating His flesh and drinking His blood attests to that thoroughness (6:53-56). Faith in His person involves belief in His deity (John 3:13; 8:24; 9:22; 12:42; 1 John 2:23; 4:15), and faith in His work involves belief in the efficacy of His death to effect deliverance from sin (John 1:29; 3:14-17; 13:19). In John’s thought, faith that saves is joined directly to the person and work of Jesus Christ.*³⁶

How readily some fall into the trap of adding requirements to the Gospel beyond simply believing that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead.

*John does not use the word gospel at all. In Acts, Luke records the dissemination of the good news, but it is Paul who gives us the technical definition of the word as it relates to us today. The classic passage is 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Christ’s death and resurrection are, literally, “of first importance.” The good news is based on two facts: a Savior died and He lives. The mention of Christ’s burial proves the reality of His death. He did not merely swoon only to be revived later. He actually died. The list of witnesses (vv. 5-8) proves the reality of His resurrection. He died and was buried (the proof); He rose and was seen (the proof). Christ’s death and resurrection are the foundations of the gospel of the grace of God. Notice the same twofold emphasis in Romans 4:25: He “was delivered up . . . and raised . . .” Everyone who believes that good news is saved (1 Corinthians 15:2). That, and that alone, is the whole Gospel of the grace of God.*³⁷

Certainly, faith must have some content. There must be confidence about something or in someone. To believe in Christ for salvation means to have confidence that He can remove the guilt of sin and give eternal life. It means to believe that He can solve the problem of sin which is what keeps a person out of heaven. You can also believe Christ about a multitude of other things, but these are not involved in

³⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 340.

³⁷ Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 22-23.

salvation. You can believe He is Israel's Messiah. . . . He was born without a human father being involved in the act of conception . . . He will return to earth. . . . He is the Judge of all. . . . He is able to run your life. . . . But these are not the issues of salvation. That issue is whether or not you believe that His death paid for all your sin and that by believing in Him you can have forgiveness and eternal life. Faith has an intellectual facet to it. The essential facts are that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 14:3-4; Romans 4:25). In addition, faith involves assent or agreement with the truth of those facts. One can know the facts of the Gospel and either agree or disagree with them.³⁸

Earl Radmacher

Sometimes people refer to the Gospel as "the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." However, the burial of Jesus is not part of the gospel as such. Rather, it is the proof of the death of Christ. . . . I am stressing this because a more balanced statement of the Gospel needs to be made, not only by laypersons but also by pastors and theologians. In a seminary class I was making quite an impassioned presentation on the value of the death of Christ. A student (now a missions professor) interrupted by raising his hand and asking, "Don't you believe in the resurrection of Christ?" I responded, "Certainly I believe in the resurrection of Christ. Why would you ask such a question?" "Well," he said, "there seems to be such a neglect on the resurrection in our books and teaching; whereas, when I turn to all the evangelistic messages in the Book of Acts, the emphasis is on the resurrection. The death of Christ without the resurrection would be no Gospel at all. It would simply be a tragedy." How right he was!³⁹

Some churches offer what they call the "full gospel," which supposedly includes tongues-speaking. Others plead for a "whole gospel," which envisions not just the redemption of

³⁸ Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 118-19 (ellipsis added).

³⁹ Earl Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 47 (ellipsis added).

individuals but the redemption of society. Others claim that a gospel that does not include discipleship is not good news. Surely, the church must take more seriously the need to disciple its members, but discipleship differs from the Gospel that saves from eternal damnation. . . . How readily some fall into the trap of adding requirements to the Gospel beyond simply believing that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead.⁴⁰

Robert Lightner

To be sure, there are essentials the sinner must know before he can be saved—he is a guilty sinner (Rom. 3:23), sin's wages is death (Rom. 6:23), Christ died in the sinner's place (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3), the sinner must trust Christ alone as his sin bearer (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). These are the essentials of the Gospel.⁴¹

Christ's work alone saves, but unless His Person and work are received by faith, no benefit comes to the individual sinner. Man's faith must have the proper object before salvation results. God does not simply demand belief in the ultimate triumph of good, or faith in the evangelical church, or even faith in His own existence and power, as that which brings salvation. It is always faith in God's Son as the divine substitute for sin which brings life to the spiritually dead sinner.⁴²

Larry Moyer

The Gospel as found and preached in the Bible concerns the objective, finished, proven, never-changing fact: Christ died and arose! Often, what we share with the lost is the entire Bible—everything from Genesis to Revelation. Yet we leave out the message God most wants the non-Christian to hear. The Bible contains the Gospel, but the Bible is not the Gospel. The Bible includes everything from God's creation of the earth in Genesis to His creation of a new earth in Revelation. The Gospel, however, is the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 117 (ellipsis added).

⁴¹ Robert Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 160.

⁴² Ibid., 160-61.

Christ's work alone saves, but unless His Person and work are received by faith, no benefit comes to the individual sinner.

*message of the death of Jesus Christ for our sins and His resurrection.*⁴³

Michael Cocoris

*The Great Commission demanded and the apostles practiced preaching the Gospel of the grace of God, that is, that Christ died for sins and arose from the dead. When we evangelize we must tell people exactly that. Like the two wings of a bird or the two rails of a track, both the death and resurrection of Christ are necessary and important.*⁴⁴

Charlie Bing

*To emphasize the quality of one's faith necessarily means that the object of faith is de-emphasized. The proper object of faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ as declared in the Gospel (1 Cor 15:1-11, 14, 17). Genuine faith in an improper object cannot save (Jas 2:19).*⁴⁵

Jonathan Smith

*What greater issue exists than one's eternal salvation? Of all subjects before us personally and the church corporately, we must be clear on this one. This is a life-or-death issue from which there is no escape, and we ought to lay down our lives and everything else for a clear statement that says salvation is a gift of God's grace received by faith in Christ's work on the cross. None of us can afford to be in the grandstands on this issue. We all need to be vitally involved against the powers of evil in the cause of a clear Gospel.*⁴⁶

*This is the Gospel. This is the good news—that Jesus is my righteous Substitute and offered to God His work. When I trust in that, I have salvation.*⁴⁷

Dennis Rokser

*According to these verses, an integral part of the Gospel Paul preached was the recognition of the person of Jesus Christ—God in human flesh. . . . You are heralding first of all, a PERSON—the unique and eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the World. . . . So when Paul came to Corinth to evangelize these lost pagans, he not only heralded the person of Christ but also His finished work as part of the Gospel.*⁴⁸

John Cross

*By faith, we believe that Jesus died in our place for our sin. By faith, we believe that Jesus paid our sin-debt. By faith, we believe that God's justice was satisfied by that death. We believe that when He looks at us, He no longer sees our sin, but He sees us clothed in Jesus' righteousness. By faith, we believe that God gives us the gift of eternal life. It's all faith, but it's not blind faith. It's faith that is built on the facts we find in the Bible.*⁴⁹

*If someone was to ask you, "How can I get to Heaven?" you should be able to answer: To live in Heaven we need to be pure and perfect, just as God is pure and perfect. If we put our faith in God, believing that when Jesus was dying on the cross, He was dying in our place for our sin, then God will clothe us in His righteousness and we will be accepted completely.*⁵⁰

Andy Stanley

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." "Whoever" includes everyone who is willing. Believing in him is the only requirement. Believing means placing one's trust in the fact

The Great Commission demanded and the apostles practiced preaching the Gospel of the grace of God, that is, that Christ died for sins and arose from the dead.

⁴³ R. Larry Moyer, *Free and Clear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1997), 19.

⁴⁴ G. Michael Cocoris, *Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 61.

⁴⁵ Charles Bing, *Lordship Salvation* (Burlson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1997), 57.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Smith, *True Grace* (J & M Books, 2005), 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁸ Dennis Rokser, *Let's Preach the Gospel* (Duluth, MN: Duluth Bible Church), 31-32 (ellipsis added).

⁴⁹ John Cross, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* (Olds, Alberta: Good Seed International, 2004), 271.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

*that Jesus is who He claimed to be and that His death accomplished what He claimed it accomplished.*⁵¹

J. B. Hixson

*But in essence, the Gospel is the good news that God loves man and has sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for man's sins. Christ accomplished this when He died on the cross at Calvary as man's substitute. The benefit of Christ's work must be appropriated individually by faith. What is the essential message of the gospel that must be believed for salvation? One of the best passages which summarizes the gospel is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. . . . This summary contains everything that is essential to saving faith: man is a sinner; Christ is the only Savior; Christ died as man's substitute; Christ arose from the dead.*⁵²

Richard Seymour

*What is the Gospel? The Gospel is that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and that He came back from the dead in order to save us. (1 Cor. 15:3, 4) The Lord Jesus Christ gives eternal life to those who depend upon His death, burial and resurrection as their ticket to Heaven. That's the gospel—the good news.*⁵³

When a comparison is made of the Gospel messages being proclaimed within the Free Grace camp, it becomes readily apparent to any unbiased observer that we are no longer all preaching the same message. The crossless, resurrectionless, deityless gospel of today is *not* what other Free Grace men have historically proclaimed. There has been a radical shift in recent years. This disunity on the most important doctrinal truth of our day is a tremendous tragedy in itself. It is one of the many ramifications of changing doctrinally on the Gospel. In fact, the *new* Free Grace gospel carries with it enormous consequences that many grace-oriented people have never seriously considered. These will be spelled-out in succeeding articles. ■

⁵¹ Andy Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough?* Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 91.

⁵² J. B. Hixson, "What is the Gospel?" (2001), 2-3 (ellipsis added).

⁵³ Richard Seymour, *The Gift of God* (Lagrange, WY: Integrity Press, 1985), 69.

The next article will explain that with the change to a crossless gospel there has come the emergence of several entirely new doctrines as well. Look for it!

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