

## Grace Evangelical Society and the Content of Saving Faith

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



In an article titled "How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1, The Content of Our Message," Zane Hodges states: "Let me begin with a strange scenario. Try to imagine an unsaved person marooned on a tiny, uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He has never heard about Christianity in his life. One day a wave washes a fragment of paper up onto the beach. It is wet but still partly readable. On that paper are the words of John 6:43-47. But the only readable portions are: 'Jesus therefore answered and said to them' (v 43) and 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life' (v 47).

"Now suppose that our unsaved man somehow becomes convinced that this person called Jesus can guarantee his eternal future, since He promises everlasting life. In other words, he believes Jesus' words in John 6:47 (notice Hodge does not mention about believing in Jesus but only His words). Is he saved? I suspect that there are some grace people who would say that this man is not saved because he doesn't know enough. For example, he doesn't know that Jesus died for his sins on the cross and rose again the third day." (*Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1, The Content of Our Message," The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society 13, Spring 2000: p. 4*).

Notice that Hodges says: "Let me begin with a strange scenario." I would say, "Let's begin with the Bible." Problems arise when strange scenarios begin to redefine or undermine the truth of God's Word causing confusion regarding the content of a

saving faith, a faith that must know and believe in the Gospel facts of Christ's person and work. We know that it's grace that saves us through the vehicle of faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Saving faith means the kind of faith that is only centered upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, and which results in salvation. In other words, the sinner cannot claim the promise of eternal life without knowing who the Promiser is and why he needs the promise and where the promise leads to in the end. A promise without a foundation is useless and can never save anyone.

Hodges is making a theological blunder at this point in his teaching by claiming a person can be saved without knowing he is a sinner, without knowing he needs forgiveness through Christ, without knowing anything about Christ's death and resurrection, without knowing that the eternal future is Heaven and not some other kind of future related to the transmigration of the soul, karma, etc. The fact of the matter is this, no person can be saved who does not know and believe that Jesus died on the cross for them and rose from the dead. That is the Gospel! Hodges has created a Christless gospel in his vain reasoning (1 Cor. 15:3-4; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13). Hodges seems to be reasoning that the Gospel can save a person without an individual knowing about the Gospel, knowing why he needs the Gospel, what the Gospel promises, and what is the future promise related to the Gospel. In other words, a person can take a blind leap into the dark and still be saved in the end.

Every sinner must understand ("come unto the knowledge of the truth" - 1 Tim. 2:4) that Jesus died on the cross for them and rose again to grant them salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. What reason would anyone have in believing on Jesus Christ if there is no reason to believe on Jesus Christ! When believing on Christ the sinner realizes Jesus died in his place and upon believing he can be saved from Hell, receive the forgiveness of sins, and be made right before God. The Gospel would not be good news if you don't know what the good news is all about!

Why are these types of "island scenarios" presented by Hodges and other men? In reacting to the lack of assurance that Lordship Salvation advocates promote through their extreme perseverance of the saint's theology, Hodges and others have changed the content of a person's faith, what a person must believe to be saved. Hodges declares that a person must only believe in the message of eternal life to be saved which is offered by a *Jesus* they know nothing about and a *reason*

they know nothing about. In coming to this conclusion, he essentially says that everyone who believes in this promise of eternal life should have complete assurance of salvation or else their belief is not genuine. However, Hodges has failed to distinguish between the *object* of belief and condition for salvation (faith in Christ) from the *result* of salvation (eternal life). Everlasting life is the result of salvation – not the object and sole condition of faith.

Jesus Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection is the object of one's faith and eternal life and many other spiritual blessings are the result of a person's faith in Christ. At the time of salvation, our faith is not placed in imputed righteousness, redemption, reconciliation, eternal life, or anything else, but in the person and work of Jesus Christ to grant us these wonderful spiritual blessings. Christ is to be the object of one's faith at the time of his conversion. We should not make the *result* of faith and conversion (eternal life) the *condition* for faith and conversion.

Of course, this is not to say that the sinner cannot have an understanding that salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life are the reason he is placing faith in Christ and that he will receive these spiritual benefits. What reason would anyone have in believing on Jesus Christ if there is no reason to believe on Jesus Christ! When believing on Christ the sinner realizes that he is going to be saved from hell, forgiven of his sins, and made right before God.

Again, the Gospel would not be good news if you don't know what the news is all about! Christ's death, burial, and resurrection saves us from hell by providing us with acquittal (total forgiveness of sins) and justification before God. However, these spiritual blessings are never to become the sole object of one's faith. Faith in Christ is simply one thing, faith in Christ, His person and work, which produces the results and glorious prospect of salvation, forgiveness, redemption, justification, eternal life, etc.

We should not do what Hodges, Wilkin, and others have done in making the *result* of faith (eternal life) the *object* of faith, and when doing so, denying that an individual must place faith in the person and finished work of Christ to be saved. So, they have turned the tables on the content of saving faith. Instead of a person needing to place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (God) to be their Savior because of

their own sinful depravity, they only need to place faith in a promise of eternal life that someone called Jesus gave, without knowing anything about their own sinfulness and need for forgiveness, their lost estate, that God judges sinners, and that they need to be saved from hell.

In making the content of faith belief in eternal life (not belief in Jesus Christ as the God and Savior), Grace Evangelical Society (GES) members have made the false assessment that a person, like the fellow marooned on a deserted island, does not have to know that Jesus is God and the Savior from his sins. GES places believing in the promise of eternal life as the sole content of a person's faith which results in that individual becoming a born-again Christian. Believing in Christ's deity is not a necessary part of saving faith.

Shawn Lazar, GES Director of Publications, stated:

“What makes faith ‘saving’ is when you believe the saving proposition, i.e., Jesus’ promise of eternal life ... Consequently, we believe that Jesus’s deity is a powerful reason to believe in Him for eternal life. We also believe it is essential for spiritual maturity. But – and this is controversial – we deny that you must believe that Jesus is God at the point of faith, to be born-again.”

Lazar goes on to say the reason for denying one must believe in Jesus is because many people believed in Jesus for eternal life without knowing He was God. Sadly, Lazar failed to give one example of his many examples of people who were saved without believing that Jesus was God. In pushing Hodge’s theory, that in John’s evangelistic Gospel faith in the promise of eternal life is the only thing necessary to become a Christian, Lazar dismisses the eight times Jesus speaks about his role as Savior from sin through His death and resurrection (John 1:29; 2:19; 3:14-15; 11:25-26; 12:32-33; 18:32; 19:30; 20:27-29).

This is a glaring omission! The fact that you only need to believe in somebody (a Jesus) that guarantees you eternal security (eternal life) sounds more like Gnosticism which concluded a person can live on after death without requiring belief in Jesus as God and Savior from sin. The fact that “somebody” guarantees you eternal life is not the Gospel that Paul preached.



How should we deal with "The Deserted Island Scenario" which speculates about "the barest minimum of information" a person needs to know in order to be saved? First, hypothetical situations are not Scriptural facts that come from "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Second, theoretical circumstances and conclusions can introduce conjecture and not concrete facts regarding Biblical and propositional truth. "

What saith the scripture?" (Rom. 4:3) should always be our approach to understanding what the content of a person's faith must include for them to be saved. In 1 Timothy 1:3-4 the apostle Paul warns against teaching strange doctrines that "minister questions" and bring confusion into the minds of people regarding the truth. In other words, we should not pay attention to endless, speculative arguments and follow "vain jangling" (1 Tim. 1:6) or empty and useless talk (babble) which does not advance God's truth.

The "lost on an island" scenario is based on the assumption that God will not give further revelation from His Word to those who have received some Bible truth. However, Scripture teaches that all who respond to the light they have will receive more light. Biblical examples of people receiving additional light or revelation include:

- Nineveh (Jonah 4:11)
- The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25-40)
- Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48)
- The Macedonian man (Acts 16:6-10)
- Lydia (Acts 16:13-14)
- The Athenians (Acts 17:22-34).

Acts 17:27 suggests this when referencing heathen people: "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." This is our graceful God! God can bring the good news of Jesus Christ to all who respond to the light they have. It should be noted that people go to hell because they reject the light that they already have, not because they didn't

know enough information. The principle is this: "Light received brings more light, but light rejected brings night." Based upon this Biblical assessment, then surely God will send the marooned islander additional light at least comparable with what is revealed to Cornelius in Acts chapter 10.

It's interesting to notice that in Acts 10 the apostle Peter highlights the gospel truths of Christ's death on a cross ("whom they slew and hanged on a tree" - Acts 10:39), His burial and resurrection on the third day ("Him God raised up the third day" - Acts 10:40), and that He appeared to witnesses ("and shewed himself openly" and "unto witnesses" - Acts 10:40-41). The Deserted Island Scenario of Zane Hodges falls short of the Biblical and historical model that a person must understand about the person and work of Jesus Christ (His death, burial, and resurrection) in order to be saved. Therefore, this argument should be rejected as hypothetical and not scriptural.

An internet blogger stated this:

"We have to ask the theological question, if God could cause John 6:47 to reach a poor man stranded on a desert island, then why couldn't He allow a few more verses or even the whole chapter to wash ashore, so the poor man would have absolutely no room to doubt who Jesus really is"?

Of course, God will reveal His Son to people in His own timing. We should not presume upon God's sovereignty! Let's stop all the hypothetical island theories of fragments and whole chapters of Scripture washing up on shore! Even when people have the full revelatory light they can still reject the truth (Luke 16:31). There are theological dangers associated with these deserted island theories. They send doubt upon the infallible truth of what the Bible says regarding a person's faith and salvation.

Hodges continues: "Let's return for a moment to that deserted island in the Pacific Ocean that I invented in my previous article. My hypothetical unsaved man has just read the words of Jesus in John 6:47, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has eternal life.' All this person needs to do is to believe that statement and



eternal life is his." (Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation to Respond," *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14, Spring 2001: pp. 11-12).

According to Hodges, a person only needs to believe that *someone* called Jesus gave a promise of eternal life and you must just believe in "that statement" and you will be saved. This information is apparently good enough to grant a person salvation and justification before God. However, Hodges fails to emphasize that "believing in me" (John 6:47) does not refer to Christ's message about eternal but believing in Christ (the totality of His person and work) to grant eternal life. John chapter 3 repeatedly acknowledged this (John 3:15-18). Hodges attempt to isolate John 6:47 from the rest of the Bible creates a "one verse fallacy" that is not based upon the entire revelation of Scripture about Christ's person and redemptive work.

Let's look at the salvation requirement set forth by Zane Hodges. "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...What is the core issue? Very simply it is this: *We want people to believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny. Of course, we would like them to believe a lot more than this, but this at least must be believed.*" (Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 (Autumn 2000): p. 7, italics added.)

Jonathan Perreault correctly responds to Hodge in this way:

"But in response to Hodges, it really doesn't matter what 'We want people to believe'. That's a subjective and arbitrary requirement - not to mention cultish! The real issue is: What does God want people to believe? If Hodges were intellectually honest with the Gospel of John 2 he would have to admit that God wants people to believe in Christ crucified for eternal life (Jn. 3:14-16). Unfortunately, in his later years Hodges slowly drifted away from the truth of the gospel to embrace a 'promise-only' message where people don't have to believe in "the Crucified One for eternal life" - they just have to believe in "the name of Jesus...for eternal well-being". Instead of John 3:14-16, his 'gospel' became John 6:47."

Of course, *who* Christ is and *what* He did are inseparably bound together in the understanding of what it means to believe on Jesus Christ. Therefore, the message

Jesus gave in John 6:47 does not exclude the Gospel for this is what a person must believe about Jesus Christ to be saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13). John 3:16 is no different than John 6:47. When a person believes in Christ they are embracing by faith the person and work of Jesus Christ to save their souls. If the content of an individual's faith is not in the person and work of Christ, as outlined in the historical record of the book of Acts (Acts 2:29-36; 10:30-40; 13:23-39), then they cannot be saved for they will not know *why* they need to be saved, *what* they are saved from, and *who* saved them!

Paul clearly reveals that because of the advent of Christ and His death and resurrection, every person needs to be a Gospel believer to be justified and possess eternal life.

Acts 17:30-31

*"And the times of this ignorance (heathen ignorance regarding the special revelation about Jesus Christ and the Gospel) God winked at (overlooked their unbelief in the sense of not bringing immediate judgment upon them with the absence of special revelation); but now (with the Gospel age and worldwide proclamation of the Gospel) commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."*

Romans 10:13-17 also debunks Hodges Island theory:

*"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord (a title of deity, calling on Jesus Christ who is God) shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? (meaning you cannot express saving faith if you don't know about the person and work of Jesus Christ) and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel (the content of saving faith). For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*



The Bible is very clear on this matter. If a person does not understand about Christ's death and resurrection, as revealed in the Word of God, then he cannot express genuine faith that results in his salvation. If you don't have the greater light and information that Jesus is God, that He is the Savior who died and rose again, then you will express faith in *something* else of *someone* outside the Biblical content of faith. In this case, your faith is vain and worthless.



If people simply believe in "the name of Jesus" for eternal life, not knowing who He is, they could possibly be trusting in a "false Christ" or "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4), a merely human Jesus for example, one that the apostles didn't preach. This is indeed possible, especially when we remember that Satan is "the father of lies" (Jn. 8:44) and also promises eternal life (Gen. 3:4). The

fact that someone can believe in "another gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4) further substantiates the need for a person to know and understand the true Gospel in order to be saved.

The Grace Evangelical Society (GES) teaches that a person can be justified (declared legally righteous before God) without that person believing that Jesus is God in the flesh and the Savior from a person's sins. This idea was popularized by Zane Hodges and is still being propagated today within GES. The main argument is that an unsaved person does not need to know the specific doctrines of the Trinity, the eternal sonship of Christ, or the doctrine of the Virgin Birth to be saved. Therefore, this should be conclusive evidence that a person does not have to know the identity of Jesus Christ, that He is God and that He came to earth to save mankind from the penalty of their sins. In fact, a person can reject that Jesus is God and reject that Jesus died on the cross to save them from their sins but only believe that "someone" (named Jesus) guarantees them eternal life. This, according to some in GES, is enough for a person to be saved.

Of course, there is a vast difference between knowing about the theological depths of the Trinity, Virgin Birth, and hypostatic union of Christ than simply understanding and believing that only Jesus, as God, can save you. GES has created a straw man argument and knocked it down with their own debunked thinking that a person does not need to know about the personal claims and work of Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and still go to Heaven. In other words, since you don't need to know anything about the Trinity to be saved, it stands to reason that you don't have to know who Jesus Christ is, that you are a sinner in need of salvation, and that Jesus died on the cross and rose again to give you salvation and eternal life. All you must know and believe is that someone called "Jesus" offers you eternal life and all you must do is believe in that promise.

In the later writings of Hodges (not his earlier writings), he limits the content of saving faith in Jesus as "the One who guarantees our eternal destiny" (eternal security) and rejects a requirement for belief in Christ's deity and that He is the Savior who came to provide forgiveness of sins for mankind (Acts 13:38-39). In reality, he began promoting a crossless gospel in evangelism. Essentially, he concluded that a person can be saved without knowing who Christ *was* and what Christ *did* for them on the cross.

In his own words, Hodges remarks:

"The simple truth is that Jesus can be believed for eternal salvation apart from any detailed knowledge of what He did to provide it.' (Hodges, "How To Lead People To Christ, Part 2: Our Invitation To Respond," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14, Spring 2001: p. 12.)

This is simply antibiblical and has no sound exegesis to back it up. One would think that a former professor of New Testament Greek and exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary would not arrive at this ambiguous and unscriptural conclusion when looking at the Scriptures and how people placed faith in the Gospel message. The content of the Gospel is not only what saves a person, it must also be the content of a person's faith. In order to be saved, a person must believe that Jesus is God and that Christ bore the sinner's judgment upon the cross, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day to give him eternal life.

William R. Newell writes:

"The gospel is all about Christ. Apart from Him, there is no news from heaven but that of coming woe!"

In the article titled "How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message," Zane Hodges also writes: "Years ago, as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, I washed dishes in the dining hall to pay for my meals. Often after I had finished this chore I hung around and talked theology with another student who swept up the kitchen every night. One night this student made a statement to me that I have never forgotten. He said something like this: '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. It is the name of Jesus that brings salvation whenever anyone believes in that name as his or her sure hope of eternal well-being...No one has ever trusted in that name for his or her eternal well-being who has not been saved by doing so. And this is true no matter how little they might have known about the One whom that name represents." (*Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1, The Content of Our Message," Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society 13, Autumn 2000: pp. 5, 8*).

In this case, Hodges is placing a personal and subjective experience of someone else above God's truth. Peter reminds us that no person's experience, even his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, should trump the revelation of God's infallible truth (2 Pet. 1:18-19). J. Vernon McGee is correct to say that "experience cannot be trusted. Experience must be tested by the Word of God. Unfortunately, many folk today are testing the Word of God by their experience. My friend, if your experience is contrary to the Bible, then it is your experience, not the Word of God, which is wrong."

Of course, the man in Hodge's story may have truly been saved without realizing all the implications of Jesus being God's Son or understanding the title of "Lord" and meaning of the name "Jesus" (Jehovah saves), but he could not be saved without realizing that only God can save him and provide him with the forgiveness of sins and salvation he needed from hell. Built into every person's response to God is the

assurance that man is the sinner and God is the Savior through Jesus Christ death, burial, and resurrection.

Here is the point. The good news of the Gospel and a person's faith in Christ is shaped upon the historical record and facts of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:23-24; 10:30-40; 13:23-39; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). How Hodges can conclude that the deity of Christ is a non-essential element of saving faith is mind-boggling to me. John 3:16 affirms the necessity of believing in Jesus as the Son of God. Hodge seems to focus on what some have termed as



"Samaritan theology" in John chapter four, indicating that the Samaritan woman could not know who Jesus was but still possess faith in Him. But this is not the case for she declared: "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29). Jesus used the evangelistic approach of exposing her as a sinner (John 4:16-18). After being confronted with her sin, the woman immediately believed that Jesus was the coming Messiah to which Jesus replies, "I that speak unto thee am he" (John 4:25-26). In short, Jesus exclaimed, "I AM."

Hodges has tried to "cut and paste" a different gospel message (believing in a promise of eternal life given by a person called Jesus) into one verse, reinterpreting it apart from all other Biblical and historical evidence regarding what a person must believe to be saved. Although I'm convinced that Hodges believes the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-3) is what saves people, it is contradictory and senseless to say that people don't have to know about the Gospel that saves people. Essentially, Hodges is teaching that a person does not need to know anything about the Gospel to become a Christian. That is like saying you don't have to know anything about mechanics to become a mechanic. You don't have to know anything about baking to become a baker. You don't need to know anything about blueprints to become a draftsman.

This not only defies rational thinking but also Biblical theology. People must hear the whole Gospel story so they can express faith in the right Jesus and correct Gospel message (2 Cor. 11:4). Declaring the Gospel message when witnessing to unsaved people is not “excess baggage,” “extra details,” or “clouding the issues” as Hodge and others suggest. There are no less than one hundred explicit references to the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ from Acts to Revelation. To miss this point is to miss the importance of how all people must hear and respond in faith to the Gospel message. If you miss this point, you are straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matt. 23:24).

Jonathan Perreault once again gives us this important observation:

“The apostle Peter includes the burial of Christ in his sermon on the day of Pentecost when the church first began (Acts 2:22-32, 40) - and 3,000 souls were saved (Acts 2:41)! The apostle Paul includes the burial of Christ in "the message of...salvation" to the unsaved Galatians (Acts 13:26-41). The apostle John includes the burial of Christ in his "evangelistic" narrative (John 2:13-22, 12:1-8, 23-24, 14:18-19, 16:16-22, 19:38-42). Most importantly, Paul includes the burial of Christ in his definitive declaration of the gospel to the Corinthians, reminding them of what the content of the gospel really is - the message they believed and by which they are saved (1 Cor. 15:1, 3-5; cf. Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13; 2 Thess. 1:8-10).”

What is the Gospel and how does it relate to the person of Jesus Christ (His deity) and individual faith? What does a person need to know in order to be saved? What is the content of a person’s faith that results in him receiving eternal life?

Acts 16:31 is a clear revelation of the content of a person’s faith that is true for everyone: “**Believe on the Lord** (a personal name for God – a title of deity taken from the Old Testament [YHWH] which was given to Christ - pointing to the supreme authority, ruler, and controller of everything – Ps. 110:1; Isa. 43:11; Acts 10:36; Rev. 19:16) **Jesus** (Jehovah saves – Matt. 1:21) **Christ** (the title for the Anointed One, the Messiah of Old Testament revelation, who was also portrayed as the God of deliverance – Matt. 1:23; Luke 2:11; John 1:41) **and thou shalt be saved...**”

Who Christ is and what He did are inseparable. The person and work of Jesus Christ cannot be divided without destroying the only way of salvation. No person can be

saved by believing portions of a Bible verse that washes ashore as Hodges maintains. In receiving only a portion of a Bible verse, a lost person has received some light, but he needs to understand the Biblical, historical, crucified, and risen Savior. The truth about Jesus Christ is presented in Scripture through the Holy Spirit's illumination of a person's sinfulness and need for salvation (2 Thess. 2:13; John 16:8).



Here is the point. How can you be helped if you don't know who or how you are being helped? If the name "Jesus" means God saves, then One needs to know that God is saving him. The idea that you can believe in the promise that "someone" called Jesus gives to you about everlasting life, without knowing anything else about Jesus, falls woefully short of expressing saving faith in the death, burial, and resurrected Christ who is the incarnate God! A person must know *who* that "someone" is and *what* that someone has done

before they can be saved. The pagans in Acts 17:18 thought Jesus was some kind of pagan god when they stated to Paul: "He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection." Without Paul identifying who Jesus was the pagan people could not express faith in His person and work which included the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:23-32).

Here is the point. Someone cannot save you. Only God can save you, and Jesus as the "Son of God," possessing the same essence and eternal being as the Father was God incarnate – the divine exegesis of God's existence (John 1:18; 5:18; Phil. 2:6). John's Gospel was written to confirm that Jesus was the Son of God. John 20:30-31, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." All the apostles match John's confession at the end of the book. John 6:69, "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Yes, belief in Jesus as the Son of God was a dominant theme in Johannine writings.

1 John 5:13

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Eternal life is linked to believing in the Son of God. When believing in God’s Son (Christ’s deity – He shares God’s existence), a person receives eternal life. A person must believe who the Lord Jesus Christ is (Rom. 10:9) and what He did, paying for their sin penalty and providing them with salvation through His death, burial and resurrection (the Gospel of 1 Cor. 15:3-4) before they can possess salvation and eternal life. People need something more to believe than just the promise of eternal life. They must also “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” the only One who can give them eternal life.

Romans 10:9-10 declares a person must possess faith in Christ’s deity and resurrection to be saved. “That if thou shalt confess (*say the same thing about Christ that other Christians do*) with thy mouth the Lord Jesus (*Jesus as Lord – Jesus is God – a declaration of deity*), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead (*a belief that precedes confession*), thou shalt be saved (*a confirmation of one’s salvation through confession - Mark 16:16*). For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness (*how one is saved – the inward response*); and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (*what happens after salvation – the outward response*).”

In other words, people confess after they are saved what was in their hearts when they were saved. Their confession is that Jesus is Lord (the incarnate and resurrected God) and this confession proves the validity of their faith in Christ. Confessing with the mouth (Rom. 10:9) that Jesus is Lord (God) is mentioned first to conform to the order of the quotation from Deuteronomy 30:14 in Romans 10:8. The point is this. If Jesus is Lord (God), then He has also risen from the dead! These are two twin truths that cannot be separated. Christ’s resurrection proves that He is Lord (Acts 2:32-36). Christ’s resurrection is the evidence that He was the Lord (Rom. 4:24; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14).

What Paul is teaching in Romans 10:9-10 is this. What was in the heart at the time of belief comes out of the heart after belief. What is in the heart at the time of salvation (belief in Christ's deity and resurrection) comes out of the mouth following salvation. It should be noted that confessing and believing work in harmony. Believing is the *inward* response to Christ's deity (He is Lord) and resurrection (He is risen) while confessing is the *outward* response to these twin doctrines. Paul's point is that salvation comes through acknowledging that Christ is Lord (God), that He not only died on the cross bearing the penalty for our sins, but that He rose from the dead so we can possess imputed righteousness.

Thus, we see that the content of a person's faith is to believe that Jesus is Lord (deity) and that He has risen from the dead. True saving faith is to believe in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ which essentially is believing that Jesus came to earth as God, died, and then rose again the third day. Of course, the content of a person's faith is evident in many Bible texts. When it speaks of believing in Jesus Christ it is referencing a belief in both the person of Christ (He is Lord – God) and His Gospel work (He died and rose again).

John 3:16 is the most beloved verse in the Bible:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Jesus also said in John 6:47:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”

To believe “in him” or “on me” as Jesus taught means you must know something specifically about Christ so that you can express faith in Him. The Bible repeatedly states that a person must first know *who* Christ is and *what* Christ has done so he can express a faith that consists of knowledge and trust (reliance) upon Jesus Christ. Without understanding about Christ's person (His deity) and work in the Gospel there can be no knowledgeable or genuine faith placed in Christ, or as the Scriptures teach, people are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

Faith is empty and invalidated if it is not based in the person and Gospel work of Jesus Christ. Paul repeatedly explains that “your faith is vain” (1 Cor. 15:14, 17) if it



is not placed in the resurrection of Christ which is an integral part of the Gospel “by which also ye are saved” (1 Cor. 15:2). In other words, without understanding and believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ no person can express a rational faith in Jesus Christ, knowing that He is the only true God and Savior that died and rose again “who is both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The promise of eternal life is meaningless; it’s a promise with no basis, without believing in the actual Deliverer (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). You cannot get to the deliverance without the Deliverer, and you cannot separate the Deliverer from the deliverance. Both the Promiser (the Lord Jesus Christ) and promise of salvation (Acts 16:31), forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31; 13:38-39), justification (Rom. 5:1), and eternal life (John 3:16; 6:47) are inseparably bound together in the expression of a person’s faith. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is believing in His person and finished work (the Gospel) to provide you with the full blessings related to salvation (Eph. 1:3).

Once again, a person must come “unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) that he is a sinner before God, that the Lord Jesus Christ (God) died and rose again to be his Savior, before he can believe in the truth of the Gospel and be saved. “In whom ye also trusted, (*placing faith in Christ – His person and Gospel work*) after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (*after hearing the Gospel message*): in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13). Hearing and understanding the Gospel message is a prerequisite to faith. You cannot express belief in Christ without knowing *who* Christ is, *why* Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, and *what* He offers to you.

There is an *intellectual, emotional, and volitional* element associated with an individual’s faith. Intellectually a person must understand Christ is God and the only One who can deliver him (John 8:24; Rom. 10:9). Emotionally his heart must undergo deep conviction in the truth that he is a sinner before God and in need of cleansing (Acts 2:37; John 16:8). And finally, volitionally a person must express faith in Christ alone to be his Savior (John 1:12; Rev. 22:17).

This is how salvation and justification are received and appropriated to one’s life. Faith is not merely a mental exercise (the mind) or an emotional event (the heart),

it must also include a commitment of one's will to Christ and the stated facts of the Gospel ("I know whom I have believed" - 2 Tim. 1:12). An individual must personally rely on Jesus Christ to be his Savior by committing his faith (not his entire life as in Lordship Salvation) to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The fact that Jesus is repeatedly referenced to be our *God and Savior* (Luke 1:47; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10, 13; 3:4; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude. 25) is a strong and irrevocable, theological proposition that a person must believe Jesus Christ is God in order to be saved. It's a serious error to separate the Deliverer from the deliverance, the person of Christ from the promise of Christ, and the Gospel from the Godhead (deity) which Jesus shares with the eternal God (Col. 2:9).

This means the content of one's faith must be placed in Jesus Christ who is God and therefore the Savior of sinners. Jesus is the Son of God (sharing God's eternal existence and nature) who is also personified as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In John 4:42 the Samaritans stated: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." The Samaritan's believed Christ was indeed "the Savior of the world" – not merely the one who gives eternal life as Hodge, Wilkin, and GES promotes. Jesus saves! I'm still singing it!

It was Jesus who was "lifted up" (John 3:14) on the cross to save sinners from their coming judgment (John 3:15-16). Jesus similarly taught in John 12:47, "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Salvation from hell's judgment was part of John's evangelistic message. Therefore, Jesus used the words "perish" (John 3:15; 10:28), "condemned already" (John 3:18), and "judgment" (John 16:8) when speaking of the salvation of a person. The message of evangelism was not simply to believe in a promise about eternal life. John's Gospel does not skip over the deity, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as the message which saves people from damnation.

This repeated expression "The Christ" in John's Gospel and epistle is presented as the God and Savior from sin's penalty and the One who provides complete forgiveness of sins for every believer (1 Jn. 2:2; 12; 3:5; 4:10, 14). In fact, our daily

cleansing from sin in the Christian life (1 John 1:7) is based upon our positional cleansing and forgiveness we have received through Christ for it maintains our standing before God (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). 1 John 3:23 gives scriptural and convincing evidence that believing Jesus Christ is God's Son is to be part of the content of a person's faith: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ..." 1 John 4:15 adds, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." It's not believing in the promise of a Jesus, as Hodges and Wilkin suggest, but believing in the "Son Jesus Christ."

1 John 5:1 also declares, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." 1 John 5:10-11 adds, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." 1 John 5:13, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

It's very clear that John did not separate the promise of eternal life from the person of Jesus Christ. If you are shipwrecked and without Christ, believing on Christ means that you express faith in the Son of God (God incarnate) who died and rose again and therefore is the only One who can grant eternal life. Martha believed Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah and Son of God (God incarnate), who was prophesied to come into the world and give eternal life through His death and resurrection ("whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" - John 11:26-28).



Jesus stood condemned to death by Jewish law for claiming to be the Son of God (John 19:7), not merely the human Messiah. Belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, results in eternal life. John 20:31, "But these are written, that ye might

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John’s Gospel presents Jesus Christ as the Jewish deity (YHWH) in a human body (fully God and fully man) who saves from sin.

The conflict throughout John’s Gospel was not about Jesus’s promise of giving eternal life, but over His person as God, who alone can forgive sins and save people from God’s wrath. John 6:29, “Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” “Before Abraham was, I Am” (John 8:58). John 10:33, “The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” In John’s Gospel and epistles, denying the deity of Christ identifies one as an imposter of Christianity – not a believer in Jesus Christ and part of Christianity (1 John 2:22; 5:1; 5:20).

In other words, In John’s writings, Jesus is always presented as the Christ, God’s Son, God incarnate, and the Savior of sinners. Jesus is not merely someone who offers eternal life. Jesus is the Christ (God in the flesh – John 1:1), the eternal preexistent One (John 8:53; 12:41; 17:5; 20:28) and He is the Savior who came to rescue sinners from the hell. Believing anything less or something else than this cannot be true saving faith. According to John, the content of a person’s faith is to be in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both God and the Savior of sinners. Matthew agrees with John’s conclusions about Christ.

Matthew 1:21-23, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

From the days of the apostles to our present day, every orthodox Christian in the history of Christianity has taught that salvation and justification requires faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Sadly, Hodges, Wilkin, and others within GES have abandoned the Biblical and historical requirement within Scripture and Christianity to believe in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, justification, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life.

According to GES teaching, Christ as the God and the Savior from sin, Christ as the risen Lord from the dead, does not need to be part of the content of a person's faith when becoming a Christian. Belief in what Jesus says about eternal life is enough without identifying or knowing who Jesus is. This opens the door for the Jesus of Modernism, Liberalism, Demythologization Theology, the New Age, Post Modernism, and the Jesus of the cults. Unless one believes in the person of Jesus Christ, that He is God incarnate, the only Savior from sin, the risen Lord, they cannot have any promise or hope of everlasting life. How can a dead Christ give anyone eternal life?

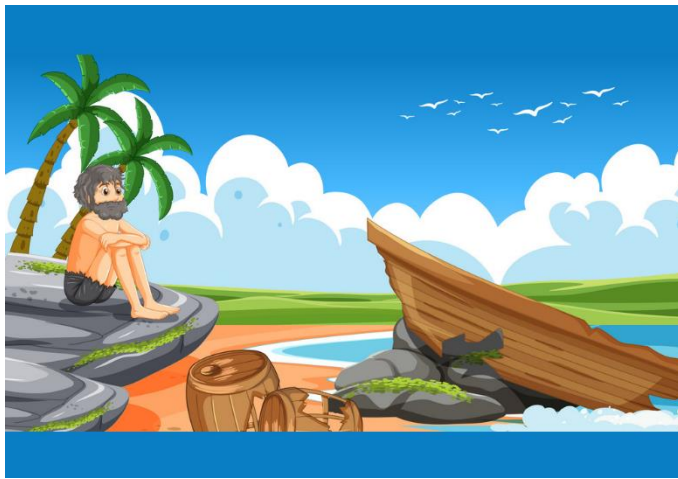
According to GES, the person of Jesus Christ is replaced with the promise Jesus gives about eternal life. Christ being the Savior of sinners is unnecessary and is replaced with a promise of eternal life. A person who thinks he is good and self-righteous, who has no concept that he is a sinner and in need of a Savior, can enter Heaven when believing the promise of eternal life. The need for repentance and forgiveness from sins is replaced with believing a promise about eternal life, without a person experiencing conviction over his sinful and lost estate before God. Yes, GES teaches that a person can go to Heaven without knowing there is a God, without knowing they are a sinner before God, without knowing that Jesus is God and their Savior from hell, and without having any change of mind about their sin, the Savior, and need for salvation from hell. In essence, one can go to Heaven without acknowledging they are a sinner, without repentance, without needing a Savior, and without believing in God.

If these anti-biblical conclusions were true, then serial killers and child molesters would not have to acknowledge their sinfulness before God through repentance, but only believe in a promise about eternal life, and they would go to Heaven. Atheists would not have to admit there is a God, but potentially embrace a promise about eternal life, and to their own surprise enter Heaven upon death. Cultists who reject the deity of Christ would not have to change their thinking about Christ but only believe a promise about eternal life to enter Heaven. Christ rejectors, unrepentant sinners, and atheists could all enter Heaven when they die. If one just believes they have eternal life, without believing on Christ, then you will get into Heaven. Of course, the Bible tells a much different story (Rev. 21:8, 27).

To state it succinctly, to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31) means to express faith in both the person and work of Christ. The two are inseparably bound together like the heads and tails on a coin. Faith in the promise of eternal life without possessing faith in Christ’s person and work results in a promise that has no foundation. But faith in the person and work of Christ (John 20:31) brings an individual into the spiritual blessings of salvation, forgiveness, justification, redemption, and eternal life.

John 17:3

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God (*the Heavenly Father*), and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (*the Son who shares the Godhead with the Father and reveals the Father to us*).



Eternal life is essentially knowing God experientially through Jesus Christ who came into the world to reveal God to mankind (John 1:18). Eternal life is not only a *quantity* of life but also experiencing a new *quality* of life through Jesus Christ and our union with Him. What does a person who is shipwrecked on a deserted island need to know to experience eternal life? John 17:3

gives us this answer. A person must know that Jesus Christ is the only true God. This is because only God can give everlasting life and a new way of life. A person comes to know God through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and continues to know God through possessing an ongoing relationship with Christ (Phil. 3:10). To dismiss the deity of Christ as part of the content of a person’s faith in Christ is to deny the repeated and clearly revealed facts of Scripture. In fact, according to John, a person who denies Christ as God is an antichrist (1 John 2:18-23) – not a believer.

In summary, a person must possess the knowledge that he is a sinner before God (Rom. 3:20, 23) and that Jesus is the only God and Savior that can grant salvation and eternal life through His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Pet. 3:18). You cannot

have good news (Rom. 1:16) without knowing the bad news (Rom. 3:23). You cannot be saved without knowing you are a sinner, that Jesus is “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42) and “that the Father send the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). You cannot have salvation without a Savior (Jude 25 – “the only wise God our Saviour”). You cannot have eternal life without knowing the Giver of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) which is “the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

Isaiah 45:22

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is none else.*”

The knowledge and content of a person’s faith must always be placed in the Lord Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, who died on the cross for sinners (paying sin’s penalty), who was buried (proving the finality of His death), and who rose again the third day (providing us with eternal life and acceptance before God). This is true saving faith, the kind of faith that knows the truth about Christ’s suffering and death for sinners on the cross and rising from the dead to grant them salvation, forgiveness, justification, and eternal life. The New Testament presents Jesus as the Savior from the penalty of sin and the only One who can forgive sins (Luke 5:20; 7:48; Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18; Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

“Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (Luke 5:21). Even the enemies of grace and Jesus got it right. You would think that a ministry called Grace Evangelical Society could get it right! No, I’m not saying that Hodges, Wilkin, and others refuse to acknowledge that only God can forgive sins, save, justify, and give eternal life through Christ’s death and resurrection. They certainly believe that Jesus is God and they do believe that the cross and the resurrection of Christ is the sole ground of a person’s salvation and justification before God. Otherwise, they would be blatant heretics of the Gospel truth. However, the varied teaching among GES is that a person does not need to know any facts about himself (he is a sinner and a stench in the nostrils of God – Rom. 3:10-20), any facts about Christ (His deity – John 8:24; Rom. 10:9-10), any Gospel facts about the cross and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4) to be saved.

Essentially, GES is teaching a person can be *secretly saved* by God and the Gospel without knowing anything about it. In my opinion, this approach to witnessing sounds closer to universalism than Biblical evangelism. To think that a person can be saved not knowing about the person of Jesus Christ (a godless gospel), not knowing about the cross (a crossless gospel) and knowing nothing about the resurrection (a non-miraculous gospel) is nothing short of heresy.

To their credit, on the website of GES their doctrinal statement reads:

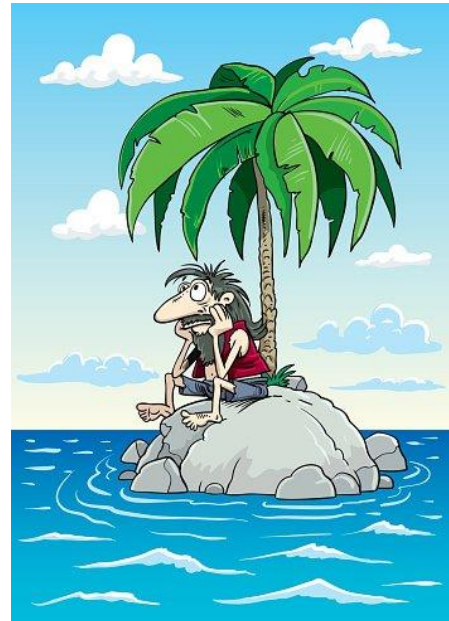
“The sole condition for receiving everlasting life is faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died a substitutionary death on the cross for man’s sin and rose bodily from the dead (John 3:16-18; 6:47; Acts 16:31).”

GES may contend for the Gospel or the faith (Jude 3) in their doctrinal statements, but they seem to deny it when evangelizing the lost. Their heresy is not in denying the deity of Christ but omitting the person of Jesus Christ from evangelism. Their heresy is not in denying the Gospel but making the claim you can evangelize without the Gospel. It is a *heresy of method* within the GES movement that flagrantly omits Christ’s person and work as the sole ground of a believer’s salvation, forgiveness, justification, and eternal life. But it’s also a *heresy of teaching* when one fails to use the right message while evangelizing which can give poor lost listeners false hopes regarding the only way of salvation.

Evangelizing without sharing the Gospel and the person and work of Jesus Christ is abandoning Biblical orthodoxy and historical Christianity. To their credit, GES has been very careful to not frontload or backload the Gospel with works as higher Calvinism promotes. But sadly, in their attempt to maintain orthodoxy that salvation is by grace alone (from start to finish) they have taken the grace out of evangelism (Eph. 2:8-9) by promoting a heretical theory that a person does not need to know about the grace of Jesus Christ to be saved. They only need to know and believe that someone called Jesus said He would give a person eternal life. But according to GES, *who* Jesus was, *why* Jesus died on the cross and rose again, and *what* eternal life means does not need to enter the faith equation. A person can be saved without understanding or knowing any of these things.



I once asked a man at the local grocery store if he believed in eternal life. He said, “Yes, I believe that one enters another form of life after their present life form on earth and lives on forever in a process of recycling.” Of course, he believed in reincarnation. The point is that in evangelism we must define who Jesus is, what Jesus did for sinful humanity, and what eternal life means. We cannot be vague in our Gospel presentation. As previously explained, without properly understanding or coming to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), a person cannot be saved. The light or revelation of man’s depravity (sinfulness), Christ’s deity (He is God) and the Gospel’s declaration is necessary to produce genuine faith in the heart of an individual. This means that a heathen sitting on an island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean cannot be saved without the full light of the Gospel revelation.



2 Timothy 1:10

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

“In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

In Romans 1:16 Paul states: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” So, there you have it. The Gospel and belief are tied together. In other words, you cannot be saved without hearing the Gospel message for it is the power behind this message that brings people out of their blindness and into the spiritual blessings related to salvation. It’s “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13) which means that no person can be saved without knowing about the special

revelation of the Gospel message and believing in the Gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Again, I do not believe the heresy of GES is in denying the Gospel as the ultimate way of a person's salvation and justification before God but denying that the Gospel must be presented to unsaved people. The heresy promotes the erroneous teaching that a person can go to Heaven without knowing anything about the true nature of his own sinfulness and separation from God, without knowing about his condemnation to hell under God's wrath, without knowing anything about the truth about Jesus Christ (He is God), and without knowing anything about the message of the Gospel. If it sounds bizarre - it's because it is! Going to Heaven without being a sinner, without repentance, without knowing the Jesus of the Bible, without God, and without the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is nothing short of heresy. If it sounds like heresy – it is!