

HERESY

OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

BECOME A CHRISTIAN
WITHOUT

FAITH IN
JESUS AS

GOD

AND

SAVIOR

KENNETH WILSON, M.D., D.PHIL.

Heresy of the Grace Evangelical Society

Become a Christian
without Faith
in Jesus as
God and Savior

Kenneth Wilson, M.D., D.Phil.

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Foreword

I consider it an honor to provide a foreword to Dr. Kenneth Wilson's new book, *Heresy of the Grace Evangelical Society: Become a Christian Without Faith in Jesus as God and Savior*. Ken has been a friend since 2001, and I have had the privilege of watching him grow in theology from his work at Faith Evangelical Seminary to the completion of his doctorate from Oxford University in the area of Patristics. He had already established himself as an orthopedic surgeon and professor at Oregon Health Sciences University. Now he continues in the area of theology and Patristics (areas in which we share interests) with a brilliant book on Augustine and now an evaluation of a heresy within evangelical ranks.

Kenneth Wilson has written a sensitive and accurate assessment of the theology of Zane Hodges and Bob Wilkin in their departure from the Gospel of Christ. I have watched this movement from its development over the decades that has minimized and confused belief in the person of Christ with the benefits of Christ's work. This is a much-needed book for Christians who desire to be orthodox in their theology.

I suppose some might wonder why I speak of Dr. Wilson's book as sensitive, since he is critical of an alleged heresy and some who have embraced it. This is because he follows in the train of biblical writers like Paul, Peter, and Jude who also had love and concern for people but desired them, and those they influenced, to be led back to the truth. Even though he focuses on the deviation of two persons from our common salvation (Jude 3), he does not do so with rancor, but with concern for them, and those who are led astray by them.

I had the privilege of having several meetings with Zane Hodges before I became a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was an erudite scholar and pleasant person that I enjoyed being with. After joining the Dallas faculty some years later, I read his book *Absolutely Free*, in which he moved beyond the teaching on grace theology, which I learned from reading Dr. Charles Ryrie. Hodges's new emphasis was clear. No matter what one believed about the need for sanctification or belief in our salvation by Jesus, even apostasy, one's salvation and security resided in believing in eternal security.

I became acquainted with Professor Hodges's student Bob Wilkin and found him intransigent in his emphasis requiring belief in eternal security, even more than what one believes about Jesus. His theology seemed to focus more on a perceived benefit of believing that we have eternal life than in the Christ who gives life because of our belief in Him as God's Son (John 20:31). In the last few years, I have noticed that many of my friends who are professors of Bible and theology have separated themselves from Wilkin and his conferences due to this teaching that condemns most of the Christian world—past and present—as persons who are not recipients of Christ's salvation. This is clearly seen in Wilkin, when he says, "*If you have never believed in eternal security, then you aren't saved*, because eternal security is the promise Jesus makes in the gospel" (italics added). (Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 96–97.)

What began as a "grace theology" that focused on the unmerited favor of God apart from our works has moved to an extreme view of grace. The identity of the Savior is relegated to second place relative to the benefits that the Savior provides. Salvation is contorted as based on our belief in our security rather than belief in the one who redeems and saves a believer, our God and Savior Jesus.

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Preface

“I can’t believe Ken Wilson used the ‘H word’ against the Grace Evangelical Society!” The “H word,” *Heresy*, may provoke negative reactions from those who do not understand this term from an early Christian perspective. Earning a D.Phil. (Doctor of Philosophy) from the University of Oxford in Patristics has provided me a valuable perspective identifying common elements in heresies.^[1] Heresy most often arises from well-meaning Christians within the church. Identifying a group as teaching a heresy does NOT imply they are non-Christians. In fact, the opposite is usually true—the sect teaching heresy excludes other Christians as not being genuine Christians.

Many of us recognize Gnosticism, Arianism, and Modalism as examples of ancient heresies. The early church battled numerous such views that contradicted essential elements of the Christian faith. In fact, the early church fought so many heresies that it appeared most all of the ways a group could stray from the essentials of the faith had been refuted. That is why the birth of a new heresy in 2005 seems significant. This is when Robert Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society (GES) changed their Affirmations of Belief, claiming a person could become a Christian *without* believing that Jesus is God incarnate and be justified *without* believing that Jesus was the Savior from sin.

Many years ago I repeatedly lectured in the annual meetings of both the Grace Evangelical Society and the Free Grace Alliance. I am not a member of either group. While serving my General Surgery internship in Dallas, Texas, I attended Victor Street Bible Chapel where Zane Hodges taught. I financially supported his early ministry in the *barrios* among

Spanish-speaking Christians. Bob Wilkin taught one of my classes when I was training for my Master of Divinity degree; and, I interacted with him at GES meetings and held conversations with him at the table during dinner. I am personally acquainted with these good Christian men. It grieves me to have to write this book.

Aside from my own attempts to convince Zane and Bob of their errors, numerous other Christians have tried to dissuade them from their novel doctrine that is heretical. These attempts will be detailed in later chapters. In their efforts to lovingly restore Bob Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society to healthy doctrine, these Christians have gone above and beyond what Scripture requires. After fifteen years and multiple conversations, Bob Wilkin continues unrepentant in his heretical view. This typifies the historical precedent regarding those who teach heresy and form a sect.^[2]

Therefore, this book has not been written in an effort to restore fellowship. The purpose of this book is to alert the Christian community to a sect teaching a dangerous heresy, yet masquerading as the ones who are boldly defending true Christianity. This book began as an article to be published in a major U.S. theological journal. When submitted, the editor agreed with me, but would not allow it to be published for one reason: it would require that the journal provide Bob Wilkin an opportunity to respond in writing within that journal. This, the editor, could not tolerate. A second journal (international) replied that there was no reason to publish what the Christian community already knew—the Grace Evangelical Society taught heresy.

So I offer this book as one who: 1.) by scholarly training understands heresy historically and recognizes its dangers, 2.) personally interacted as a friend with Zane Hodges and Bob Wilkin, 3.) personally

attempted to bring those teaching this heresy back into the orthodox faith, and 4.) can bring a voice of warning to *those Christians who remain unaware* of what much of Christianity already knows.

The Grace Evangelical Society (GES) teaches the heretical doctrine that a person can be justified (declared righteous before God to enter an eternal relationship with God for all of eternity) *without* that person believing that Jesus is God in the flesh and Savior from sin. According to Bob Wilkin and his GES, a person must only believe that someone named Jesus irrevocably guarantees you eternal life (i.e., eternal security) by faith alone when you believe Jesus's promise of eternal security to you. It is time to expose the origin and teachings of this heresy.

Ken Wilson, MD, DPhil
December 14, 2020

Introduction

The Preface provided what I believe to be critical components in understanding and evaluating this book. Realizing that many persons skip a book's Preface, I will now summarize. Heresy is a technical term that does not imply the heretics are non-Christians. I personally knew and interacted with Zane Hodges and also interacted with Bob Wilkin. Zane was, and Bob is, a good Christian man. I lectured at Grace Evangelical Society annual meetings. Other Christians and I have attempted many times over fifteen years to restore Bob Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society to orthodoxy.

For Christians and theologians outside of the Free Grace movement, it is imperative to understand that the majority of Christians identifying as Free Grace have rejected Wilkin's GES heresy. For fifteen years they have refused to associate with this heretical GES group. The majority of Free Grace Christians continue to hold the orthodox position: to become a Christian one must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God incarnate and Savior from sin. They may agree with some less essential doctrines of GES, but do not want to be identified with heretics who have departed from the most basic doctrine that identifies persons as Christians.

Orthodox Jews are known as the people of the book (עַם הַסֵּפֶר, *Am HaSefer*) and for the שְׁמָא יִשְׂרָאֵל (*Shema Yisrael*), that God is one. Christianity is distinguished from all other religions by the belief that Jesus Christ is God incarnate and the Savior from sin, who died and rose again. Those are the essential elements. That does not mean one must understand all of the theological implications of Christ's deity and profess the Chalcedonian Creed. Nor does that mean one must be able to explain

Christ's vicarious substitutionary atonement for sin. But claiming a person can become a Christian without believing those essential elements of Jesus as God and Savior is like a Jew claiming to be Orthodox without believing the *Shema Yisrael*, that God is one. That is not possible. To join a religious group, orthodoxy requires that a convert believe the essential element(s) of that religion. If the religious group does not require that person to believe the essential element(s), then that group is *not* orthodox.

Traditional Free Grace Christians remain orthodox. To become a Christian one must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God incarnate and Savior from sin. Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society claim this *is not a requirement* to become a Christian—the most essential doctrine of Scripture and historical Christianity has been rejected—not necessary to become a Christian.

It grieves me to write this book. But, I write it hoping to educate Christians who remain unaware that Bob Wilkin and his GES are teaching dangerous doctrine. I hope Christians who are welcoming Bob Wilkin and GES into their churches will read and comprehend this danger, in order that they might escape this heretical sect. Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society are teaching heresy.

What is heresy?

As a functional term within modern evangelical Christianity, calling a person a heretic implies he or she is a non-Christian who teaches a grievous error. This is an inappropriate use. Historically, the English word heresy arose from the Greek verb *ᾱρᾱεῖν* (to take, grasp, seize) by adding *σις* to form the noun *ᾱρᾱεσις* (Latin, *haeresis*), with at least six different meanings over time.^[3] Originally, it was a neutral term with no negative connotations. This includes its uses in the Second Temple period and in the text of the New Testament. In the second century of the church, Irenaeus of Lyons (ca.180) wrote *Against All Heresies* defending the faith handed down from the apostles of Jesus against Gnostic sects who were misusing Christian Scriptures. This heralded the pejorative use of heresy as meaning a teaching outside of the bounds of orthodox Christianity. Christianity in this early period held diverse opinions on how to practice liturgical rites and how to explain doctrines about the person of Christ as both God and man who died for humanity's sins. To be labeled a heresy meant to depart outside of the broad range of acceptable orthodoxy concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines heresy as “a belief that is against the [principles](#) of a particular religion.” Belief in Jesus as God and Savior is the essential doctrine of the Christian faith.^[4]

Heresies Arise from Within the Church

Heresies began within the Christian church at least by the second century. The Valentinian Gnostics were considered Christian heretics by the early church father Irenaeus. Marcion appealed to the church at Rome to radically separate from Judaism by rejecting the Old Testament. The Gnostic Basilides was the first person known to claim God had to infuse the gift of faith into spiritually dead sinners incapable of responding to God. As a self-proclaimed divine prophet, Montanus claimed Christ would return to set up the kingdom in Phrygia (Turkey). The Ebonites asserted Christ was a mere man empowered by God, while the Docetists protected Christ's divinity by claiming he only appeared to exist in human form. Each of these originators of heresy believed their doctrine would help Christianity defeat its rivals.

Christians usually develop heresy in a well-meaning attempt to further explain or coalesce distinct doctrine. Alister McGrath concluded, "Heresy is best seen as a form of Christian belief that, more by accident than design, ultimately ends up subverting, destabilizing, or even destroying the core of Christian faith."^[5] Christians create heresy unintentionally. "Every major heresy began as an exploration of the dynamics of faith within the church."^[6] Heresies arise within the Christian church.

So we define heresy, not by the motive or the morality of the originator, but by its final effect upon the essential truths of Christianity. The deviation may appear to be almost inconsequential initially, but the consequences of that minor deviation wreck the ship of Christianity on the rocks of heresy. This heresy does not need to be a direct assault on Christ's divinity or humanity. If a doctrine indirectly negates an essential element concerning faith in Jesus Christ's person as both God and man, or

Scripture's stated purpose of Him coming to save sinners, it is classified as a heresy.

The Grace Evangelical Society Negates Both

I do not consider the Grace Evangelical Society's doctrine of Jesus Christ to be in error. The leaders believe that Jesus is both God and man and the Savior from sin. GES does not directly assault the person and work of Christ. However, their doctrine of salvation negates the person and work of Christ. According to Bob Wilkin and the Grace Evangelical Society, justification does not require the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is God or Savior from sin. They say that logically a person must be God to guarantee eternal life (i.e., for them this equals eternal security) or save people from sin. However, according to the GES, a person *does not* need to believe that Jesus is God or Savior from sin to be justified. That is a heresy; and, I am not the first to call it a heresy.^{[\[7\]](#)}

Now Wilkin and GES *do* think it is good evangelism to include the fact that Jesus is God and Savior, but it is not essential to justification. As long as the person believes someone named Jesus can guarantee eternal security then nothing else is required. One need not know he or she is a sinner in need of a Savior. A person does not need to know Jesus as God came to earth as a man to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). In fact, with this heretical view, a GES “Christian” can reject that Jesus is God and reject that Jesus died to save us from our sins. The GES “Christian” only needs to believe that someone named Jesus guarantees him or her eternal security.

A second bizarre consequence results from this view. An unbelieving woman reads the Gospel of John, believes she is a sinner in need of a Savior, and believes that Jesus is God in the flesh who died on a cross and rose again in three days to save her from her sins. She commits her life to Jesus Christ as her Lord, and follows him in obedient

discipleship. This woman remains a faithful follower/disciple of Christ until her death. According to Wilkin and his GES, that theoretical woman goes to Hell. Why? Because she never believed that Jesus guaranteed her eternal security.

Do you see the problem? The divine person and salvific purpose of Jesus Christ have been relegated to the periphery of Christianity. Belief in eternal security is more important than the person and work of Christ. This is heresy.

The Making of a Heresy

In the chapters that follow, I will guide the reader through the thinking process that created this incredible contradiction. We begin with what Robert (Bob) Wilkin and his GES currently believe about justification. We then explore the works of Zane Hodges and how he developed this strange gospel. In my opinion, the safeguards were removed that usually prevent well-meaning persons from drifting off into heresy. This should serve as a warning to us that we are all vulnerable to reaching similar heretical conclusions if safeguards do not remain in place. The attempts of former colleagues to return Zane Hodges, Bob Wilkin, and other GES supporters to orthodoxy are detailed. We then explore the damage this heresy has caused Free Grace proponents. But let us begin by exploring the current teachings of Bob Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society.

Chapter 1

Justification According to the GES

We should first learn what the GES currently teaches regarding justification. To become a Christian (be justified in Protestant theology), the GES website claims one must only believe the promise of guaranteed everlasting life (eternal security) by Jesus Christ:

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). Faith is the conviction that something is true. To believe in Jesus ("he who believes in Me has everlasting life") is to be convinced that He guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it (John 4:14; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; 1 Tim 1:16).^[8]

This paragraph must be carefully dissected to understand what GES is claiming. It does indeed state "the Lord Jesus Christ died a substitutionary death on the cross for man's [humanity's] sin and rose bodily from the dead." This is the historical, orthodox teaching within Christianity. But there are serious problems with the other parts of this paragraph.

Faith Alone

First, it states “The sole condition for receiving eternal life is faith alone.” By “faith alone,” the statement excludes a person who believes Jesus is God and Savior who died for our sins, yet also believes one must persevere in faith and good works for final salvation. In other words, Calvinists, Arminians, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and all other Christian groups who require works are damned to hell. But here we discover a gigantic problem. The historical evidence for early Christians who believed and taught “faith alone” without any works is non-existent. “The history of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is difficult to trace before the Reformation in the 1500’s. A clear line of development of this doctrine from the Apostles to Martin Luther simply does not exist.”^[9] Even Luther did not understand forensic justification as a one-time event (rather than a process of becoming righteous in sanctification) until he was decades into the Reformation.^[10]

No historical record exists of anyone believing in eternal security until at least the Protestant Reformation (began AD 1519), and even this can be questioned. Now this historical absence cannot prove the doctrine of eternal security to be wrong. What it does prove is the claim by Wilkin and GES is unbelievable. Out of the billion humans who have been considered Christians for millennia, only the handful who believe in eternal security will reach heaven. A billion persons believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are damned, according to Wilkin and his GES. The Scriptures do teach justification by faith alone apart from works. But that is very different from claiming a person must *believe in faith alone* (apart from works) in order to be justified. No Scripture ever states this.

This is a common error in the history of Christian theology. A Christian leader or group will take the pressing concern at that moment in

history and elevate that issue as the sole deciding factor in whether or not a person is a Christian. For Wilkin and his GES, that issue is eternal security. Many persons, especially in the Baptist traditions, teach eternal security. But Baptists do not teach you must *believe in eternal security* to become a Christian. They teach you must believe in Jesus Christ as God and Savior.

To Believe in Jesus Eternal Security

Second, Wilkin and GES will also claim that the billion Christians throughout the history of the Church never “believed in Jesus.” Observe how they arrive at that conclusion. Notice the second part of their statement: “To believe in Jesus (‘he who believes in Me has everlasting life’) is to be convinced that He guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it (John 4:14; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; 1 Tim 1:16).” For the GES, to “believe in Jesus” means a person is required to believe “He guarantees everlasting life” (eternal security). You *must* believe you will spend eternity with God regardless of your subsequent gross immorality or apostasy from faith in Christ. You must believe in eternal security or you are damned. If you have never held assurance of eternal security, then you were never justified (saved).

Wilkin claims you must initially believe in eternal security to be justified. However, you can later lose this assurance and still be a Christian. And if you can lose this sole condition of assurance of eternal security and remain an eternally secure Christian, then it is also no problem to later reject Christ as God and Savior from sin. After all, in the heretical view of GES, belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ was never required in the first place. How did Wilkin reach this incredible conclusion? No Scripture states a person must have assurance of salvation in order to be justified. We will discover that the verses conscripted by GES to substantiate this claim are misused. Instead, we must be convinced or assured that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

To Believe in Jesus Assurance

Third, the GES then proceeds to explicitly require assurance of salvation for justification.

Assurance of everlasting life is certainty that one is eternally secure simply by faith in Jesus. Assurance of everlasting life is based only on the promise God makes in His Word that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ alone possesses everlasting life (John 5:24; 1 John 5:9-13). Good works, which can and should follow regeneration, are not necessary for a person to have assurance of everlasting life (Eph 2:10; Titus 3:8). *Assurance is of the essence* of believing in Jesus for everlasting life. That is, as long as a person believes in Jesus for everlasting life, he knows he has everlasting life (John 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:27; 1 John 5:9-13; italics added).^[11]

The term “of the essence” means this: if you are not assured of the guarantee that you will live forever with God—regardless of your subsequent behavior and even loss of faith—then you are not justified (saved). That is, if you do not believe the doctrine of eternal security, then you are damned to hell. In the GES view, justification by God absolutely requires a person to be convinced of the doctrine of eternal security. How did they arrive at such an unorthodox view?

Wilkin followed Hodges in citing John 11:25–27, forcing “the Christ, the Son of God” to mean “guarantor of eternal life.” Wilkin wrote, “Faith in Christ is the conviction that He is the Guarantor of eternal life for every believer. ... When the bible speaks of ‘faith in Christ,’ it is talking about believing a specific promise that he made. Jesus explained that saving promise to His friend, Martha” [cites John 11:25–27].^[12] He also claimed,

The promise of the gospel is that all who simply believe in Christ for eternal life are eternally secure from that point onward. And, since believing the gospel is necessary to be born again and go to heaven, a person who has never had assurance that he is eternally secure has not yet been born again. ... *If you*

have never believed in eternal security, then you aren't saved, because eternal security is the promise Jesus makes in the gospel.^[13] (italics added)

This theology results in a very strange consequence. Wilkin attends Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) meetings to evangelize the pastors and professors who are headed to hell. That would be the vast majority of them in his opinion, because they do not believe in eternal security. Under the heading “Most Evangelicals Need Evangelizing,” Wilkin claims Lordship Salvation (Lordship Justification/Calvinists) adherents are damned. “If a person holds to Lordship Salvation, then he doesn’t believe that Jesus is the Guarantor of eternal life to everyone who simply believed Him for it. ... Hence, a person who believes in Lordship Salvation, no matter how moral, does not believe the gospel.”^[14] Wilkin applies the generous disclaimer that such a person *might* be saved. Why?—because, they *initially* believed in eternal security, then “later stop believing in Him for eternal life.”

Therefore, all Calvinists, Arminians, Catholics, and Orthodox (97% of all Christians) are damned to hell. They did not initially believe in eternal security. That leaves only the faithful remnant of a few hundred persons comprising the GES sect along with the Baptists and some non-denomination groups to be saved.^[15] Wilkin wonders why his own broader evangelical community does not take him seriously.

To Believe in Jesus

The GES website contains no mention of a person needing to believe Jesus is God incarnate or Savior from sin to be justified. Why? Because Wilkin and his GES leadership do not believe those elements are required to become a Christian. In 2005, GES changed its doctrinal statement requiring a belief in eternal security for justification, leaving out any requirement to believe Jesus is God or Savior from sin.^[16] Yet Wilkin and GES boldly claim at the bottom of their webpage: “*Grace Evangelical Society is firmly committed to the fundamental doctrines of the historic Christian faith. Not all of those doctrines are delineated in this affirmation of belief*” (italics original). Requiring a belief in eternal security for justification salvation is *not* one of the “*fundamental doctrines of the historic Christian faith.*”

This departure from orthodoxy first appeared in 1985 with Zane Hodges. What GES has completely deleted from its requirements for justification is indeed “*a fundamental doctrine of the historic Christian faith.*” All Christians remaining within orthodoxy have required the belief that Jesus Christ is God and Savior from sin. In other words, one cannot be a Christian without believing this doctrine of who Jesus is and what Jesus did to save sinners. For Wilkin and GES to claim adherence to “*the fundamental doctrines of the historic Christian faith*” while denying a Christian must believe Jesus is God and Savior from sin is a serious misrepresentation. This is a false claim by GES.

Conclusion

The Grace Evangelical Society altered its Affirmations of Belief in 2005 to chase an unprecedented theology in the 2000-year history of Christianity. That is, you cannot become a Christian unless you believe Jesus guarantees you eternal security. You *must* possess assurance of your justification salvation by believing in eternal security, or you are damned to hell. Wilkin and GES teach a person can become a Christian (be justified) *without* believing Jesus is God incarnate and our Savior from sin. No orthodox Christian or heretic in the history of Christianity has made such an incredible claim. Well, nobody except the Gnostics.

As a result of this heretical doctrinal change, many Free Grace leaders who were also former leaders within GES decided to leave as a result of this GES (mis)understanding of saving faith.^[17] These were Christians within the GES leadership—including the chairman of the board—who believed in eternal security and were in fellowship with Wilkin. These more academic leaders and members within GES resigned after forming the Free Grace Alliance. They could not agree with the new GES Affirmations of Belief.

In the next chapter, we will discover the origins of this deviant view in the teachings of a respected and beloved Greek teacher at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was also my friend and a mentor.

Chapter 2

The Road to Heresy— Construction began in 1985

Zane C. Hodges was my friend. This is why I feel a need to provide a context for this chapter. Zane was the one who introduced me to the various different meanings of salvation in Scripture. Zane's *The Hungry Inherit* and *The Gospel Under Siege* were pivotal books for me. For a young Christian who had been taught "saved" always meant "go to heaven," this revolutionized my ability to understand Bible passages. After graduating from medical school, I accepted an internship at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. I attended church less than one mile away at Victor Street Bible Chapel where Zane pastored. I watched in awe as this kind and scholarly man gently corrected stupid teachings (including my own) from other men during the Sunday night "breaking of bread meetings" in this Plymouth Brethren assembly. I financially supported the ministry of Zane Hodges in that poor Latino community.

My autographed copy of *Absolutely Free* has "Thanks so much for your generous fellowship in the gospel. Zane Rev. 22:17." I was the only single person at Victor Street Bible Chapel until I met my "wife to be," and then we attended as a married couple. This financially poor church gave us a wedding gift. We still treasure that gift and memories of those good people. Forty years later I can still remember faces and call them by name. So I write this chapter not as an outsider, but reluctantly, as a personal friend of Zane and a beneficiary of his life's work.

The Road Less (never before) Traveled

The road to heresy did not begin until 1989. That is when Zane Hodges published *Absolutely Free*. This was Hodges's response directed against John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* in which he taught "Lordship Salvation [Justification]." ^[18] MacArthur published this in 1988, the year immediately preceding Zane's *Absolutely Free* in 1989. In it, Hodges wrote the following regarding John 11:25–27 as he compared it with John 20:30–31. He was redefining the meaning of "the Christ."

But to believe that Jesus is the Christ—in *John's sense of that term*—is to believe saving truth. It is in fact, to believe the very truth that Martha of Bethany believed. To put it as simply as possible, Jesus was asking Martha whether she believed that He fully guaranteed the eternal destiny of every believer. ^[19] (*italics original*)

This was the first time Hodges strongly equated belief in Jesus with guaranteeing eternal security. His 1985/7 *Grace in Eclipse* had used this passage similarly, but not forcibly. ^[20] This later emphasis was definitely not Zane's teaching in the early 1980s when I attended his church in Dallas, Texas. Hodges over-reacted to the doctrine MacArthur was teaching. The words "A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation" appear above *Absolutely Free* on the title page. Unfortunately, Hodges's response was not biblical. Historically, rhetorical overstatements like his occur in polemical circumstances among dueling Christians. Christians other than Zane also strongly disagreed with MacArthur's Lordship (Justification) Salvation doctrine. But, they did not approve of the novel conclusions by Hodges. ^[21] They concluded both MacArthur and Hodges were wrong.

Hodges followed this 1989 book with a 1990 article in *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society (JOTGES)* stating, "Assurance is an

inseparable part of saving faith.”^[22] Again, Hodges reached his novel redefinition of “Christ” by comparing John 20:30–31 with 11:25–26.

What is striking in all this is that our Lord’s claim to be the Guarantor of resurrection and eternal life to every believer is met by Martha’s affirmation that Jesus is the “Christ.” Thus Martha’s declaration of faith is couched in precisely the terms used in the thematic statement of John 20:30-31. To believe that “Jesus is the Christ” is what it means to “believe in Me.” ... Instead, as John 11:25-26 make plain, the “Christ” is the very One who assures the believer that he will rise from the dead (if he dies) and that the believer possesses a life that can never be terminated by death—that is, he possesses eternal life.^[23]

In this 1990 article on “Assurance of Salvation,” Hodges requires Martha to believe two components: “the ‘Christ’ is the very One who assures the believer that he will rise from the dead (if he dies) and that the believer possesses a life that can never be terminated by death—that is, he possesses eternal life.” Martha must believe Jesus would guarantee: (1) a bodily resurrection, and (2) eternal life. I questioned Zane on this topic personally at a dinner table in 2005 (together with Dr. David Anderson). I cited John 11:26, “I am the resurrection and the life” (Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή). I pointed out that his understanding of the text demanded a belief in the bodily resurrection for justification. The Greek καὶ (and) connecting resurrection and life demanded a person believe that Jesus would bodily resurrect a person from the dead and also provide eternal life.

Therefore, if one presents the gospel for justification as believing Jesus guarantees eternal life, yet leaves out this requirement to believe Jesus guarantees a bodily resurrection, then half of the novel gospel is missing. Zane agreed with me. His *Absolutely Free* (1989) had already made that claim sixteen years earlier. Why does GES not currently teach what Hodges wrote and admitted was required? GES changed Hodges’s requirement of

teaching an unbeliever must believe Jesus guarantees a bodily resurrection in order for that person to be justified. GES is missing half of Hodges's novel gospel.

Other Examples of Hodges's Novel Gospel

In 1997 during a GES conference panel discussion, Hodges was asked,

Questioner: "Could you elaborate on the content of the gospel that needs to be believed as far as who Christ is, and what is essential for salvation?"

Zane Hodges: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. What is the content of that? John 11:25 and 26, that He guarantees, that He is the Guarantor of eternal life and resurrection to everyone who believes. That's the content."^[24]

Also, in a 1997 *JOTGES* article, Hodges wrote:

Thus to believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that He guarantees resurrection and eternal life to everyone who believes Him to be the Christ. The Christ is the Guarantor of these things to every believer. To deny that He does this for every believer, or to doubt that He does it, is not to believe what Martha believed. To deny or doubt this, is not to believe what John wants his readership to believe.^[25]

Hodges equivocates by adding salvation from sin in this same article. "So I find it not only useful, but indeed essential, to explain that the Lord Jesus Christ bought our way to heaven by paying for all our sins." Hodges could be inconsistent here, but that is unlike him. Hodges's use of "essential" cannot mean essential for becoming a Christian (justification). He had previously explicitly excluded it in the same article. In my opinion, this equivocation quandary persists in some current GES teachings.

In a 1999 GES conference panel discussion, Hodges reiterated this concept:

The New Testament does articulate in terms of something that we can believe. "These are written that you might believe that, THAT Jesus is the Christ, and that believing you might have life through His name." First John 5:1 says,

“Everyone that believes Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Now what does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Christ? Well I think obviously it means to believe that He is the one who gives to every believer eternal life. “I am the resurrection and the life, he that liveth and believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet will he live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” And then He says to Martha, “Do you believe this?” And notice that what He said is first of all I am the One who is the source of resurrection and eternal life to everyone who believes in Me. And if you believe this, Martha, then you have said that I am that person, and you have the guarantee of resurrection and eternal life.^[26]

Hodges’s *JOTGES* article published in 2000 further demonstrates his view of the precise object of saving faith. This occurred through the now infamous “isolated island” example. The purpose of the article was explaining how to lead people to Christ.^[27]

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. 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. Needless to say, there is a lot more he doesn’t know either, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal Sonship of Jesus or the doctrine of the virgin birth.

But why is he not saved if he believes the promise of Jesus’ words? It is precisely the ability of Jesus to guarantee eternal life that makes Him the

Christ in the Johannine sense of that term. Our Lord's exchange with Martha in John 11:25-27 demonstrates this clearly.^[28]

Hodges further explains his limitation of the object of saving faith:

Her words, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4:19) are a first step in the direction of recognizing Him as the Christ. There is no evidence that she or the other Samaritans understood the deity of our Lord. But they did believe that he was the Christ. And John tells us in his first epistle that "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (5:1)! A full theology of His person is not necessary to salvation. If we believe that Jesus is the One who guarantees our eternal destiny, we have believed all we absolutely have to believe in order to be saved.^[29]

Hodges limits the content of saving belief in Jesus as "the One who guarantees our eternal destiny" (eternal security), explicitly rejecting a requirement for belief in Christ's deity or as Savior from sin. "Evangelism, therefore, is intended to bring men and women to the place where they believe that Jesus guarantees their eternal destiny. If a person does this and we insist on more than that, we will be guilty of seeking to invalidate the simple exercise of faith that really does bring salvation." So Hodges's alteration of his gospel message now taught a person can become a Christian (justification) *without* faith in Jesus as God and Savior from sin.

False claims by Grace Evangelical Society persons

Hodges erred in his novel gospel that he derived during a polemical counterattack. But, Hodges was an expert in the Greek language and exegesis. One of his students, Bob Wilkin, today persists (along with his GES) in teaching all that is required for justification is belief in the promised guarantee of eternal security. They omit Hodges's bodily resurrection requirement. Therefore, according to Hodges's own statements, all of those persons Wilkin and GES have brought to justification by believing in eternal security are not yet saved. They have not yet believed both required components. These deceived pseudo-believers only *think* they have eternal security. Why?—because they have not *also believed Jesus will resurrect them bodily*. According to Hodges, the bodily resurrection *must be* the second part of the content of justifying faith. If Hodges and Wilkin disagree over Greek exegesis, I will side with Hodges on this one point of exegesis. Wilkin and GES have it wrong, according to Hodges. Wilkin's claim is false.

Reiher (a GES apologist) explained Hodges's 1990 article. "His point was that since in John's Gospel the precise object of faith, the sine-qua-non, was Jesus's promise of everlasting life to the believer, then if we add to the person of Christ as the precise object of our faith, then we are distorting what the Lord Himself said."^[30] Reiher admits that in this 1990 article, Hodges derived his (novel) theology from The Gospel of John and did *not* require belief in the person of Christ for salvation; but, only belief in Jesus's promise that guarantees everlasting life to the believer. However, Reiher makes the claim that Hodges and GES *did not* change the gospel they preached.

However, Reiher fails to notice Hodges *did* change. Hodges did *not* demand belief in eternal security for justification salvation in the 1970s or 1980s like he ultimately did in 1989.^[31] Not one of Hodges's five books prior to *Absolutely Free* demands his later requirement to believe in eternal security or a bodily resurrection for justification.^[32] Hodges did not teach this view when I attended his church in Dallas, Texas in the early 1980s. Zane Hodges *did* change his gospel message. Both his books and my personal interaction with him prior to 1989 testify to that fact. Reiher's claim is false.

Hodges, Wilkin, and GES not only changed the gospel that they were preaching, but they also changed the GES Affirmations of Belief to reflect that change of doctrine. This doctrinal change is what precipitated the departure of so many GES leaders and members in 2005 and 2006. This includes my own refusal to associate myself with GES any longer.

Many of us appreciate Hodges's exegetical work for Free Grace. Hodges's book, *The Gospel Under Siege* (1981), has some excellent discussions on difficult scriptural texts.^[33] But starting in 1989 with *Absolutely Free*, it was Hodges who was assaulting the gospel. This deviant gospel is verified in Hodges's second edition of *The Gospel Under Siege* (1992). There were five printings from 1981 through 1988. All of these five are exactly the same without additions or subtractions. Not one of these voiced the view that Hodges's new gospel created. It is only evident in the second edition of *The Gospel Under Siege* in 1992. Hodges altered his gospel to suddenly require belief in the promise, not the person.^[34] Now *The Gospel* was *Under Siege* by Hodges himself.^[35]

Hodges Retreated into Isolation

The controversy over his novel gospel based upon John 11 intensified from 2004 until his death in 2008. Hodges received gentle challenges from many of his prior students. Friends and supporters repeatedly and lovingly confronted both Hodges and Wilkin with their implausible interpretation, an interpretation being taught boldly through the Grace Evangelical Society and *JOTGES* articles. Hodges did not want to interact with these friends who disagreed with him. He lost accountability by pushing away supporters and friends who lovingly attempted to bring clarity to his confusion. Bob Wilkin remained loyal to Hodges and his novel gospel (except for failing to teach Hodges's bodily resurrection requirement). In the final years of his life Zane isolated himself. He engaged in more activities outside of theology, perhaps so he would not be required to interact. He wrote commentaries privately and continued to teach only at the GES meetings from 2005 through 2008, after most of his prior supporters had left GES. Wilkin remained to support Hodges's views.

Sadly, Zane Hodges told Bob Wilkin that he would no longer speak at the GES annual meetings if anyone spoke who opposed his new teachings. Prior leaders on the GES board of directors and authors who had written articles in the GES journal (*JOTGES*) were no longer invited or allowed to speak at the GES annual meetings. Bob Wilkin decided it was more important to promote the Hodges's Heresy than allow a variety of opinions within his Grace Evangelical Society. To his credit, after Hodges died (2008), Wilkin did rescind that rule. But by that time, only a few of these numerous prior leaders were willing to speak at GES meetings.

Conclusion

Zane Hodges taught the historical Christian understanding of justification requiring faith in Jesus as God in the flesh and savior from sin until 1989. With his *Absolutely Free* response to MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Hodges departed from orthodox doctrine and created a novel heresy. He claimed "to believe in Christ with saving faith" meant to believe someone named Jesus promised eternal security (eternal life with God that could never be lost for any reason). The basis of this conclusion is Hodges's unprecedented conclusion that "Christ" means the One who guarantees eternal life (eternal security). Hodges deleted Jesus as God and Savior for justification.

This road to heresy has two lessons that we should heed. Doctrines that are developed during polemical attacks on one's opponents must be scrutinized inside a faith community. Many false doctrines and heresies have been formed in polemical contexts. Augustine's syncretization of pagan with Christian concepts in his battle against the Pelagians stands paramount.^[36] Doctrines resulting from vigorous polemical argumentation are suspect. Second, accountability is essential. If the only persons we allow to talk with us are those who support our ideas then we are in trouble. Accountability from opposing viewpoints helps us sharpen our exegesis and understandings of Scripture. Iron sharpens iron.^[37] A dull scholar is like a dull knife blade—useless and dangerous. It saddens me enormously to admit that my friend and mentor Zane Hodges became that dull knife.

Chapter 3

Tracking How Hodges Changed His Gospel

Some members of the Grace Evangelical Society deny that Zane Hodges changed his gospel. This is understandable if one does not carefully track how this change happened.^[38] Hodges's transition into another gospel was not dramatic or instantaneous. It began in 1985 with an emphasis on John 11:25–27, then ended fifteen years later in 2000 when Hodges denied that faith in Jesus as God and Savior was required to become a Christian. We begin with Hodges's first work decades earlier.

Traditional Theology 1972–1984

Hodges wrote *The Hungry Inherit* in 1972. Charles Ryrie wrote the Foreword. Regarding the woman at the well, Hodges wrote,

*‘If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water (John 4:10). [...] ‘Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well?’ He had to be. Man might dig wells in the earth. Only God could dig one in the human heart! But the woman once more missed the point. [...] ‘I know,’ replied the woman, ‘that Messiah, the one called Christ, is coming.’ ... The Savior spoke it with climactic succinctness. ‘I,’ He said, ‘the one who is speaking to you, am He!’ ... She knew *Him* now—the Christ, the Savior of the world.*^[39]

The woman already knew a Jewish man was offering living water that would spring up into eternal life. But she did yet know who Jesus was. When she did know who Jesus was as Savior and God, Hodges sees her receiving eternal life. There is no mention of a guarantee of eternal security. This continues. “Even the greatest of prophets could not give the gift of eternal life. The woman at Sychar had learned that. No, to give men living water, Jesus must be who the disciples said he was, the Christ of God.”^[40]

Hodges wrote about those Samaritans in Sychar who believed (John 4:41–42), “And when she had explained how ‘He told me all that I ever did,’ many of them had believed in Him, agreeing this must be the Christ. [...] Here indeed was the Savior of the world, the Christ.” There is a suggestion of divine power in knowing all. There is no guarantee of eternal life/eternal security.

This the disciples did not yet understand. But when they did, they made it a part of the message they proclaimed to men. Then they fully subscribed to the words yet to be uttered by another apostle named Paul,” how 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” (1 Co 15:1–4). ... Little wonder, therefore, they were later to think, that the next time He spoke to all the people His words were shaped by this new theme He had just introduced...

[\[41\]](#)

Hodges never mentions John 11 or a guarantee of eternal life in this 1972 book. The gospel of Hodges and Ryrie was identical. The 1982 printing by Multnomah Press is identical. But the third edition in 1997 printed by Hodges’s own publishing label, Redención Viva, has a different ending to this chapter. Hodges adds John 20:30–31 and 1 John 5:1, two key texts supporting his later gospel.^{[\[42\]](#)} However, he *did not* add his newer requirement to believe Jesus guarantees eternal security.

In *The Gospel Under Siege* (1981) this pattern continues. Hodges does forcefully argue for eternal security and that every Christian should have assurance of his eternal destiny with God. God’s promises—not works—should be the basis for assurance. He writes of “the heretical denials of the Person of Christ (2:22, 23; 4:1-3).”^{[\[43\]](#)} Hodges is correct in his assessment of the twelve apostles. “Despite the fact that Philip, along with the other disciples, had believed in Jesus (John 1:1:40-51; 2:11) and had eternal life, the Person of their Savior remained something of an enigma to them.”^{[\[44\]](#)} These disciples had believed that Jesus of Nazareth was God’s promised Christ who would save them from their sins. But there is no evidence for a guarantee of eternal life or eternal security in John’s opening chapter. The disciples during Jesus’s earthly ministry had to believe in the *Person* of Christ. Jesus the Christ had made no promise of eternal security. Hodges’s essential verse is John 5:24. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”

Surprisingly, John 11:25–27 does not appear anywhere in this book. Eternal security is not guaranteed.

The fifth printing in 1988 is exactly the same without any changes. This is not the case with the second edition of *The Gospel Under Siege* “Revised and Enlarged” in 1992. This will be documented in the section covering that time period.

Hodges wrote the biography of Luis Rodriguez, his co-pastor at Victor Street Bible Chapel, in *Here Walks My Enemy* (1982). He mentions believing Jesus for eternal life but in a traditional sense without evidence for believing Jesus guarantees eternal life.^{[\[45\]](#)} His 1982 book with Arthur Farstad, *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text with Apparatus*, does not discuss this issue.

John 11:25–27 defines “the Christ” 1985–1989

Charles Stanley wrote the foreword to *Grace in Eclipse* (1985/7). This work boasts Hodges’s first use of his later crucial passage of John 11:25–26. After citing the passage, Hodges explains,

For John, the “Christ” was the One who could make the claim of John 11:25–26 in which he guarantees the eternal destiny of the individual who believed in Him. To believe that He was the “Christ” was, in fact, to believe Him to be such a Person as that. It was to believe in Him as the Guarantor of one’s eternal felicity and well-being. It was the “Christ” who guaranteed resurrection and unending life to the believer.^[46] [He follows this with 1 John 5:1.]

Note the “Guarantor of eternal felicity” language. But note also the requirement to believe in Jesus who “*guaranteed resurrection*.” This is what Wilkin and GES have abandoned in Hodges’s teachings. Note also Hodges’s emphasis on “to believe Him to be such a Person as that.” The Guarantee was not divorced from the “Person” of the one guaranteeing it. This is confirmed a few chapters later as Hodges explains the rich young ruler from Mark 10.

Yet such a leap of faith required the rich young ruler to adopt a much higher view of this rabbi than he currently held. Indeed, it required him to reach the conclusion that Jesus was exactly who he had hinted He was—a divine Person! And that meant that He was the Christ, the Son of God. But to reach *that* conclusion was to be born again, as the Gospel of John so plainly declares (John 20:30-31, italics original).^[47]

This is a critical move. Hodges here straddles the fence by simultaneously having one foot resting on the historical requirement of believing Jesus to be God (Son of God) and Savior from sin (Christ) while also teaching belief in Christ as “Guarantor of eternal felicity” on the other foot.

Two years later in 1989 with *Absolutely Free!*, Hodges repeated this requirement of believing Jesus guaranteed the bodily resurrection. “But if they were asked whether Jesus guarantees resurrection and eternal life to people on the simple basis of faith, their reply might very well be negative. ... And in so saying, they would plainly disclose that they did not believe what the Savior asked Martha to believe. Not all facts about God are saving facts. ... But to believe that Jesus is the Christ—in *John’s sense of that term*—is to believe saving truth. It is in fact to believe the very truth that Martha of Bethany believed. Jesus was asking Martha whether she *believed* that He fully guaranteed the eternal destiny of every *believer*” (italics original).^[48]

But notice Hodges next discusses “Faith as Appropriation” where he writes,

But to do that, you need to know certain facts. You need to know what God’s *gift* is, and you need to know who *I* am [italics original] ... She needed to know something about this offer, and she needed to know something about the Person who was placing the offer before her [...] ‘we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’ (Jn 4:42; italics added).^[49]

We see this again: “‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’ (Ac 16:30-31). ... The word ‘Lord’ is used by Paul and Silas to identify the Person in whom the jailer should put his faith.”^[50] We see it again:

‘Why do you call *Me* good? No one is good but One, that is *God*’ (Lk 18:19; italics added). How loudly do these words proclaim, ‘You need to think seriously about who I am’! Of course, Jesus was good, because He was God. He was in fact, the Christ, God’s Son. And believing this truth, the young man would have possessed eternal life (Jn 20:30–31).^[51]

So in *Absolutely Free!*, Hodges also simultaneously holds both his new understanding of “the Christ” (as guarantor of bodily resurrection and

eternal life) and who Jesus is as God and Savior. Jesus's promise of these is meaningless without knowing Jesus as God ("Person") and the Savior of the world. The full title of the work is *A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation: Absolutely Free!* Hodges repeatedly confronts what he views as the misunderstandings of this group. He wrote the following about the Lordship Salvation misunderstanding of faith apart from works: "What replaces this doctrine is a kind of faith/works synthesis which differs only insignificantly from official Roman Catholic dogma."^[52] I will comment on this observation in a later chapter.

Adding Assurance and Deleting Jesus as God and Savior 1990–2008

In the prior chapter we explored the articles of Zane Hodges in the *JOTGES* beginning in 1990. To summarize, Hodges now taught “Assurance is an inseparable part of saving faith.”^[53] Hodges was also honest that the idea that Christians would perform good works is an *inference*. It is never actually stated in Scripture.

We said earlier that we believe that all born-again Christians will do good works. We believe it, however, because it appears to be the only rational inference from the scriptural data. But, let it also be said clearly, it is an inference. No text of Scripture (certainly not Jas 2:14–26!) declares that all believers will perform good works, much less that they cannot be sure of heaven unless they do.^[6] No text says that!^[54]

I contend that Hodges’s claim is itself an inference: “No text says that!” I challenge Hodges on his requirement of assurance for justification. Hodges discusses assurance as essential to saving faith. He first erroneously quotes Calvin as believing in assurance (see Chapter 5). Then, he writes comparing John 20:30–31 with John 11:25–27.

Belief that Jesus is the Christ—that is, the One who assures the believer of future resurrection and of eternal life—is saving belief. A faith which has as its content “Jesus is the Christ” (in the Johannine sense) is saving faith. But to believe this is to know that I am saved. Assurance, therefore, is inseparable from—and part of the essence of—saving faith.⁹ [His footnote 9 explains he requires only initial assurance since it can later be lost, yet the persons still have eternal life.]^[55]

Hodges assumes without evidence that eternal life equals eternal security. He further assumes that those who believe Jesus promised eternal life and will not come into judgment understand what eternal security is. You cannot

believe a doctrine unless you understand that doctrine. He further assumes Scripture teaches assurance as a requirement for justification without any evidence. To quote Hodges, “No text says that!” It must be inferred. Inferring a condition to become a Christian is dangerous. Hodges infers his assurance for justification: THAT is dangerous.

In his 1992 revised and enlarged edition of *The Gospel Under Siege*, Hodges inserted his altered gospel. “God promises eternal life to everyone who believes that Jesus is ‘the Christ, the Savior of the world’ (John 4:42; 20:30, 31; 1 John 5:1). Individuals are saved when they are convinced of that promise and thus are sure they have eternal life.”^[56] Hodges quotes Romans 4:5,^[57]

“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” He then writes, “But today, many theologians respond to this with a ‘yes, but....’ ‘Yes, but if you don’t do works you are not justified at all.’^[27] In this way, the Pauline declaration is annulled in favor of a faith/works synthesis which is contrary to Scriptures and to the doctrine of faith expounded in the Reformation by Calvin and Luther.^[28]

In his footnote 28, Hodges claims that “good works were never the test of true faith, but rather, good works flowed out of *the assurance of salvation* which was inseparable from true saving faith” (italics original).^[58] This is blatantly untrue. Neither Luther nor Calvin taught assurance of salvation as Hodges claims. Hodges’s error regarding Calvin’s assurance is discussed in Chapter 5.^[59]

Yes, Luther did reject works as part of justification, which is widely accepted in the scholarly world.

Since then works justify no man, but a man must be justified before he can do any good work, it is most evident that it is faith alone which, but the mere mercy of God through Christ, and by means of His word, can worthily and

sufficiently justify and save the person; and that a Christian man needs no work, no law, for his salvation; for by faith he is free from all law, and in perfect freedom does gratuitously all that he does, seeking nothing either of profit or of salvation—since by the grace of God he is already saved and rich in all things through his faith—but solely that which is well-pleasing to God.

[\[60\]](#)

So Luther was clear about rejecting works. However, Hodges assumes rejecting works equals assurance. Luther was an Augustinian monk who closely adhered to Augustine's teachings. Luther's *Bondage of the Will* matches Augustine's views of the "non-free free will" being so corrupted that God must unilaterally chose persons for justification and regenerate them so they can believe. Luther's assurance is not as advertised by Hodges. Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* speaks in this way:

Therefore, when we willingly and gladly hear the Word preached concerning Christ the Son of God, who for us was made man and became subject to the law, that he might redeem us: then God, by and with this preaching, assuredly sendeth the Holy Ghost into our hearts. Wherefore it is very expedient for the godly to know, that they, have the Holy Ghost. This I say, to confute that pernicious doctrine of the sophisters and monks, which taught that no man can certainly know (although his life be never so upright and blameless) *whether he be in the favor of God or no*. And this sentence, commonly received, was a special principle and article of faith in the whole Papacy, whereby they utterly defaced the doctrine of faith, tormented men's consciences, banished Christ out of the Church, darkened and denied all the benefits and gifts of the Holy Ghost, abolished the true worship of God, set up idolatry, contempt of God, and blasphemy against God in men's hearts. For he that doubteth of the will of God towards him, and *hath no assurance that he is in grace*, cannot believe that he hath remission of sins, that God careth for him, and that **he can be saved**. Augustine saith very well and godly, that every man seeth most certainly his own faith, if he have faith. [...] This I have said concerning the inward testimony, whereby a [Christian man's] heart ought to be fully persuaded that **he is under grace and hath the Holy Ghost**. Now, the outward signs (as before I have said) are, gladly to hear of Christ, to preach and teach Christ, to render thanks unto him, to praise him, to confess him, yea, with the loss of goods and life: moreover, to do our duty according to our vocation as

we are able, in faith, joy, etc.; not to delight in sins, nor to thrust ourselves into another man's vocation, but to attend upon our own, to help our needy brother, to comfort the heavy hearted, etc. **By these signs as by certain effects and consequents we are fully assured and confirmed, that we are in God's favor.** (emphases added)^[61]

Luther had assurance of being in God's favor *only at the present time*, just like Augustine did. Luther never wrote of eternal security as Hodges assumes. Luther's assurance was temporary for the present moment—only as long as the Christian remained within God's grace.

Luther was even more explicit later in his *Commentary on Galatians* (5:4). "Indeed, even the righteous man, if he presumes to be justified by those works, loses the righteousness he has and falls from the grace by which he had been justified, since he has been removed from a good land to one that is barren."^[62] Likewise, a sermon in 1533 explains,

True, it is difficult to do good and in turn receive nothing but ingratitude. Remember, however, that you are a Christian, and *if you wish to remain a Christian*, you will have to exert yourself more earnestly than the non-Christian, as exemplified by our Father in heaven. That is a promise. *If you in your heart forgive him who has offended you, so in turn you will be forgiven* by God and men.^[63] (italics added)

The 1530 Augsburg Confession reveals Luther's view that Christians can lose the Holy Spirit when he condemns the Anabaptist's view of eternal possession of the Spirit.

Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance. They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance.

^[64]

Martin Luther *did not* hold to assurance of salvation and eternal security. Therefore, Hodges's 1992 revised and enlarged edition of *The Gospel Under Siege* exposes his altered gospel and makes false claims about Luther's theology.

Hodges's *The Epistle of James* in 1994 does not mention criteria for justification.^[65] In *Power to Make War* (1995), Hodges only describes his justification theology in the epilogue.^[66] I quote a lengthy section because it was refreshing for me to read my friend speaking truth about what a person must believe for justification.

The Bible is plain. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried...He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). He was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). My reader, nothing is left for *you* to do but to believe in *Him* as God's Christ — God's Savior. When you do that, He gives you the water of life without cost or obligation of any kind: "Whoever desires, let him take the water of life *freely*" (Rev. 22:17, italics added). And you can never, ever lose it! [...] Or have you believed in the King of Kings as God's appointed Savior of men — as *your* personal Savior? (all italics and non-bracketed ellipses original).^[67]

I am at a loss to explain why Hodges makes this cogent appeal for belief in the Person of Jesus Christ as *personal* Savior from sin by his death and resurrection in 1995. Jesus as "Guarantor of eternal life [security]" is absent. Assurance being of the essence of faith is absent. Eternal security is explained as "you can never, ever lose it!," but *not* required for justification. A lucid moment! Thanks be to God!

I repeat his 1997 article quotation now in its chronological order.

Thus to believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that He guarantees resurrection and eternal life to everyone who believes Him to be the Christ. The Christ is the Guarantor of these things to every believer. To deny that He does this for every believer, or to doubt that He does it, is not to believe what

Martha believed. To deny or doubt this, is not to believe what John wants his readership to believe.^[68]

Hodges wrote *The Epistles of John* in 1999. “Like Abraham, his hope is founded on faith (Romans 4:18) so that he knows that his eternal life is guaranteed by his Lord (cf. John 11:25–26). It is this faith which results in the new birth (cf. 1 John 5:1)....”^[69] “Of course, when they initially believed, they knew they had eternal life. In the same way, every believer knows at the point of saving faith that he has this life, because the promises he believes guarantee it (cf. John 11:25-26).”^[70]

This expresses his gospel change without explicitly denying the historical requirement of faith in Jesus as God and Savior. Note Hodges’s required belief in the “promises” (plural, both bodily resurrection and eternal life), not merely the promise (singular) of eternal life/security as taught now by Wilkin and the GES.

Hodges wrote against “fruit inspectors” who decide whether or not a person is a Christian based upon their works evidencing faith. “But many such ‘inspectors’ have never been born again *themselves*, because they have never understood the grace of a God who ‘imputes righteousness apart from works’ (Romans 4:6)” (italics original).^[71] So in 1999, Hodges de-Christianized persons who believe good works inevitably appear visibly from faith and remain. Of course, it is true that God does “impute righteousness part from works.” But this was the first time Hodges disenfranchised Lordship Salvationists, Calvinists, Arminians, and almost all other Christians from Christianity. A person must believe in Jesus’s guarantee of eternal security with no works added or that person is not “born again.”

But where does Scripture require that a person *believe* in imputed righteousness apart from works to become a Christian? Hodges’s own

statement was “Not all facts about God are saving facts.”^[72] His polemic responding against John MacArthur and Calvinists went too far. That is why, today, Wilkin and his GES continue to teach 97% of all Christianity is headed to hell—because 97% of Christianity does not believe in eternal security. If Scripture does not require *belief in this doctrine for justification* then neither should we. But Hodges arrives at this conclusion through the following logic:

- 1) The meaning of the Christ, the son of God must be determined by John 11:25–27.
- 2) John 11:25–27 defines “the Christ, the Son of God” as Jesus being the Guarantor of bodily resurrection and eternal life.
- 3) Eternal life must mean eternal security since any other meaning would not be *eternal* life.
- 4) Therefore, a person must believe in eternal security to become a Christian.

Hodges errs on all four points. How John the apostle uses “the Christ, the Son of God” should be determined by reading his entire epistle, not isolating it to John 11:25–27. Even Hodges in his earlier writings understood “the Christ, the Son of God” in its historical meaning as God and Savior. Eternal life and eternal security, although closely related, are two different concepts.^[73] Changing the gospel to require belief in eternal security is a doctrine of man, not of God.

I previously discussed Hodges’s *JOTGES* 2000 “isolated island” article in which he (erroneously) explains how to lead people to Christ.^[74] I now want to highlight what Hodges did with the essential elements of Jesus as God and Savior. He writes, “there is a lot more he doesn’t know either, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal Sonship of Jesus or the doctrine of the virgin birth.” I agree those doctrines are unnecessary for

justification. But he leaves out the requirement to believe in Jesus as God and Savior. Why? Because his novel definition of “the Christ” (due to isolating it to John 11:25–27) means “Guarantor of eternal life [security].” It no longer means God and Savior as John presents throughout his entire gospel! So Hodges believes there is no reason to require those historical essentials of Christianity.

In his 2001 *Harmony with God*, Hodges never refers to Jesus guaranteeing eternal life/security.^[75] He repeats the following idea numerous times but does not explain it: “To be saved, all the unsaved person needs to do is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31)!”^[76] His key passage of John 11 and his novel theology do not appear in this book on repentance.

His *Six Secrets of the Christian Life* (2004) contains two references to his novel view of regeneration. “A Christian, of course, is a person who has been born again by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for the free gift of eternal life (see John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47 and many other verses).”^[77] Without any prior context of Hodges’s views, this could be this could be an orthodox statement if “the Lord Jesus Christ” is understood correctly. There is only one other statement. “People are saved at the very moment they believe any of the promises God makes in His Word about giving eternal life to the believer in Jesus. Well-know examples of such promises are John 3:16; 5:24; and 6:47, and there are many others.”^[78] This is not orthodox Christianity.

Zane Hodges died in 2008. But the Grace Evangelical Society posthumously published three works by Hodges in 2014. *Jesus, God's Prophet* (2014) does not discuss the issue of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.^[79] *The Atonement* (2014) does not mention Jesus as “Guarantor of

eternal life [security].”^[80] We will explore more extensively Hodges’s *Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We?*

“Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We?”

In his work, “Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We?” (2014), there are three areas that we should examine. First, Hodges quotes John 11:25–26 *without* mentioning Jesus as “Guarantor of eternal life [security].” ^[81] Instead his emphasis is again on faith in the bodily resurrection. “Clearly this is both physical life and eternal/everlasting life that are consummated forever in resurrection. ... So salvation for Paul necessarily meant unending life.” Hodges continues, “But let it also be clearly recalled that the expectation of resurrection and of immortal, glorified life is a guarantee rooted deeply in the gospel of Jesus Christ Himself. ... Their assured destiny is to inherit a resurrected physical body and ‘eternal glory’ (2 Tim 2:10).” Again, Wilkin and his GES omit half of Hodges’s novel gospel requirements.

Second, Hodges confuses his universal propitiation view with his prior traditional view of forgiveness of sins only for believers. He cites Acts 13:38–39, “Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39). Hodges’s next line is “every believer in Jesus Christ receives the forgiveness of sins and is justified at the moment of faith.” Why does the believer need forgiveness of sins? According to his universal actual propitiation view, all sins were forgiven already. “It is to *a new man with a new life* that God grants the forgiveness of sins. It is to that same *new man* he grants justification *You are now alive with the very life of My Son, and so all your sins are forgiven and you stand perfectly righteous in My sight.*” (italics original).^[82] Hodges himself cannot seem to live with his idea of universal actual propitiation versus forgiveness of sins

by faith. The universal actual propitiation view is not biblical. This is detailed more extensively in Appendix B.

Third, Hodges equates salvation only with eternal life, without adding salvation as forgiveness of sins. Hodges writes, “The book of Acts is not about the doctrine of eternal salvation. Nevertheless, it is important for Luke to show *what* Paul’s doctrine was on that subject” (italics original).^[83] “Any person who reads Acts 16:31 and ignores the Pauline theology found in Acts 13 is guilty of gross interpretive negligence.”^[84] “For Paul, the fundamental sense of salvation is always to have, or to receive, eternal life.”^[85] But Hodges hyper-focuses on salvation as eternal life in Acts 13:16–49 (i.e., salvation equals eternal life) while ignoring Paul’s emphasis in Acts 13 on the death and resurrection of God’s Son for forgiveness of sins.

In his own highlighted Acts 13 passage, Hodges does not even mention how Paul himself connects salvation (forgiveness of sins) with who Jesus is as royal Son, along with His death and resurrection and the forgiveness of sins! Hodges ignores the obvious. A review of Paul’s preaching in Acts 13 proves the point.

God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus [...] He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, *Today I have begotten You.*’ And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, [...] but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins. (Acts 13:23, 30–38)

Paul's preaching *emphasized the resurrection* (eight verses, 30–37). Paul's preaching *emphasized God's Son Jesus Christ, the Savior* through whom we have *forgiveness of sins*. As a Jew, was Paul ignorant of salvation from sin? "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Paul preached, "God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus [...] the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:23, 38). Paul's message of salvation focused on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and especially the forgiveness for sin. Forgiveness occurs for those who believe Jesus is God's divine Son who died for our sins and rose again. This was the gospel Paul preached. Eternal life is not in Paul's message. It only appears later after the Jews refused to believe. "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46–47). Arguing from silence that Paul must have included eternal life in that message is circular reasoning. Luke recorded the essential aspects of Paul's message. Eternal life was not one of them.

Allow me to quote again Hodges's own words: "For Paul, the fundamental sense of salvation is *always* to have, or to receive, eternal life" (*italics original*). "Any person who reads Acts 16:31 and ignores the Pauline theology found in Acts 13 is guilty of gross interpretive negligence." In *his own highlighted text* of Acts 13, Hodges ignored Paul's theology. The gospel Paul preached was this: Jesus is God's promised Son and Savior (Acts 13:23,33). Paul *strongly emphasized* Christ's death and resurrection for forgiveness of our sins (Acts 13:28–39). Hodges's own words condemn him. "Any person who reads Acts 16:31 and ignores the Pauline theology found in Acts 13 is guilty of gross interpretive negligence." Hodges ignored Paul's theology in Acts 13. To correct Hodges's prior quote, "For Paul, ~~the fundamental~~ *one* sense of salvation is

~~always~~ to have, or to receive, eternal life. *But salvation is also (if not primarily) from sin for those who believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who died and rose again. Believing this results in eternal life.*”

Like Paul, Peter also preached forgiveness of sins as the gospel message in Acts: “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Peter also preached, “He is Lord of all,” and “whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day” (Acts 10:39–40). Peter never mentioned eternal life. Cornelius and the Gentiles believed and received the Holy Spirit *without* hearing about eternal life. For both Peter and Paul, the saving message was the Person and work of Christ and forgiveness of sins. The result was eternal life. Even the Christian Jews still observing circumcision and the law within the church at Jerusalem were convinced, “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18).

The following chart aids us in visualizing how Hodges changed the gospel chronologically. Note that 1985 was the critical year where Hodges introduces his novel gospel for a person to be justified (become a Christian). Hodges writes a person should believe in the alleged promise of eternal security.

Hodges's Requirements to Become a Christian by Year

Date	God/Savior (Cross/Resurrection)	Guarantor of eternal security
1972 1982 1997	<i>The Hungry Inherit</i>	Absent 1972, 1982 Absent 1997 (but John 11:26–7 added)
1981 1982 1983 1987 1988	<i>The Gospel under Siege</i>	Absent
1982	<i>Here Walks My Enemy</i>	Absent
1985 1987	 <i>Grace in Eclipse</i>	 <i>Grace in Eclipse</i>
1989	Absent	<i>Absolutely Free</i>
1990	Absent	“We Believe In: Assurance of Salvation”
1995	<i>Power to Make War*</i>	Absent
1997	Absent	“Assurance: Of the Essence of Saving Faith”
1999	Absent	<i>The Epistles of John</i>
2000	Indirectly denied	“How to Lead People to Christ”
2001	Absent** (<i>Harmony with God</i>)	Absent** (<i>Harmony with God</i>)
2004	Absent	<i>Six Secrets of the Christian Life</i>
2014	Absent	<i>The Atonement and Other Writings</i>

* *Power to Make War* is an anomaly. His 1994 *The Epistle of James* does not discuss this doctrine.

** *Harmony with God* focuses on repentance without explaining what is required for eternal life other than citing Acts 16:31.

Two years after MacArthur wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988) and one year after Hodges wrote *Absolutely Free!* (1989), Hodges published his article boldly requiring assurance of eternal security for justification in the non-scholarly *JOTGES*, “We Believe In: Assurance of Salvation” (1990).^[86] His 2000 *JOTGES* article, “How to Lead People to Christ,” indirectly denied that a person must believe in Jesus as God and Savior from sin for justification.

Conclusion

Based upon a chronological examination of his writings, Zane Hodges taught the historical understanding of the gospel from 1972 until 1990. His 1989 book *Absolutely Free!* paved the way for his heretical denial of faith in Jesus as God and Savior. In 1990, he added the requirement of absolute assurance of salvation for justification (eternal security).

In his 1999 *JOTGES* article, Hodges demanded assurance of eternal life (eternal security) to become a Christian. In his 2000 *JOTGES* article, he indirectly denied the requirement for belief in Jesus as God and Savior to become a Christian by changing the historical meaning of “the Christ.” The historical meaning of Jesus as God and Savior was replaced with Jesus as Guarantor of eternal security. Hodges lifted his foot off of the historical foundation requiring the historical belief in Jesus as God and Savior. Having abandoned that historical requirement, both feet were now firmly on the other side of the fence in heresy.

Chapter 4

Errors Part 1: Perverts the Meaning of “the Christ the Son of God”

Many critical points are missed by Hodges in his conclusions about the Gospel of John, the First Epistle of John, and his exegesis of John 11. These include (1) misunderstanding the meaning of “the Christ,” (2) omitting the emphasis in the Gospel of John on “Son of God,” (3) missing the purpose of John’s gospel in presenting Christ taking away sins and His deity, and (4) replacing belief in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ with believing a promise of eternal security derived logically (not biblically). This final point will be covered in the next chapter.

The meaning of “the Christ”

Hodges limits his understanding of “the Christ” to his proof-text John 11 passage and 1 John 5:1. This allows him to narrowly redefine “the Christ” as “the Guarantor of eternal security.” But the Gospel of John more broadly highlights the Christ as Savior from sin from the very beginning: “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29).^[87] ““We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ)” (1:41b). “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” (4:42). This latter passage is the index reference overtly asserting Christ as Savior (from sin), not as guarantor of eternal life. Salvation for the Samaritans was not from Rome, Israel’s enemies, or physical death. The salvation was from sin as the angel had proclaimed before Christ’s birth and which Christ verified in his ministry (Matt 1:20–21, 9:6, 26:28; Luke 7:48). Jesus did not come to save the world from a lack of assurance in eternal security. The New Testament presents Jesus as Savior from sin.

Similarly, the epistle of 1 John presents Jesus as God’s Son (divine) and Savior from sin. Seven verses reference Jesus as Savior from sin. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins” (1:9). “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (2:2). “Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (2:12). “He was manifested to take away our sins” (3:5). “He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins” (4:10). “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *as* Savior of the world” (4:14).

This final verse matches John 4:42, “This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” Savior of the world means Savior from sin. This also

matches John's introduction in his gospel where "the Christ" references the Lamb of God as Savior from sin (John 1:29, 34, 41). Therefore, in 1 John 2:22, we should understand "Christ" to refer to Him being our Savior from sin: "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22). "The Christ" in John's gospel and epistles means "Savior from sin."

The apostle John combines Christ as Savior from sin and God incarnate in his first epistle. "The Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:4). "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (4:2). The author alternates his uses of Christ and Son (of God). For example, "Son of God" appears explicitly in 3:8. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin" (1 John 3:8–9). In 3:23 we note, "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ." "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15). "Christ" is not present. The author expected his readers to read the entire epistle.

Throughout this epistle he affirms Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God—including eight times (5:9–20) in the same chapter as Hodges's 5:1 reference. We repeatedly find "Son" or "Son of God" while Christ appears *only* once (5:1). Hodges hyper-focuses on 5:1, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" to the exclusion of 5:13. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." The term Christ is absent. It is a biased exegesis to focus on 1 John 5:1 for an understanding of the "Christ" in this epistle. That is precisely what Hodges did.

Life and eternal life appear twelve times in John's first epistle. Indeed, John does write, "And this is the promise that He has promised us

—eternal life” (2:25). Yes, Jesus did promise us eternal life. But a guarantee of eternal life *as the object* of faith is absent. Jesus as Guarantor of eternal life/security is absent. The promise is never stated to be the object of our faith. Hodges’s 1 John 5:1 proof-text ignored the context of the epistle. “These things I have written to you who believe in the *name* of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13; emphasis added). The name is the person. In Hebrew culture, “name” refers to the character and essence of the person.^[88] John does *not* present Jesus as “the Guarantor of eternal life”—not in his gospel and not in his first epistle. John presents Jesus as God/Son of God and Savior from sin. John missed the mark if the essence of being “Jesus, the Christ the Son of God” is Guarantor of eternal life. Note especially 1 John 5:10b–11, “because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”

God the Father gives eternal life *through* “the Son” as God and Savior. This would have been the place to present Jesus Christ as “Guarantor of eternal life” if that was John’s goal. It was not. To all readers except Hodges, the goal was to present Jesus Christ as God/Son of God and Savior from sin. These appear twenty-five times in 1 John. Jesus as “Guarantor” is absent.

Omitting the Son of God

Hodges focuses so intently on Christ meaning Guarantor of eternal life that he overlooks the “Son of God” statement in his other proof-text (John 11:25–26). As in the epistle of 1 John, the Gospel of John coalesces Messiah/Christ/Savior and God/Son of God, especially throughout the introductory chapter (1:1, 16, 34, 40, 49). This gospel also contains numerous other implications of divinity and Savior from sin. So the question should be asked if the term “Son of God” means deity in this gospel.

Many authors view “Son of God” as a purely messianic term without divine implications.^[89] But other authors recognize Son of God in the Gospels as a divine name.^[90] Ancient authors such as Tertullian, Nonnos of Panopolis, and Augustine—followed later by John Calvin—concluded “Son of God” in the Gospels was a divine title.^[91]

Köstenberger expressed the larger Johannine purpose as emphasizing Jesus’s deity and preexistence: “While the designation of Jesus as Son blends elements of his humanity and deity, other elements of John’s Christology focus more explicitly on Jesus’ divine nature.” He then lists the following five elements: (1) Jesus as the preexistent “Word” (1:1, 14) as well as other claims to Jesus’s preexistence (8:58; 12:41; 17:5), (2) Jesus’s “signs” (e.g., 2:11), (3) Jesus’s “I am sayings,” which allude to the Old Testament name of God (cf. Ex 3:14), (4) Jesus’s possession of supernatural knowledge (1:48: Nathanael under the fig tree; 2:19: nature of Jesus’s death; cf. also 12:24; 11:14: Lazarus’s death; 13:38: Peter’s denials; 21:18-19: nature of Peter’s death); and (5) Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord

and my God” (20:28).^[92] I find Köstenberger’s scriptural evidence convincing.

In the opening chapter of his gospel, John introduces Jesus in every manner by which he unveils Jesus’s uniqueness in the remainder of the book. The titles Christ, Lamb of God, Messiah, Son, Son of God, and Son of Man all occur in those introductory verses. Jesus is explicitly God and Savior from sin (John 1:1, 1:29). In contrast to the OT, LXX, and intertestamental uses, the author of John’s gospel deliberately interconnected Son of God with Messiah to portray Jesus as the God-man who saves. In stark contrast, Christ as the Guarantor of eternal security is absent in this Gospel’s introduction. That absence is inexplicable if the saving message is “Guarantor of eternal life/security.”

The Eleven “Son of God” Passages

The Gospel of John contains eleven “Son of God” passages. The first one (1:34) associates God’s Son with preexistence (1:30, “he was before me”). The second, Nathanael’s declaration of “Son of God” and “King of Israel” in 1:48, has been debated for over a millennium. However, omniscience and omnipresence may be implied.^[93] The next chapter confirms this omniscience, for we read in 2:24, “But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all.” If true, the first two uses support the more metaphysical concepts of the preexistence, omniscience, and omnipresence of Jesus. He is God.

The next three appearances of “Son of God” identify Jesus as granting eternal life as His sole prerogative (3:18; 5:25; 6:69). The sixth use (9:35) finds Jesus accepting worship because he is the Son of God.^[94] John then has Jesus publicly identifying himself as the Son of God (10:36), which to the Jews was blasphemy. Jesus raised Lazarus to life in order that the Son of God may be glorified (11:4). Martha believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, who could give eternal life and bodily resurrection (11:27). Jesus stood condemned to death by Jewish law for claiming to be the Son of God (19:7), not merely the human Messiah. The eleventh “Son of God” occurrence appears in the statement of John’s gospel explaining why he wrote about Jesus’s signs. Belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, results in eternal life (20:31). Only four of the eleven times John uses “Son of God” does he mention Jesus granting eternal life. None guarantee eternal security.

Relational versus ontological deity

Richard Bauckham argued for a distinction in John's presentation of Jesus belonging inherently to *who* God is, rather than explaining his nature (*what* God is).^[95] The Jewish understanding of God was relational, not metaphysical. Only later did the Greek influence shift the emphasis from divine identity (*who*) to divine nature (*what*). Judaism perceived YHWH's identity as the "sole Creator of all things and sole Ruler of all things."^[96] As Raymond Brown expresses it, John's gospel highlights the divinity of Christ: "The idea that he was divine I find on most gospel pages."^[97] Keener concurred, "The Gospel emphasizes Jesus's deity."^[98] Burke wrote, "While Son of God and Messiah are connected in the Gospel of John, the major theological point brought out by Jesus' divine sonship is his own divinity."^[99] Even the Jewish leaders of the first century associated Christ with the Son of God: "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" (Matt 26:63). Significant evidence exists that "Son" and "Son of God" in the Gospel of John refer to Jesus as God. Scholars may or not conclude "the Christ, the Son of God" refers to Jesus as Savior from sin and Deity. However, no prior author in all of Christian history concluded its essential meaning is "the Guarantor of eternal life/security."

The Alleged Promise of Eternal Security

Hodges rejected John's emphasized concepts of divinity and Savior from sin in order to replace them with a belief in Jesus's promise of eternal security. But eternal life does not equal eternal security. Eternal life is both quantitative and qualitative. If one believes in eternal punishment, then all persons have eternal life (live forever) quantitatively. All persons do not live forever in eternal life qualitatively. Only those persons pursuing God in obedient love can experience eternal life here and now. Using a logical argument that eternal life must be eternal security is ill conceived. A doctrine of eternal security must be derived from numerous passages considered in context. Not even one Scripture speaks explicitly to being eternally secure if a person later rejects Jesus, renounces his faith, denies Christ, and lives in gross immorality.^[100] If John's message was "believe in Jesus's guarantee of eternal security," it seems implausible that not one remnant remains of such a teaching in church history for 2000 years until Zane Hodges "recovered" it.

But that does not prevent Hodges from using John 5:24: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."^[101] This text says nothing about an inability to lose that life.^[102] Hodges used logic to reach his conclusion rather than identifying Scriptures that prove his point. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Hodges erred in his novel gospel. He created it through his polemical usurpation of the Gospel of John (particularly his exegesis of John 11) and a few verses from the First Epistle of John against John MacArthur's Lordship Justification. Hodges's errors include his (1) misrepresentation of the meaning of "the Christ," (2) omitting the emphasis in the Gospel of John on the Lord Jesus Christ being the "Son of God" (i.e., God, a unique emphasis in the four gospels), (3) ignoring John's emphasis on the Savior who takes away sins, and (4) replacing belief in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ with believing an alleged promise of eternal security.

Hodges's alteration ejected the foundational emphasis of John's gospel in presenting Jesus Christ as the Jewish deity YHWH in a human body (fully God and fully man) who saves from sin. Hodges isolated his sole criterion for justification to this one gospel (along with 1 John 5:1) instead of considering all of Scripture.

Is it a coincidence that the Gospel of Matthew also introduces Jesus as God and Savior from sin in the very first chapter?

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: *'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,'* which is translated, 'God with us.' (Matt 1:21–23)

The gospel emphasis is obvious: Jesus is God and Savior from sin. [\[103\]](#)

Hodges abandoned the historical requirement within Christianity to believe in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ for justification. This resulted in his novel view of replacing belief in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ with believing an alleged promise of eternal security. With Hodges's bizarre view, almost all Christians throughout history are

damned to hell. This final point of abandoning historical Christianity will be covered more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Errors Part 2: Replaces Faith in the Person with the Promise

The Grace Evangelical Society heresy arose from Hodges's attempt to argue against the inability of Calvinists to claim their own personal assurance of salvation. Calvinists do hold the doctrine of assurance. They teach God will cause all of his elect to persevere. However, no Calvinist Christian could be certain of *his or her own personal* perseverance (and therefore his or her own salvation) until the moment prior to death. Hodges attacked this lack of personal assurance in Calvinists (like John MacArthur) by changing the justification requirement. Hodges exchanged belief in the person of Christ for belief in the promise of Christ (guaranteeing eternal security). By doing this he indirectly excluded John MacArthur and other Lordship Justificationists from being Christians, because they require perseverance for salvation. They do *not* believe Jesus guarantees eternal security. This is a common theme among heretics and sects—exclude others as not being genuine Christians.

Person of Christ Versus His Promise

For evangelism, Hodges replaced faith in the person of Christ with the promise of Christ. In the process, he dropped the historical requirement to believe that Jesus is both God and Savior from sin to become a Christian. The importance of this point cannot be over-emphasized. Every orthodox Christian and group in the history of Christianity has taught justification requires faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ position for almost 2,000 years. This is not a Catholic-Protestant debate. This is not a Calvinist-Arminian debate. This violates all of Christian historical theology. Wilkin minimizes the importance of this glaring departure. “What matters is what the Word says, not what the Reformers said.”^[104] Who can argue with that claim? But here is the problem. What matters is that no person in history until Zane Hodges in 1989 has so (mis)understood the Word in the Gospel of John and the New Testament. Despite being Wilkin’s best friend, Hodges was no Martin Luther. Even Martin Luther looked carefully at his theology, knowing it would cause a break from at least 700 years of tradition. Hodges did not look back. Hodges refused to listen to close friends warning him. Similarly, Wilkin’s 2018 book *Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of Free Grace Theology* is not “A Defense of Free Grace Theology” as the title claims. It is a deviant contortion that took half of its title from a published book that does defend the historical Free Grace view against Grudem.^[105]

Hodges’s error resulted in an exceedingly strange predicament. If some man told you he could guarantee you irrevocable eternity with God (eternal security), you would have no reason to believe him. How could you believe him unless you were convinced that person was God? Only the impeccable credibility of the One who promises makes the promise reasonable to believe. Also, how can persons become Christians without

recognizing their sin and their need for a Savior? “The Christ” as the Savior from sin was the message of John the Baptizer (John 1:29, 35). John highlights this in his introduction.

When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus for His living water at the well, the first thing Jesus did was to confront her with her sin (4:16). She needed a Savior to forgive sin. The Samaritans believed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Savior of the world” (4:42) not “the Christ, the Guarantor of eternal security” as GES would have us read it. The Savior was taking away their sins as John the Baptizer had foretold (1:29). Three times Jesus told the Jewish leaders that unless they believed He was “I AM,” they would *die in their sins* (8:21, 24 [2x]). *That* was the promise. What good does it do to believe Jesus’s promised guarantee of eternal life if we do not first believe that we are sinners and Jesus is God who forgives our sin? We will die in our sins.^[106]

The Old Testament contains seven uses of “I AM.” As Bauckham explained, “‘I am’ occurs as a divine revelation of unique identity seven times in the Hebrew Bible: once in Deuteronomy, in one of the most important monotheistic passages of the Torah, and six times in Deutero-Isaiah.”^[107] John’s Gospel matches these seven references—in 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, and 8 (repeated three times for an emphatic climax).^[108] This is not a coincidence. The apostle John connected Jesus of Nazareth with YHWH of the Old Testament. What was John’s message?—Jesus is YHWH God!

Jesus’s thrice repeated promise in John 8:21 and 24 is the death knell for the GES view. That the “I AM” refers to Christ’s deity is not disputed in evangelical Christianity. Jesus’s promise was that unless the Pharisees believed that Jesus was “I AM” (YHWH God in the flesh), they would die in their sins. Unfortunately, virtually all English translations add

“He” (I am He). “He” is not present in the Greek text. By adding “He,” they cause the reader to miss the impact of Jesus’s claim as the “I AM” of the Old Testament. Wuest’s expanded translation is the only one to reproduce the text with this emphasis. “As for myself, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you, You shall die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins.”^[109]

Therefore, after John 8, it is impossible to be justified without believing that Jesus is God. This gospel’s emphatic climactic confession of Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28) by “doubting Thomas” speaks for itself. If you do not believe Jesus is God then you die in your sins—even if you believe some promise about Jesus being the Guarantor of eternal life. Failure to confess Jesus as the “I AM” means you die in your sins. That is the promise. Wilkin and GES must either accept that faith in Jesus as God is required for justification or once again depart from historical Christianity by contorting John 8:21 and 24. I will venture a prophecy: (I hope it is false) Wilkin will once again depart by contorting this text. “I AM” will now mean “I AM the Guarantor of eternal life.” That is how heretics and cults use Scripture. The Gnostics used (abused) Scripture in the same way.

Wilkin and GES have abandoned the priority of our forgiveness of sin by God and exchanged it for assurance of salvation; namely, believers are guaranteed eternal security. Likewise, the ancient Gnostics did not emphasize salvation from sin—they taught salvation from ignorance. The Gnostics had faith and assurance they would spend eternity with God. Yes, the Gnostics were guaranteed their eternal security and had assurance of their final salvation.^[110] But, assurance without belief in the essential requirements of Jesus as God and Savior from sin is worthless. Even worse for the GES, their requirement of such a deficient belief in eternal security

(assurance) is a Gnostic-type heresy that leaves its followers a false hope of salvation when they are damned, because they do not believe Jesus is God and Savior. The GES gospel is similar to the Gnostics. Their gospel is gutted. Their converts will die in their sins unless they believe Jesus is “I AM.”

The conflict throughout John’s gospel was not about Jesus’s promise of giving eternal life, but over his person as God who forgives sins. “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). “Before Abraham was, I Am’ (8:58).” “‘If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you did not believe’” (10:25). “‘For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you being a man make yourself God’ (10:33). Similarly Mark records, “Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but *God alone*?” (Mark 2:7, emphasis added). I repeat the point. The conflict throughout John’s gospel was not about Jesus’s promise of giving eternal life, but over his person as God who forgives sins.

For justification, we believe in the Person, not the promise. This was the problem of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–30). He did not recognize Jesus as God: “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God” (Luke 18:19). The ruler did not see himself as a sinner in need of a Savior: “All these I have kept from my youth” (18:21). The ruler did not believe that Jesus was God and did not need a Savior from sin.^[111] Therefore, even if the rich young ruler had given away all of his money and followed Jesus he would not have been justified. Unfortunately, the ruler had accepted the common theology of his time period: his riches were his own evidence of his favor with God. This is why even the apostles responded with amazement: “Who then can be saved?” (Luke 18:26).

The rich young ruler could not enter the kingdom of God without believing that he was a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus Christ was God incarnate who could save him from his sins. Jesus exposed this inability to enter due to the ruler's personal imperfection: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matt 19:21).^[112] The ruler's refusal to sell his wealth exposed his own imperfection—he was not "perfect." He had misrepresented himself as perfect when he was a sinner. The ruler did not see himself as a sinner in need of a Savior from sin. He did not see Jesus as God. Jesus asked, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God" (Matt 19:17). Jesus strongly implied "ME, you're looking at him, I AM God"—now believe!). Why would the ruler sell everything he owned and follow Jesus unless he was convinced Jesus was God and could save him from his sins?

Jesus used a similar indirect evangelistic approach with the Samaritan woman at the well in causing her to acknowledge her sinfulness: "Go, call your husband" (John 4:16). Jesus responds to her true (but inaccurate) denial of having a husband. He tells her she has had five husbands and is now living with a man who is not her husband (4:17–18). After being confronted with her sin, the woman immediately confesses she believes the "Messiah is coming, who is called Christ." Jesus answers, "I AM, the one speaking to you" (4:25–26).^[113] This matches John's introductory chapter where Messiah is Savior from sin as the Lamb of God and God himself (1:29, 1:1–4). Jesus pre-existed John the Baptizer temporally despite being born months after John, because he is the Son of God, the Logos who is Creator, and became incarnate as the Lamb of God to take away sin as the Christ (1:31, 34, 1–3, 14, 36, 41).

The Pharisees also did not view themselves as sinners. They refused to be baptized by John for the forgiveness of sins and remained blind to their own sin. “And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him” (Luke 7:29–30). “Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, “We see.” Therefore your sin remains’” (John 9:41). “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.” (John 8:24). Only sinners need a Savior.

The emphasis in the Gospel of John from the first to the last is on the person of Christ as God and Savior from sin. For justification, a person must believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” meaning Jesus is the God-man Savior who died to take away our sins. He is Savior from sin, not from a lack of assurance of salvation. For the GES to exchange this emphasis on Christ’s Person to mean a “Guarantor of eternal life (eternal security)” disfigures the gospel into an unrecognizable contortion. It is a heresy.

Belief in Eternal Life/Security?

In John's Gospel, only seven of the hundred references to "believing" occur in conjunction with eternal life, and we find all of these in only four passages.^[114] Furthermore, John 20:31 does *not* say that we must believe that Jesus guarantees [eternal] life. Rather, we must "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." By believing those essential truths, we "may have life in his name." John did not say we must believe "He gives eternal life/security" in order to be justified. That is a wrong assumption derived from John 11:25–27. If belief that Jesus gives eternal life is required for justification, then John missed this critical opportunity to include it in his statement for the eight signs. This would be a serious omission. Some theologians see John 1:1–18 (or 1–12) as the purpose of the gospel with the purpose statement at the beginning (as in 1 John 1:1–4).^[115] Believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, does indeed give eternal life. However, that is different from requiring one to believe that He gives eternal security in order to be justified. Hodges conflated the result (eternal life) with the condition for that result (believe).

In John's Gospel, eternal life is the *result* of belief (3:16) and knowing God (17:3). John's purpose for the signs is that we might believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (His person), and that once we are believing (present active participle, i.e., "are believers") we "may have life in his name." This statement presents life only as the result, not belief in eternal life/security as the condition for justification. Hodges and Wilkin have made John 20:31 a conditional sentence by placing the apodosis (eternal life) into the protasis (belief in Jesus). According to their error, we must believe *in the result as the condition* for eternal life. In addition, life has been limited to justification rather than John's additional meanings of

abundant life and knowing God as eternal life (John 10:10; 17:3). A requirement for believing in assurance of eternal security for justification cannot be found in the Gospel of John. Correspondingly, Tony Evans spends eighty-two pages emphasizing the importance of assurance and eternal security. But, he holds the orthodox view requiring belief in the person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior, not in Jesus as Guarantor of eternal security.^{[\[116\]](#)}

Hodges's Mistaken Appeal to Calvin

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which Hodges cites as proof, does *not* contain assurance of eternal security.

“In short, no man is truly a believer unless he be firmly persuaded that God is a propitious and benevolent Father to him, ...unless he depend on the promises of the Divine benevolence to him and feel an undoubted expectation of salvation” (*Institutes* 111.11.16). For Calvin, therefore, assurance was of the very essence of saving faith. That is to say, assurance that I am saved is part and parcel of believing the Gospel message.

In so writing, of course, Calvin gave expression to a biblical truth. As we have already seen, anyone who believes verses like John 5:24 and 6:47 (to name only two) also believes that he has eternal life. If one does not believe that he has eternal life he does not believe these verses. “He who believes in Me has eternal life” necessitates the conclusion that I have eternal life at the moment of my faith.^[117]

Hodges focuses on Calvin's phrase “undoubted expectation of salvation.” But Hodges should have known enough of Calvin's writings to understand how Calvin uses this phrase. Calvin would say persons could believe themselves to be Christians, have good works, and even be assured of their salvation, *yet fail to persevere*; and, therefore be damned. That is not eternal security.

Calvin wrote, “To this I reply that the unbelieving sometimes excel in specious virtues, and lead an honorable life free from every crime; and hence works apparently excellent may exist apart from faith. Nor indeed does James maintain that every one who seems good possesses faith.”^[118] “Perseverance is the gift of God, which he does not lavish promiscuously on all, but imparts to whom he pleases” (*Institutes* 2.5.3). “[John] plainly declares that the Spirit continues his grace in us to the last, so that inflexible perseverance is added to newness of life” (*Commentaries on 1 John*, 3.9).

[W]hy he should not give them [the reprobate] some perception of his goodness, and in some sort engrave his word on their hearts. Otherwise, where would be the temporal faith mentioned by Mark 4:17? There is therefore some knowledge even in the reprobate, which afterwards vanishes away, either because it did not strike roots sufficiently deep, or because it withers, being choked up. And by this bridle the Lord keeps us in fear and humility; and we certainly see how prone human nature is otherwise to security and foolish confidence.^[119]

So according to Calvin, reprobates (non-Christians) can have temporary faith, feel the assurance of God's benevolence, and have an "undoubted expectation of salvation." But that faith and assurance are misplaced if God does not grant the gift of perseverance until the last breath before physical death to the person.

No man, I say, is a believer but he who, trusting to the security of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death, as we are taught by the noble exclamation of Paul, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," [Rom. 8:38]. (*Institutes* 3.2.16)^[120]

What Calvin meant by assurance and "the security of his salvation" is definitely not what Hodges and the GES claim.

So for Calvin, persons can have faith and assurance, yet not be Christians. As McGrath explains, "[T]he similarity between the faith of the elect and reprobate excluded such an appeal as the basis of assurance."^[121] "Yet the *theological* certainty of this statement does not, according to Calvin, necessarily lead to *psychological* security. It is perfectly consistent with a sustained wrestling with doubt and anxiety on the part of the believer."^[122] Therefore, for Calvin, persons could have (false) assurance because they "believed" in Jesus Christ but did not possess eternal life

because they failed to persevere. Hodges errs greatly in thinking assurance of eternal life and assurance of eternal security are synonymous for Calvin. This is a common error in theological writings. The author assumes the meanings instead of carefully reading the cited author's context.

Furthermore, Hodges attempted to prove Calvin believed in Hodges's meaning of assurance by citing Robert Dabney's vindictive against the Plymouth Brethren (Hodges's childhood religious denomination). Dabney asserts Luther and Calvin held to assurance as of the essence of saving faith, but which Dabney in no way proved. *Current* assurance of eternal life/salvation does not equal *permanent* assurance of eternal security. Neither Luther nor Calvin taught eternal security in the sense Hodges forces it. Incredibly, if (per Hodges) justification requires the assurance of spending eternity with God based on Jesus's guarantee (eternal security), then no person for 1400 years could have been a Christian. Nowhere in that part of Christian history can we locate such a belief.^{[\[123\]](#)} Once again, we find Hodges proposing untenable interpretations in order to win his battle against Calvinists and Lordship Justificationists.

Belief in a Bodily Resurrection Required

Hodges's obsession with saving faith as eternal security caused him to overlook the obvious in John 11. Jesus's words, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25) in context means Jesus is able to raise Lazarus physically from the dead. Future eternal life is only half of the question. *Immediate physical bodily resurrection of Lazarus is the context.* But Martha does not believe this immediate resurrection of Lazarus (cf., 11:24). "Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?'" (John 11: 39–40, emphasis added). Martha did *not believe* Jesus would (or could) immediately raise her brother from the dead. Martha did not understand Jesus. Martha did not understand what Jesus was telling her about immediately resurrecting her brother Lazarus.

So using this passage as a proof text for saving faith falters from the fact that Martha *did not believe* or understand Jesus would physically raise Lazarus immediately (rather than at the last day). She believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God—Savior from sin and God incarnate—not a promise of her brother's immediate bodily resurrection and eternal security. ^[124] You cannot believe a promise that you do not understand. ^[125] Would John highlight his crucial "definition" of what "the Christ, the Son of God" means by highlighting Martha's *unbelief*? What an unconvincing and unlikely place to define "the Christ" as "Guarantor of eternal life."

Not one instance of the alleged belief in Jesus's promise (guaranteeing eternal security) can be found in John's Gospel. Hodges and Wilkin force their (mis)understanding upon the texts. In contrast, *at least thirty times* John records that someone believed in his Person (or did not

believe in his Person). John said “whoever believes *in Him* should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, italics added). John did not say, “believes in His promise.” It would be an incompetent author who expected his readers to believe in Jesus’s promise without ever giving a single example or a clear definitive statement that such a promise must be believed. John repeatedly emphasized belief in the *Person* of Jesus as Messiah/Savior and God, not a promise guaranteeing eternal security. Person—not promise.

In addition, Wilkin missed the implications of “καί” connecting bodily resurrection with eternal life. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (NKJV) «εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ καὶ ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα· πιστεύεις τοῦτο;»^[126]

Jesus connects bodily resurrection with eternal life (μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). If, as Wilkin teaches, “the Christ, the Son of God” (John 11:26) is taken to be an exact explication of John 20:31, then in order to qualify as saving faith, one must *also* believe that Jesus bodily resurrects those believing in him. Hodges emphasized this καί connection but failed to comprehend the unintended consequences until later: “the ‘Christ’ is the very One who assures the believer that he will rise from the dead (if he dies).”^[127] It forces Hodges’s novel redefinition of salvific faith to include the belief that Jesus will literally resurrect the physical body. Are Wilkin and his GES requiring belief in the other half of Hodges’s deviant gospel? No.

Conclusion

In his effort to win his battle against MacArthur, Hodges erroneously attributed belief in assurance and eternal security to John Calvin. He cited as support Dabney's erroneous attribution of belief in eternal security by Luther and Calvin. Hodges ignored the pervasive emphasis in the Gospel of John on who Jesus is as God and Savior. He ignored the seven "I AM" statements. His unprecedented redefinition of "the Christ, the Son of God" as "Guarantor of eternal life (security)" also demands a belief in the bodily resurrection for justification. We will continue this investigation in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Errors Part 3: Misses the NT Emphasis on Faith in Christ's Person and Work

Ignoring the Remainder of the New Testament

Another error made by Hodges, Wilkin, and the GES is their failure to consider all of Scripture. If faith in Jesus's promise of eternal security were required for justification, then we would expect other authors to communicate that message. Not one New Testament author makes such a claim. Wilkin responds that we must focus on the Gospel of John, since that is the only book written to help an unbeliever by inciting faith through what was written (John 20:31).^[128] However, Wilkin has missed a major emphasis throughout the New Testament.

Anderson has cogently commented on Wilkin's problem.^[129]

The argument that one must believe in eternal security or some guarantee of eternal life that can never be lost is based on a number of assumptions:

- John is the only New Testament book written to unbelievers. Hence, it is the last word in matters of evangelism.
- The authorial intent of John is evangelism.
- Eternal life equals eternal security.
- Other New Testament books are written to believers for the purpose of edification. Hence, anything they say regarding the gospel assumes a pre-understanding of gospel truth that does not need to be spelled out in complete form.

Anderson addresses each of the problems with its misrepresentation by the GES. How do we know the Gospel of John was the only New Testament book written for unbelievers? Theophilus of Luke-Acts is not stated in the work to be a Christian, and some think he was a God-fearing Gentile wrestling with Christianity versus Judaism.^[130] Why is John 13–17 present

if the purpose of John's gospel is evangelism? Only the believing disciples were present and receiving instructions in those five chapters (about one-third of the book). Eternal life does not equal eternal security, as already discussed. I offer my own analysis of the other New Testament books.

If we read through the New Testament from Acts to Revelation, a strong pattern emerges as the gospel is presented, even *to believers* as a reminder. The emphasis is on the crucified Christ, the person and work of Christ. The promise of Christ is not emphasized. There are over ninety references to Jesus as Lord in the book of Acts alone. This New Testament *kurios* corresponds to the OT name YHWH, God in the Septuagint.^[131] There are over a hundred explicit references to the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ from Acts to Revelation.

This was the gospel Peter preached: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30–31). Jesus appears as Savior fifteen times in Acts through 2 Peter.^[132] Forgiveness of sins appears twenty-four times. Paul preached: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7). Neither Peter nor Paul mentions a promise guaranteeing eternal life/security.

From Acts to Revelation we find a myriad of God's promises. There is a promise of the Holy Spirit, possessing the land, the coming Savior Jesus, Abraham's seed, to Israel, "all the promises of God," God's presence as a Father, the promise by faith in Jesus Christ, heirs according to the promise, the first commandment with promise, promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come, of life, hope of eternal life, of entering his rest, better promises, of eternal inheritance, land of promise, to Sarah, to shake earth and heaven, crown of life, heirs of the kingdom, Christ's return,

new heaven and earth, and eternal life. There could be more if you like splitting instead of categorizing. But not one time among all of these promises to Christians do we find the comforting promise guaranteeing eternal security. The “promise of eternal life” appears only a few times. Not one of these states that we are eternally secure. This doctrine must be deduced from assumptions and logic. Must one be a theologian to become a Christian? Wilkin and his GES must think so.

Let’s set aside the Gospel of John for just a moment. If belief in this alleged promise of eternal security (for all who believe eternal security) is the sole criterion for justification as GES claims, then why does not one New Testament author state this to Christians? The historically essential elements *are constantly repeated to Christians* throughout the New Testament. The death, burial, and resurrection of the God-man Jesus to save us from our sins is pervasive. Even if one assumes the Gospel of John is only written to unbelievers for evangelism, it does not explain why the New Testament authors repeat Christianity’s traditionally accepted essentials while omitting the guarantee of eternal security.

The New Testament authors emphasize the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ when writing to Christians. Where is this alleged promise guaranteeing eternal security? Not one author references a promise of Jesus guaranteeing eternal security. It does not exist. Yet Wilkin claims, “the Gospel of John, would be listed under either ‘Evangelism,’ or ‘The Doctrine of Salvation.’ Because it is the sole evangelistic book in all of Scripture (John 20:31), it makes sense that we would develop our view of evangelism and of the doctrine of salvation from there.”^[133] Hodges, Wilkin, and GES place John the apostle at odds with Paul the apostle on the gospel. Paul writes repeatedly about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord (God) Jesus Christ (Savior from sin) to believers. Where do we

find the promise of eternal life guaranteed in the Pauline epistles? We cannot find it. Wilkin's claim from logic that eternal life demands eternal security is an assumption not found in Scripture.

Believe in Jesus

Charles Ryrie wrote, “God justifies the one who ‘has faith in Jesus,’ and since the name ‘Jesus means ‘God saves,’ then anyone who believes that Jesus (who is God) saves is justified.”^[134] Ryrie (a few chapters later) taught eternal security. However, Charles Ryrie did not alter “the faith” to demand assurance of eternal security. Similarly, William Shedd explained, “The word *kurios* is the Septuagint rendering of Jehovah, and any Jew who publically confessed that Jesus of Nazareth was ‘Lord’ would be understood to ascribe the divine nature and attributes to him.”^[135] Bruce Westcott commented in more detail:

To ‘confess Jesus,’ which in the connection can only mean to confess ‘Jesus as Lord’ (1 Cor. xii. 3, Rom. x. 9), is to recognize divine sovereignty in One who is truly man, or, in other words, to recognize the union of the divine and human in one Person, a truth which finds its only adequate expression in the fact of the incarnation.^[136]

Historically, both Free Grace theologians, Calvinists, and other Christian groups agreed on what it means “to believe in Jesus.” This means you believe that Jesus is God incarnate and our Savior who forgives our sins. Hodges agreed with his fellow faculty member Ryrie until 1989 when Hodges changed the gospel.

In stark contrast, Wilkin’s infamous refrain is:

Assurance, the idea that all who believe in Jesus are certain that they are eternally secure, is the promise of the gospel. [...] The only other use of the phrase ‘the Christ, the Son of God’ in John’s Gospel [outside of John 11] is found in his purpose statement for the book (John 20:31), cited above. This *suggests* that biblical faith in Jesus as ‘the Christ, the Son of God,’ is the conviction that anyone who simply believes is eternally secure (*italics added*).

^[137]

If it merely “suggests,” then why is this the mantra of GES? But Wilkin neglects to mention that the famous confession of belief by the apostles *also* matches John 20:31. “Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:69). But Wilkin missed it; or, he must claim the addition of the words “the living” negates this same phrase.

Wilkin claims there are three essentials for evangelizing an unbeliever:

When Jesus evangelized, as seen in passages like John 3:16, 5:24, 6:47, and 11:25-27, He routinely communicated three things. We, too, must share those three elements. They are:

1. believing
2. in Jesus
3. for eternal life

I like to put it together in one sentence as follows: Jesus guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him. All who simply believe in Him are eternally secure. [...] Jesus doesn't promise provisional salvation. No one is put on probation. God can't and won't take back eternal life once He gives it to us. [\[138\]](#)

Wilkin commits three errors. (1) He assumes God giving everlasting life means the convert must *believe in* eternal security, (2) he misplaces the result of belief (eternal life) into the substance/object of belief (Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God) as a requirement for justification (believe in eternal security), and (3) ignores the numerous passages in John's gospel emphasizing forgiveness of sin and Jesus's deity as essentials of belief in Him (e.g., John 1:1–3, 14, 31, 34, 36, 41; 2:11 “believed in Him” [without mention of eternal life], etc.).

Wilkin cites John 3:16 without adding 3:17 “that the world through him might be saved.” This smacks of highly selective eisegesis. Everlasting life is directly connected to belief in who Jesus is and salvation from sin.

The prior verse, John 3:15, similarly includes Christ's death as the means to eternal life. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." John indicates a belief in that "lifted up" Son of Man. This gives eternal life. Wilkin ignores the context both before and after John 3:16. To "believe in Him" is to believe who Jesus is, not His promise that believing results in eternal life/security.

Importantly, Wilkin claims the signs were given to prove Jesus guaranteed eternal life/security. Yet, not one of the eight signs in this gospel mentions eternal security. In contrast, Jesus as God and Savior *is* emphasized through the signs. The eight signs in John's gospel are: 2:1–12 (turning water into wine), 4:46–54 (healing of the nobleman's son), 5:1–15 (Bethsaida pool healing), 6:1–14 (feeding five thousand people), 6:15–21 (walking on water), 9:1–7 (healing the man born blind), 11:1–44 (resurrecting Lazarus), and 20:9, 17–18, 26–29 (Jesus's own resurrection, cf., 2:18–22). The "Guarantor of eternal life" is absent. Jesus as God and Savior is present. The absence in the eight signs is an insurmountable hurdle for his heretical view.^{[\[139\]](#)}

Believe in Jesus as God and Savior

In stark contrast to “the Guarantor of eternal security” view, the Gospel of John presents Jesus as God, sent from above by the Father to be the Savior from sin. The signs Jesus did convinced people of who Jesus is (not in some promise of eternal security). A brief survey proves this to be John’s priority.

The Samaritans believed Christ was “the Savior of the world,” NOT the Guarantor of eternal life. “And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” (John 4:41–42). The apostle John made a major error here if he intended “the Christ” to mean “Guarantor of eternal life/security.”^[140] Next, Jesus “said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Jesus should be honored just as God the Father is honored, and will personally raise the dead in resurrection life and judge them (as God; John 6:22–30). “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

“He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (6:47). The *result* of seeing and believing in Him is everlasting life. Everlasting life is not said to be the object of faith. “And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done?’” (John 7:31). “‘Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins. [...] When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM ...’ [...] Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM’ (John 8:24–58, Wuest).

The sign of healing the man born blind further exposes the error of this contorted view. Jesus “said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him” (John 9:25b–28). The blind man did not worship somebody who guaranteed eternal life—he worshipped God/the Son of God.

“The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God’ (John 10:33). The Jews focused on Jesus’s claim to be God, not some “promise of eternal security.” “And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me” (John 11:42). Jesus's purpose for this sign of raising Lazarus was so the people would believe God the Father sent Jesus into the world to save sinners. Jesus did not say he was sent to guarantee eternal security. “Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him” (John 11:45). “But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (John 12:10).

“I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:47). “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?” (John 14:9b–10a). “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22). “For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:27–8). Jesus prayed, the apostles “have known surely that I came

forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me” (John 17:8b). “The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me” (John 17:25). “According to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). Jesus said to Thomas, “‘Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:27b–28).

“Many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did” (John 2:23). People believed in Jesus's NAME (who He is), not His promise. “Name” in Hebrew thought signifies the essence of the person.^[141] The Jewish ruler Nicodemus confessed, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). “And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done?’” (John 7:31). “Others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’” (John 9:16). “Then many came to Him and said, ‘John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true’” (John 10:41). “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him” (John 12:37).

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31). All three Synoptic gospels combined have only ten instances of Jesus’s miraculous “signs.” Seventeen times John’s gospel mentions Jesus’s signs. The signs incited belief. There were no recorded words of Jesus guaranteeing eternal security when Jesus performed these signs. The signs incited belief in *who* Jesus is (not in some promise of eternal security). John’s gospel presents Jesus as God, sent by the Father from above to be humanity’s Savior from sin. Believing this is

“believing in His name.” The result is everlasting life. This life is both abundant life (experiencing intimacy with God now) and future as we spend eternity in intimacy with God.

One of Zane Hodges’s close friends was another GES supporter, John Niemelä. Niemelä followed Hodges in his gospel error as early as 2003. “John focuses on the reception of eternal life. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (in the Johannine sense as the resurrector and guarantor of eternal life) receives eternal life from Him. John 11:25-27 indicates that Christ also promises to resurrect all who believe in Him.”^[142]

What Does it Mean to Believe?

Hodges understood faith as being convinced of truth without any component of the human will. “Biblical saving faith is a conviction or persuasion about what God says to us in the Gospel (Rom 4:21). There is no place for man’s will—even as influenced by God’s Spirit.”^[143] He derives this from Romans 4. “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore “*it was accounted to him for righteousness*” (Rom 4:20–22).^[144] The combination of faith (πίστει), unbelief (ἀπιστία), and being fully convinced (πληροφορηθεὶς) indicate Paul understood faith as being fully convinced or persuaded. “Faith is nothing more than a response to the divine initiative.”^[145]

I define faith to my theology students in this manner: “Faith is the conviction that something is true—without *definitive* proof—but with enough *evidence* to be convinced it is true.” If there is definitive irrefutable proof then no faith is required. If there is little or no evidence then it is speculation rather than faith. I do not hold the mind/will/emotions or *notitia/assensus/fiducia* view on the nature of faith. Melancthon was correct that before a person can believe she must understand what is being said (*notitia*). A person must also assent to it (*assensus*), not disagree with it or reject it. But I cannot agree with *fiducia* as part of faith since it is now purported to mean faithfulness/fidelity instead of confidence/reliance. I have previously written that the corrupted human “will” as unfree and preventing an ability to believe was a Stoic concept imported into Christianity by Augustine after his reversion to his former pagan training in AD 412.^[146]

We all exercise faith in our daily routines. We are convinced of the truth that the sun will rise and then later, the night will follow. We are convinced of the truth that when we drop an apple it will hit the ground. Our emotions and wills are not involved in being convinced. Faith that justifies does not require a special category of faith.^[147] It requires a special object. What God uses to justify a person by faith is the object of that faith. The object required for justification is Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Throughout Christianity this has been understood to mean that Jesus is God incarnate and Messiah/Savior from sin. To expand on this essential understanding, Jesus is the one and only God (YHWH) that the Old Testament promised would become a human in order to die for our sins as Savior so that we could enter an eternal relationship with God. This is faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus as “Guarantor of eternal security” without belief that Jesus is God incarnate and Savior from sin cannot justify anyone.

Conclusion

Hodges created the belief in assurance of eternal security in order to win his battle against John MacArthur's Lordship Salvation (justification). Hodges identified and attacked the weakness in Calvinist theology—the inability of Calvinists to claim their own personal assurance of salvation. Hodges accomplished this by changing the justification requirement. Hodges changed the object of belief. Hodges missed the New Testament emphasis on the Person of Jesus as God and on the work of Jesus as Savior from sin. This was the gospel message to non-Christians in Acts and the gospel summary to Christians in the epistles.

Wilkin and his GES remain loyal to Hodges and his heresy. The Free Grace Movement left Wilkin and his GES behind in 2005 when Wilkin altered the Affirmations of Belief. In the next chapter we learn of the disagreement of the prior GES leadership with Hodges's heresy and their departure from the Grace Evangelical Society.

Chapter 7

Former GES Leaders Rejected the GES Heresy

Personal admonishment of Hodges

I personally confronted Zane Hodges with his heresy problem in 2003 with David Anderson present. In order not to lose his belief in the eternal security view, Hodges conceded the following point: when instructing someone on how to become a Christian, one must also teach the unbeliever that Jesus will resurrect the physical bodies of his believers. This is because of the “καί” in John 11:25–26. That is, to be saving faith, one must understand Jesus guarantees one’s eternal destiny (eternal security) *and also* that Jesus guarantees a bodily resurrection from the dead. Hodges concession required belief in a bodily resurrection.

Of course, Hodges’s answer did not resolve the conundrum since neither Hodges nor anyone else was evangelizing unbelievers with the requirement of belief that Jesus guarantees a bodily resurrection (as well as guaranteeing eternal security). By teaching the current GES gospel, all of those persons who had “saving faith” in that eternal security message of Hodges were still doomed to hell. Why?—because Hodges had failed to explicitly include belief in Jesus’s guarantee of their bodily resurrection. But Hodges was intelligent enough to recognize I had put him in a no-win situation with that “καί” connection. He either had to admit his exegetical doctrinal error or add belief in a bodily resurrection as the second part of his novel content for saving faith.

His previously discussed island example had minimized the gospel to Jesus as Guarantor of eternal life.^[148] In *Absolutely Free* and in this conversation with me, Hodges admitted that his minimalist content of saving faith required more than his island example proposed. It required

faith in Jesus's promise—He would resurrect the physical body. Hodges was wrong. Zane Hodges died in 2008 still teaching the same heresy.

Wilkin's Grace Evangelical Society

Bob Wilkin, a protégé and disciple of Hodges who founded the Grace Evangelical Society in 1986, teaches (almost) everything Hodges taught. However, when this author confronted Wilkin with the problematic guarantee of bodily resurrection and Hodges's response, Wilkin responded he did not agree with Hodges, his Greek professor. Wilkin said the “καί” in John 11:25 does not require that a person teach both a guarantee of bodily resurrection and eternal security as the content for saving faith. Rarely does Wilkin depart from Hodges's teachings. This may be the only example. At least Hodges was consistent with his biased exegesis. Wilkin ignores it. “Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life and will never perish. That's the promise. If we believe the promise, we won't perish and we have everlasting life. It is that simple. [...] Assurance, the idea that all who believe in Jesus are certain that they are eternally secure, is the promise of the gospel.”^[149]

Wilkin's Grace Evangelical Society continues to teach what Hodges derived from his exegesis of John 11 (minus half of Hodges's deviant gospel). Reiher correctly notes that GES never has formally taught that faith in Christ as God or Savior was required for justification as a Christian. Reiher disagrees with Stegall. “For example, Stegall wrote, ‘There was once virtual unanimity among us who hold to the Free Grace position that in order for lost sinners to receive eternal life they *must* believe that Jesus Christ is God-incarnate who died for their sins and rose again to save them eternally.’^[25] Yet this was never GES's position”^[150] Reiher was correct that this historical Christian doctrine was never explicitly demanded in GES. But Stegall was correct that GES members and leaders almost unanimously believed that to receive eternal life persons must believe

“Jesus Christ is God-incarnate who died for their sins and rose again to save them eternally.”

Former GES Leaders Reject this Heresy

The major separation from this GES heresy within the “Free Grace” movement can be highlighted by citing three frequent lecturers at GES meetings with sixteen publications between them in the GES journal (*JOTGES*)—Charles (Charlie) Bing, Greg Sapaugh, and David Anderson. Bing was on the GES board; and, was an editor of the GES journal and newsletter for several years. He authored seven *JOTGES* articles. Bing disagreed with Hodges’s view. In fact, he wrote against it in *JOTGES* before Hodges’s view became understood. After quoting John 20:30–31, Bing writes,

Three corresponding emphases are evident in this purpose statement [John 20:30–31]. First, it declares Jesus is the divine Son, the revelation of God: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” This merely continues the obvious emphasis on Jesus’ deity in the Gospel. It also explains why John declares in v 30 that only certain miracles were recorded. Besides the explicit statements, it is commonly observed that deity is revealed through the selection of miraculous signs that Jesus performs (cf. 10:37-38; 14:10-11) and the “I am” statements He makes. In short, the book begins and ends with Christ’s deity.

[\[151\]](#)

Greg Sapaugh was the chairman of the board for GES. He explicitly rejected Hodges’s view.

With regard to Hodges’s deserted island scenario, I disagree that the man in the illustration receives eternal life by believing portions of John 6:43-47 that washed ashore. This man may have no concept of sin or his need for a Savior. The name Jesus is just a word on a piece of paper with no content. For all we know, the man thinks everlasting life is a “fountain of youth.” Instead, I see this man as a lost person who has received some light. ... I believe in a historical, crucified Christ, not just a name on a piece of paper. [...] In the final analysis, the exclusive reliance by Hodges on the Gospel of John has led him to this very position: a division of the person of Christ from the work of Christ. The logical extension of this is that the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son

of God were not even necessary. But who Christ is and what He did are inseparable.^[152]

After the publication of this article, Sapaugh allowed his term as GES chairman to expire and he subsequently distanced himself from GES. Wilkin commented to Sapaugh that, in his estimation, probably about eighty percent (80%) of GES agreed with this article refuting Hodges's view.^[153]

Anderson also wrote an article arguing against the GES alteration of saving faith's content.

But in recent months the discussions on justification I have overheard have morphed from "assurance is of the essence of faith" to "belief in eternal security is a *sine qua non* of justification." [...] The point is that "eternal security," as we understand it in modern theological circles (once saved always saved) is not an apt and equivalent substitution for "eternal life" in many, many biblical examples. [...] This instance [cites Wesley reading Luther's preface to Romans] would seem to argue powerfully for the claim that assurance is of the essence of saving faith, although one could not prove from this testimony that John Wesley ever believed in eternal security. This study argues that assurance is one thing, while eternal security is quite another.^[154]

Former GES board of directors member Charlie Bing wrote again against the GES view:

John's gospel does not demand belief in eternal life "which can never be lost." Of course, it is good to share eternal security when sharing the gospel. When grasped, it makes the promise of salvation all the more wonderful. But we must distinguish what is the object of belief and the condition for salvation from the result of salvation. There are many results of salvation, which may take a person some time to understand fully. The doctrine of eternal security is a wonderful and comforting assurance that those who have eternal life can never lose it, but to demand that an unsaved person grasp this in order to be saved is an unnecessary addition to the saving gospel. A person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior who died for their sins and rose again is adequate for salvation.^[155]

Anderson exposed the illegitimate use of Hebrews 11:1 as a passage about assurance as the essence of faith:

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen.” But “assurance” was a completely new definition assigned to the word *hupostasis* by Luther at the insistence of Melancthon. As Helmut Köster of Harvard notes, “Whereas all patristic and medieval exegesis presupposed that *hupostasis* was to be translated *substantia* and understood in the sense of *ousia*, Luther’s translation introduced a wholly new element into the understanding of Heb 11:1. Faith is now viewed as personal, subjective, conviction. This interpretation has governed Protestant exposition of the passage almost completely. . . . Yet there can be no question but that this classical Protestant understanding is untenable.” He goes on to argue that *hupostasis* should be understood in light of its other uses in Hebrews and concludes that *helenos* and *hupostasis* do not describe faith but “define the character of the transcendent future things.”^[156]

Assurance is *not* of the essence of saving faith. The GES claim is wrong.

No dissenting articles on saving faith’s content appear in GES’s journal (*JOTGES*) after 2005. Why?—because all of those dissenting leaders had left Wilkin’s Grace Evangelical Society. Wilkin would not allow these men to teach or publish articles or books under the GES umbrella. Wilkin holds the reins tightly to protect his remaining heretical sect.

Faith in Eternal Security

No evidence for a belief in eternal security can be found in the history of Christian literature until the Reformation. No evidence can be found that belief in eternal security is the content of saving faith until the 1980s by Hodges. Instead, belief that Jesus was God and Savior from sin pervaded the early Christian authors's writings. Luther did not teach eternal security; and, Hodges's quotation of Calvin (previously cited) does not state such a doctrine. This convoluted view of "promise of eternal security," purported by Wilkin's GES, means not one person was a Christian from the end of the first century to the Protestant Reformation. This is nothing short of an astonishingly presumptuous claim. When this extreme consequence of his bizarre view was pointed out to Wilkin, he responded that it does not prove some persons at some time did not believe in eternal security—an argument from silence. There is zero evidence.

A more recent blog by GES Director of Publications, Shawn Lazar, continues this misinterpretation of what it means to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

What makes faith "saving" is when you believe the saving proposition, i.e., Jesus' promise of eternal life. ... Consequently, we believe that Jesus' 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*. Why do we say that? Because during Jesus' ministry, many people believed in Jesus for eternal life and were born-again without believing that He is God. We believe that is still true today. [...]

Do You Have to Believe in Eternal Security to Be Saved?

GES: Jesus promised believers *eternal* salvation, not *probationary* salvation, at the point of faith. Hence, you must believe in *eternal* salvation to be saved. Moreover, denying the eternality of salvation indicates a failure to understand

both the one condition of salvation (i.e., by an act of faith apart from works), and the nature of the salvation Jesus gives (i.e., it is eternal), (*italics original*).

[\[157\]](#)

Lazar defends the Hodges/Wilkin/GES heresy by claiming “during Jesus’ ministry, many people believed in Jesus for eternal life and were born-again without believing that He is God.” But not even one example is given for his “many people believed in Jesus *for* eternal life” (i.e., eternal security, *italics added*).

John 11 is the only possible case and is the proof-text for this view. I have previously explained why Martha’s “I believe” did not refer to eternal security. According to Jesus, Martha did not believe in the immediate bodily resurrection of her brother Lazarus. “Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’” (John 11:39–40). Therefore, Martha did not believe Jesus Himself was the resurrection and the life *for that time* regarding her brother Lazarus. Martha missed Jesus as the immediate resurrection and the life. This is extremely troublesome for GES’s alleged saving message. All other cases claimed by GES must also be manufactured by an erroneous and historically unprecedented redefinition of faith as belief in Jesus’s promise instead of his person as God and Savior.

Why does Lazar limit the data to Jesus’s earthly ministry in the Gospel of John? Every New Testament book (including the Gospel of John) was written after Jesus’s death and resurrection. During Jesus’s ministry, it was quite difficult to believe in Jesus’s resurrection, because it had not yet occurred. The apostles did not believe Jesus was going to die and rise again (John 21:9). Lazar ignores progressive revelation.

Lazar and GES are up against a real dilemma trusting in Hodges's view. Can a person today be justified by believing Jesus's guarantee of eternal security while rejecting belief in Jesus's sacrificial death for sin and His bodily resurrection (as recorded in the Gospel of John)? Can a person today be justified by believing Jesus's guarantee of eternal security while rejecting belief in Jesus as God in the flesh (as recorded in the Gospel of John)? For Lazar and GES, this *must* be the case. Why?—because they reject these historical bulwarks of the Christian faith as essential for justification. Whether the person is *likely* to believe Jesus is God and Savior from sin by his death and resurrection is irrelevant. Hodges's unprecedented eisegesis about “the Christ” in John 11:25–26 as Guarantor of eternal life persists as a heresy.

Anderson rejects the idea that the guarantee of eternal life (eternal security) is the essential criterion of saving (justifying) faith.

Cornelius is a case in point. He is a God-fearer, a Gentile attracted to Yahweh (10:22). Peter, who ought to know, says that Jesus and the disciples went around Israel preaching peace (a “what,” not a “how” or a “why”). He goes on to preach the resurrection (10:40), forgiveness of sins (10:43), and faith alone (10:43). Never does he mention “eternal life,” or even the word “life.” [...] Paul preached a similar message at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13). When he got to the good news about Jesus, Paul camped on resurrection truth (13:30–37). He then preached “the forgiveness of sins” and that anyone who “believed” in Jesus was “justified” (13:38–39). Then Luke tells us that these believers received “eternal life” (13:48). To say that Luke did not give a complete rendering of what was said just because the readers of Acts were believers with a pre-understanding of the complete message stretches credulity. We either have an accurate record of what was said or we do not. [\[158\]](#)

Luke's evangelistic gospel was presented to unbelievers in Acts. But, it never mentions believing Jesus's promise of eternal life. Eternal life was the result of “believing in Jesus”—the person and work of Jesus as Lord

(God/Son of God) and Christ (Savior from sin through his death and resurrection).

Charlie Bing notes that John's focus is not "on eternal life, but other aspects and results of salvation." These include:

Salvation from sin, Coming into the light, Life as quality, Never hungering or thirsting, The new birth or indwelling by the Holy Spirit, Becoming a child of God or coming to the Father, Deliverance from final death, Jesus' death for sins and resurrection, Saved or delivered from condemnation, Belief in who Jesus is: 'in His name'. [\[159\]](#)

The only time Wilkin and GES can identify an actual promise of Jesus guaranteeing eternal life for justification is John 11:24-25. In contrast, there are eight times Jesus speaks about his role as Savior from sin with 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). [\[160\]](#)

Heresy by Omission Versus Error by Addition

The GES omission of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior constitutes a heresy. This contrasts with the error of many other Christians who add works to faith as a requirement for eternal life. Someone might ask: “Why is an omission a heresy while an addition is only an error?”

Both the New Testament and Christians throughout the history of Christianity have insisted upon belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior for justification. Arianism taught that Jesus was a subordinate created demigod. It was labeled a heresy by the Church. The heresy of Docetism rejected that Jesus had a physical body. Orthodox Christians insisted Jesus had to become a genuine human with physical skin and bones and blood. Gnosticism taught Jesus was our Savior from ignorance, guaranteeing eternal security to the elect. Orthodox Christians rebutted that Jesus was our Savior from sin, not ignorance.

For thousands of years, Christian converts have been baptized and have partaken of the Lord’s Supper to remember the God-man Jesus who died for our sins. They have recited creeds containing the essential elements of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ was God in the flesh and Savior from sin who died and now lives. The Apostles’s Creed, Nicene Creed, Chalcedonian Creed, and Athanasian Creed all contain those essential elements. All of these were written within the first four hundred years of the Church and recited faithfully by converts to Christianity.

In contrast, no convert ever recited a promised guarantee of eternal security by somebody named Jesus. No creed ever mentioned a guarantee of eternal life/security. Hodges, Wilkin, and his GES have pushed “Delete” on the most essential belief in Christianity—faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior for justification. They have pasted in an alleged promise of

eternal security. Their omission is heresy. They have omitted the most unique and essential element for entering Christ's Church.

So what about those who add works to faith? My theology students know that I teach faith alone in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only requirement for justification. I specifically reject Lordship Justification, water baptism, good works, and anything else as a requirement. I think Christians who teach these works as requirements are wrong. When flying on an aircraft, whether you are required to present the "ticket" of good works to reach heaven when you first board or only when exiting the flight makes no difference. For them, the ticket of good works is essential to reach heaven. That is not the New Testament teaching. The verses on "faith without works is dead" and "demons believe and tremble" in James 2:14–26 are no exception.^[161]

Good works are essential for sanctifying Christians, not justifying non-Christians. Good works and faithfully enduring suffering are required for Christians to reign with Christ as co-heirs, not reach heaven as heirs of God (Rom 8:16–17). Persons who demand good works (or sanctification) in order to reach heaven nullify the infinite sacrifice of Christ by attempting to add their own pitiful microscopic good works. No one could convict Jesus Christ of sin (John 8:46). Who of us cannot be convicted of *much* sin (1 John 1:8)? Who of us has any impressive degree of sanctification to match Jesus Christ? Good works do not contribute to justification; nor, according to John Calvin, can they prove justification.^[162]

In defending their position, those Christians who claim to believe in faith alone but require good works pull a rabbit out of the hat by claiming those good works are God's, not ours. Certainly God works through and in us, but those are still *our* works. And even those sanctifying works are pitiful compared to Christ. Works accomplish nothing toward producing

justification, proving justification, or accomplishing a sufficient sanctification to enter heaven. Christ's imputed perfection is sufficient.

Demanding "Faith alone" for Justification

In 1989, Hodges (and then later Wilkin) committed the typical historical error in Christianity of appealing to the single pressing issue of the moment as the sole defining criterion for salvation. I challenge anyone to find a verse in Scripture that says: One *must believe* in “faith alone in Christ alone” who guarantees eternal security *without works* to become a Christian (justified), as Wilkin and his GES require. True as that doctrine may be, belief in that doctrine is *not required for justification* according to Scripture. There is a difference in what Scripture states as true and what it states is required to become a Christian. The Scriptures state Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Must you believe that to be a Christian? No. Scripture teaches you become a Christian by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior. No good works are required. But where does Scripture state adding good works (that God produces in us) negates faith in who Jesus is for salvation? ^[163] It is wrong, but it does not negate faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior for justification.

In my opinion, this is a typical evangelical error: it is not limited to Wilkin and his GES. Evangelicals want to oust some Christians as “true Christians” because they add works for final salvation.^[164] Roman Catholics, Calvinists, Ariminians and other Protestants *all* add works. Catholics require the ticket of good works at the beginning or during the ride. Protestants require the ticket of good works before you exit the ride into heaven. Catholics overtly require works for justification (faith + works => justification). Calvinists also require works by sneaking them into the definition of faith (faith [+works] => justification). Both require good works for final salvation. Neither teaches faith alone. Similarly, John MacArthur and Lordship Justificationists also require works for justification. You

cannot be justified unless you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ *and* surrender your life to obey Jesus as Lord. That is a work. They do not first believe in eternal security by faith alone then add works later.

Therefore, if all Roman Catholics are non-Christians, then so are all other Protestants (except those few believing in eternal security without works). That is the problem with “faith alone in Christ alone” as a requirement for justification. I believe “faith alone in Christ alone” to be a true statement. But it does not mean that any addition of works nullifies a person’s faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior from sin for justification.

Some people will object that Hindus are Christians with this understanding. They can believe Jesus is a god along with numerous others and that he gives eternal life. But that is *not* the criteria Scripture demands. Hindus do not believe that Jesus is God incarnate—the one true God in the Jewish understanding of YHWH (not merely one of many gods). Hindus do not believe Jesus is our Savior from sin—no Savior exists in Hinduism because people must pay for their own sins. Hindus do not believe that Jesus is God and Savior from sin.

If adding works nullifies faith in the saving message (prevents justification by faith), then you are in the same untenable position as the Grace Evangelical Society. Not one person from AD 100 to 1530 was saved.^[165] Even Martin Luther did not believe the GES heresy that faith alone guarantees eternal security (see Chapter 3).^[166] Is Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, in hell?

Yes, according to Wilkin and his GES, Martin Luther is in hell. Luther did not believe that Jesus is the “Guarantor of eternal security.”

The deviant view of Hodges, Wilkin, and GES requiring belief in “faith alone in Christ alone” in order to become a Christian is a typical polemical error. (It was Hodges’s anti-Lordship Justification polemic.) In

contrast, by deleting who Jesus is as God and Savior in exchange for a perplexing promise of alleged eternal security in John 11, their deviant gospel blocks the path to becoming a Christian.

Adding works to faith alone is an error, not a heresy. Deleting belief in Christ as God and Savior *is a heresy*. I cite McGrath again, “Heresy is best seen as a form of Christian belief that, more by accident than design, ultimately ends up subverting, destabilizing, or even destroying the core of Christian faith.”^{[167\]](#)} Wilkin and his GES exactly match this respected scholarly definition of heresy.

Conclusion

Christians outside of the Grace Evangelical Society (evangelical and beyond) agree with the Free Grace theologians that Hodges, Wilkin, and GES have abandoned the essential Christian gospel. According to Jesus's promise in John 8:21 and 24, all GES "converts" will die in their sins unless the GES "converts" believe that Jesus is "I AM" (God) who forgives their sins. The GES heresy has strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel. That is why the majority of GES leaders and speakers left the GES fifteen years ago. The attempts of these former GES leaders to restore Wilkin and GES to orthodoxy are delineated in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Former GES Leaders Attempted the Restoration of GES

We have previously examined the attempts at the restoration of GES by written communications in journals and other public venues. In addition, persons who were previous leaders in GES repeatedly held personal discussions with Wilkin and GES. Wilkin has publically admitted the prior contributions of the former GES leaders.^[168] My personal communication with both Hodges and Wilkin has already been discussed. David Anderson also spoke personally with Zane Hodges and Bob Wilkin trying to persuade them of their error. “Wilkin’s response to the 1400 years without any mention of eternal security did not phase him. Wilkin just said, ‘Many are called, and few are chosen.’”^[169] Wilkin stopped selling Anderson’s book *Maximum Joy* (first published by GES) after Anderson’s 2008 *CTSJ* article appeared arguing against the GES heresy.

Anderson is correct about the 1400 years without a Christian. John Niemelä admitted he had no answer to this “1400-year stretch without a single Christian” problem for years. Then he wrote an article in 2015 attempting an answer to Anderson’s challenge.^[170] He summarized this in a *Grace In Focus* article months later:

Interestingly, scholarly studies of Greek lectionaries show that 93% of the Gospel of John was read in church services over the course of a year. ... In every generation there were untold thousands of born-again people (both Jews and Gentiles) who shared their faith with others and their witness was supported by the reading of Scripture each week in church services. Without hesitation, we affirm that the faith-alone in Jesus Christ alone for everlasting life message of the New Testament has always gone forth unhindered.^[171]

Niemelä has provided us with an excellent example of circular reasoning.

[\[172\]](#) There are no records of anyone believing forensic justification. This is an absolute requirement for believing in eternal security. Niemelä replies like this: But the Gospel of John was read frequently. People heard Jesus Himself (through the readings) tell them about eternal security. Because they heard the Word, and God's Word "has always gone forth unhindered," then somebody MUST have believed in eternal security. The logic is dizzying (circular ad nauseum). This fallacy is so blatant that I have added Appendix A (The Niemelä Fallacy) to discuss his full *JOTGES* article from which Niemelä borrowed this error.

Anderson remains correct. The GES deviant gospel means there were no Christians from AD 100 to 1500. The GES continues to bury its head in the sand, scavenging for an answer.

The Official Meeting of 2009

In 2009, there was an official meeting in College Station, Texas. Wilkin (along with some of his GES members) met with prior GES leaders who had resigned (due to the GES change in the Affirmations of Belief requiring assurance in eternal security for justification). Wilkin's GES board approved that meeting to discuss two major questions: (1) Is assurance of the essence of saving faith (that is, must someone believe that what he receives by believing in Jesus is eternal?) and (2) Must one believe the four essentials (deity, Savior from sin, death, and resurrection of Christ) to be born again? Wilkin proposed that there were four major "Free Grace" views:

- (1) the faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life view
- (2) the faith in Jesus Christ for an undefined duration salvation view
- (3) the faith in Christ and the five essentials for eternal life view, and
- (4) the faith in Christ and the five essentials for an undefined duration salvation view.

Notice the biased wording in Wilkin's proposed views—"undefined duration salvation view." All of the attendees believed and taught the doctrine of eternal security. Wilkin biased the talks by introducing a straw man argument. Not one attendee believed a Christian could lose his or her salvation. What Wilkin was not willing to say was "eternal life" since he equates this (erroneously) with eternal security. The former GES leaders refused to say justification occurs by believing somebody named Jesus guarantees eternal security.

Stephen Lewis, John Niemelä, and Renee Lopez presented the view of Zane Hodges.^{[\[173\]](#)} The former GES leaders all left that meeting feeling like it was an exercise in futility. Why—the GES members had acted like a brainwashed sect, blindly following one man’s strange view. The GES representatives vehemently defended their position with passion instead of scriptural exegesis.

Attempts by Dr. Joseph Dillow

An additional meeting with the GES board occurred in May 2012 with Jody Dillow and a prior GES speaker who was a pastor. Additionally, Jody Dillow spent hours personally with Bob over the next year trying to convince him of his errors. At both meetings Dillow focused on two problems: (1) GES says one does not need to believe that Jesus is God in order to be saved, and (2) GES says you do not need to trust Christ for the forgiveness of sins to be saved. Dillow argued from John 8:24 that one must believe that Jesus is “I AM” or you will die in you sins; and, from John 20:21 that we must believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. Dillow noted that GES directly denies these requirements. Dillow further focused on John 6:54–56. We must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to be raised up on the last day. Blood is a metaphor for death for sin, and flesh is a metaphor for suffering and death for sin. Drink and eat are metaphors for believe. Therefore, Dillow accurately concluded, we must believe on Christ for the forgiveness of sins or we cannot be saved.

During the meeting with the GES board, Dillow and his friend questioned the board about the official GES Affirmations of Belief. It seemed to say that believing in Christ’s death for our sins was a necessary condition for obtaining eternal life. “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).”^[174] Dillow’s question was about the comma. He pointed out to the GES board that the phrase after the comma appears to explain who Jesus Christ is (explicatory). So, the meaning becomes “faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins.” But Wilkin responded the comma is placed there to separate belief in who He is

(Guarantor of eternal life), from the content of our faith in Him (substitutionary death for our sins and resurrection).

Dillow wrote the following statements about those meetings: “In both instances, either they did not respond or they quickly moved on to another subject. I also told their board that if any elder board or mission board had an applicant who shared the GES view, 99% would not hire that pastor or missionary. I am not saying they do not have answers but I have not heard of them.”^[175] Other men (who prefer not to be mentioned) told me they spoke personally with Zane Hodges or Bob Wilkin attempting to dissuade them from persisting in this false doctrine of justification without faith in Jesus as God and Savior from sin. This was to no avail.

Attempts by the Free Grace Alliance

Fred Lybrand was president of the Free Grace Alliance in 2009 when he felt obligated to publically distance the Free Grace Alliance from the teachings of Bob Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society. The first public statement was the FGA GES Gospel Statement of April 7, 2009.

So, as the President of the Free Grace Alliance, we've prayerfully concluded that this statement must be made. The Free Grace Alliance is not associated with the Grace Evangelical Society and does not endorse the GES Gospel (also referred to as "crossless" or "promise only" by some). We invite those who share our heart for the Gospel's clarity and declaration, of both the Person and Work of Christ, to join hands with us (italics original).^[176]

The second public distancing of the Free Grace Alliance from Wilkin and GES occurred the next week in a more extended explanation by Fred Lybrand as the president of the FGA.

I would name it the GES Gospel. I am not aware of it being held by anyone, anywhere, in history; it is solely owned and promoted by GES. [...] as you know, in the past we have offered to sponsor such collegial and academic discussions to no avail. It is my deepest hope that GES will repent of its recent error and return to the Free Grace Movement. Perhaps there is a future discussion to be had, and I remain hopeful; however, I want it to be abundantly clear that the GES Gospel, in its current iteration, is not something I can endorse as legitimate or supportable from the Word of God. [...] I do not believe the GES Gospel is the gospel by which anyone can be eternally saved.

[...] I didn't leave GES, GES left me. If GES still affirmed what it did when it started, I'm sure I'd still belong." [...] this curious Faith-Alone-in-John-Alone viewpoint. [...] The GES Gospel is not the gospel Paul preached [...] To believe the GES Gospel is to deny the Classical Free Grace understanding of the gospel through which we are eternally saved. [...] I was a faithful member of GES and avid supporter of Zane Hodges. Unfortunately, the traditional Free Grace Movement has been abandoned by GES with the advent of the GES Gospel. GES is not the Free Grace Movement. [\[177\]](#)

In October 2008, when Lybrand asked Hodges to meet personally as a friend to discuss Fred's concerns about Zane's novel gospel, Hodges refused. Hodges died about six weeks later, still clinging to his self-crafted heresy.

Conclusion

A multitude of Christians over a fifteen-year period have attempted to lovingly return Wilkin and his GES to orthodoxy. All of these efforts have failed. Despite so many warnings, Bob Wilkin and his GES continue to propagate the “Guarantor of eternal security” requirement invented by Zane Hodges. This heresy has damaged Christianity, and has especially hurt the Free Grace movement. This is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Damage to the Grace Gospel by Wilkin and GES

Unfortunately, Christians outside of the “Free Grace Movement” often view the extremist Bob Wilkin as the spokesperson for Free Grace. Their opinion of Wilkin is not favorable. As I mentioned in the Introduction, other evangelical Christians view Wilkin as a modern heretic. Evangelical journal editors will not allow him to publish articles in their journals. Wilkin is limited to publishing within his own tightly controlled GES venues.^[178] No publisher will accept his deviant gospel. Even his contribution in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* has not been received as scholarly outside of the miniscule GES circle.^[179] Wilkin was the only author in this book who was not associated with a university or theological school. To my knowledge, Wilkin has never published an article in an academic, peer reviewed journal.

Wilkin's GES is not Free Grace

Bob Wilkin has been teaching the promise heresy of Hodges since at least November 1999. I found a paper I wrote for his Soteriology 301 class from November 4, 1999 entitled, "Is Assurance of Salvation Essential to being Justified by Faith?" Wilkin was teaching this deviant view to his students. On the final exam, I wrote the answer he was expecting then refuted it, adding that the grade did not matter as much as truth mattered.

Wilkin and GES hold a minority view within the Grace Movement. Charlie Bing voiced this concern in a speech at a Free Grace Alliance (FGA) annual meeting: There are "people who do not think a sinner has to recognize his or her sin in order to be saved. I know that this is the position of Bob Wilkin of GES and perhaps some in the FGM [Free Grace Movement], but I do not find it in any way a prevalent or popular idea."^[180] The previously discussed Free Grace Alliance consists mostly of members who left Wilkin's GES starting fifteen years ago. The FGA is larger than the GES and does not hold to the heresy of GES. Members of the GES are allowed to attend FGA conferences but are not allowed to speak publically or present their heretical views. (I am not a member of either the GES or FGA groups.)

David Anderson, President of Grace School of Theology, views Bob Wilkin as an anomaly within both Free Grace and Christianity. Wilkin himself wrote this about Anderson's historical understanding of justifying faith: "In *A Defense of Free Grace Theology* saving faith is not defined as being persuaded that the Lord Jesus's promise of everlasting life to the believer is true. In fact, in Chapter 3, 'The Faith That Saves,' Anderson says that I am the only person he knows who believes that."^[181] Wilkin is correct.

^[182] We are unaware of any Free Grace theologian who is recognized as

prominent within Christianity who has been deceived by the GES Heresy.^[183] That is because Free Grace theology does not redefine the object of faith in accordance with Hodges's error.

Grace School of Theology in the Woodlands, Texas is the only training center for the Free Grace Movement that is fully accredited to offer degrees as an academic institution by TRACS and ATS.^[184] It was established in 2002 through the encouragement and advice of Dr. Charles Ryrie, former Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.^[185] There are currently over 600 students from over thirty countries and twenty-one professors on the GSOT teaching faculty with a Doctor of Philosophy degree. Not one of these professors agrees with the GES Heresy. Grace School of Theology is the educational and academic arm of the Free Grace Movement. It rejects the Hodges/Wilkin/GES view as an unbiblical and false doctrine.

In contrast, Rocky Mountain Bible College and its President Emeritus, Stephen Lewis, Ph.D., teach the GES deviant view. "Faith (believe) is a personal response, apart from works, whereby one is persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that He gives everlasting life (that cannot be lost) to all who believe in Him for that life because of His death and resurrection."^[186] The term "Christ, the Son of God" has been robbed of its meaning as God and Savior and replaced with "He gives everlasting life (that cannot be lost) to all who believe in Him for that life." The only professor with a Ph.D. teaching at the school is John Niemelä, Hodges's good friend who teaches the same heresy. This school has only five students. It is neither accredited nor credible.

There are, of course, a majority of Christians who will disagree with the historical Free Grace viewpoint as represented by Grace School of Theology. But those opponents do not label this theology a heresy like they

do to Wilkin and GES.^[187] Why not?—because Grace School of Theology and its professors adhere to historical Christianity regarding the requirements for becoming a Christian. One must believe in Jesus Christ as Lord (*kurios*, God) and Savior from sin. In contrast, Wilkin and the GES have rejected this historical essential foundation of almost 2000 years among all Christian teachings. That constitutes a heresy.

Wilkin Followed Hodges into Heresy

The damage to the Free Grace Movement by Bob Wilkin and his GES is significant. This is lamentable since Wilkin wrote books prior to 2005 that were supported by the major Free Grace leaders. His book, *The Road to Reward* (2003), was endorsed by Dr. Tony Evans, Dr. Earl Radmacher (President Emeritus of Western Seminary), and Dr. Charlie Bing.^[188] Today, no prominent proponent of Free Grace theology will endorse Wilkin's books. They view his current teachings as false doctrine.

My own writings and speaking have made me no friend of the Calvinist theologians. In my opinion (and many other scholars), Augustinian-Calvinism toggles on an unstable pagan foundation.^[189] But unlike Wilkin who claims Calvinists are not Christians, I embrace Calvinists as Christians. They correctly believe the major historical tenets of the Christian faith that are required for justification. Wilkin does not. I will fellowship with Calvinists with whom I strongly disagree. However, I will not fellowship any longer with Bob Wilkin. Wilkin is a heretic.

Wilkin remains a heretic—despite fifteen years of multiple attempts at restoration to orthodoxy by many other Christians (Titus 3:10). He could be considered a divisive or factious man (αἰρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον). He changed the GES doctrinal statement that ejected leaders and a majority of his members—eighty percent (80%) according to Wilkin's statement to his former chairman of the GES board, Greg Sapaugh. Wilkin divided the Free Grace Movement. More accurately, as the former FGA president Fred Lybrand explained, Wilkin and GES left the Free Grace Movement. GES is an unwanted and unwelcome parasite within Christianity.

Wilkin wrote in 2016, "Free Grace Theology Has Emerged over the Last 35 Years."^[190] But a more appropriate title for Wilkin's article would be

“Free Grace Theology has *Diverged* over the Last 35 Years.” He accurately proclaims, “*The Gospel Under Siege* by Zane Hodges came out in 1981 and it helped to define some of the major issues. But even today, there is still more work to be done to nail down all of the particulars of Free Grace theology.” I agree. But Wilkin fails to tell the reader that for most of his life Hodges did *not* believe the doctrine he taught at his death (and that GES now teaches). Nor does Wilkin communicate that the majority of persons within the Free Grace Movement (including Hodges’s close friends) strongly oppose Hodges’s unprecedented and dangerous redefinition of faith in Jesus Christ. These Christians all continue to hold Christianity’s (and Hodges’s original) orthodox view.

Most Christians outside of the Free Grace Movement associate all Free Grace persons with the heresy of Zane Hodges and Bob Wilkin. The “Lordship Salvation” debate between Hodges and MacArthur exposed Hodge’s mutilation of the Gospel of John into a perplexing promise for justification. These other Christians are not aware that the majority of Free Grace proponents reject Hodges’s view. After Hodges’s death, Wilkin has continued propagating Hodges’s bizarre “faith alone in the promise” criterion for justification. Wilkin’s full time employment as director of GES has provided him numerous opportunities to speak and write. He spreads his “Godless-Saviorless” gospel view as being the major voice of Free Grace. Instead, it is a disgraced sect.

Students in my Church History and Historical Theology class recognize my emphasis on unity within Christianity. I applaud the German Lutheran theologian Georg Calixtus (d.1656) for his attempts to reconcile Catholics and Calvinists by focusing on the essentials of Christianity.^[191] But Hodges, Wilkin, and his GES have shipwrecked the most essential element within Christianity. They left “the faith”—the most essential

doctrine of Christianity—that belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior from sin is required for justification.

Conclusion

Bob Wilkin is *not* the voice of the Free Grace Movement—he is the lone wolf howling at the moon. He is an outcast, a heretic. Wilkin's undying devotion to his mentor contrasts dramatically with dozens of other Free Grace authors and professors who held Zane Hodges as a dear friend and mentor, but who can also see him as a mere man who made a grievous error in his later years.

The Free Grace Movement rejects the heretical views of Hodges and Wilkin requiring assurance of eternal security in order to be justified. Free Grace theologians reject Hodges's heresy that faith requires belief in the *promise* of eternal security by somebody named Jesus. The Free Grace Movement adheres to the historical and universal Christian understanding that requires a person to believe in the *Person* of Jesus Christ as God and Savior. Wilkin and his GES (despite their assurance), have wandered far outside of Christian orthodoxy. They are preaching to themselves, as they claim to be the sole remnant of genuine Christianity, isolated in the wilderness.

Conclusion

I have delayed writing this book for fifteen years. It is very difficult to lose friends because those friends chose the path of heresy. It is *extremely* difficult to watch a Christian theologian you admire wander off into heresy. I have watched and prayed for over a decade as many committed Christian leaders confronted Zane Hodges, Bob Wilkin, and the Grace Evangelical Society about their aberration—their invention of a new deviant gospel message for justification. It grieves me to publically expose them as Christian heretics, in its historical meaning. But expose I must, because other unsuspecting Christians must be protected from their dangerously insufficient gospel message that cannot justify anyone. That is the reason so many prior leaders and members left Wilkin's GES.

Zane Hodges remanufactured his gospel message to defeat John MacArthur and his Lordship Salvation (Justification) doctrine. Hodges did this by emphasizing personal assurance with a guarantee of eternal security. In the process, Hodges abandoned the historical Christian faith. How can anyone possibly become a Christian without faith in Jesus as God and Savior? According to Scripture and all of historical Christianity, you **MUST** believe that Jesus is God and Savior to become a Christian. Justification requires faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.

Zane Hodges died in 2008. Hodges required belief in a bodily resurrection for justification. Bob Wilkin and his GES altered Hodges's erroneous gospel by omitting half of it—belief in a bodily resurrection for justification. They do teach Hodges's false gospel of faith in Jesus's guarantee of eternal security. GES teaches a false gospel requiring assurance of eternal security. Hodges, Wilkin, and GES deleted faith in

Jesus as God and Savior. In its place they pasted faith in Jesus as “Guarantor of eternal security” as the sole requirement for justification. The GES gospel is heresy. The GES gospel cannot save (justify). You cannot become a Christian by believing somebody named Jesus or Jesús guarantees you eternal security.

A “Godless-Saviorless” Gospel

Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society teach that you can become a Christian *without* believing that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and Savior. This novel GES view has been called a “Crossless Gospel” and a “Promise Only” Gospel. But these mild designations totally miss what makes this radical view a heresy. This is a “Godless-Saviorless” Gospel. If Jesus is not God and Savior, then it really makes no difference if He died on the cross (Crossless Gospel). If Jesus is not God and Savior, then it really makes no difference if He made a promise of eternal life (Promise Only Gospel). The GES teaches a false gospel. This heresy resembles Gnosticism in guaranteeing a person eternal life (eternal security) without requiring belief in Jesus as God and Savior from sin. Somebody named Jesus or Jesús guarantees eternal security. That is not the gospel the apostle Paul preached.

Paul’s gospel emphasized “the Lord Jesus Christ.” To Paul, this meant He was God (*kurios*) in the flesh, the man Jesus, and Christ as Savior from sin. These confessions (*who* the Lord Jesus Christ is) appear throughout Paul’s epistles. In glaring contrast, Jesus as “Guarantor of eternal life” and “Jesus’s promise of eternal life/security” are conspicuously absent in Paul’s epistles. The authors of the New Testament were intentional with a laser-sharp focus on the *Person* of the Lord Jesus Christ, not some alleged *promise*. Person—not promise.

The Ordinances

The New Testament confirms two major ordinances that Christians have been commanded to follow and by which we remember the Lord Jesus Christ. These are baptism and the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist). In baptism we die to sin as Christ died for our sin (Rom 6:2). Rising from the water we are raised in newness of life like Christ was resurrected to life. Water baptism indicates our allegiance to Christ by remembering His death for our sins so that we might live for Him (Rom 6:2–11). Similarly, by partaking of the Lord's Supper, we also remember the Lord's death for our sin until He returns (1 Cor 11: 23–26). Both of these ordinances point to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of our sins.

Where is the New Testament ordinance remembering Jesus's promise guaranteeing us eternal security? The Grace Evangelical Society has trivialized the importance of the Christian ordinances that have been practiced since before the writings of the New Testament. They have abandoned historical Christianity to chase a perplexing promise—a promise that Jesus himself confirmed Martha did not even believe. Martha did not believe Jesus was “the resurrection” for Lazarus (John 11:40). The GES boldly claims a belief in Jesus's promise “guaranteeing eternal life” is essential while denying that “the faith” is essential.^[192] The apostles handed down Jesus's teachings as the “rule of faith.” Protestants observe only two ordinances. Remembering Jesus's guarantee of eternal life is not one of them. That is because the New Testament emphasizes this: Jesus died for our sins as Savior and forgives our sins as God. Wilkin and the Grace Evangelical Society have denied “the faith.”

The Bizarre Consequences of this Heresy

For Wilkin and his GES, justification salvation occurs without belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. You only need believe somebody guarantees you eternal security. As noted previously, their position results in bizarre consequences. A person can believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, her Savior from sin, and then commit her life to Jesus as Lord with faithful service until physical death. She goes to hell. Why?—because she has not believed the alleged crucial message of Jesus guaranteeing eternal security.

Equally bizarre, a person can believe that somebody named Jesus guarantees her eternal life (eternal security), and that belief in his promise allegedly results in justification salvation. Simultaneously, she boldly rejects that Jesus is God in the flesh, and adamantly rejects that she is a sinner and Jesus is her Savior from sin. She spends eternity with God (according to the GES heresy). It would be difficult to manufacture a more ludicrous Christian heresy.^{[\[193\]](#)}

The Response of Wilkin

How will Bob Wilkin respond to this book? Perhaps in less than six months, he or Shawn Lazar will publish a rebuttal through GES as a book or a book review. No other publisher will publish it and no other prominent Christian leader will endorse it. Perhaps Wilkin will lead the readers deep into the wilderness, examining the leaves with a microscope and thereby cause them to miss the trees. By following Wilkin, the readers will probably miss seeing the entire forest (i.e., why this view is heresy). Perhaps he will defend his “Godless-Saviorless” gospel view with Hodges’s interpretations of Scripture (except he will neglect to require the second half of Hodges’s gospel, a guaranteed bodily resurrection). Just like the Gnostics used Scripture to defend their views, Wilkin may cite Scripture to defend Hodges’s view. He might complain about my lack of grace (what others see as speaking the truth in love; and, while he himself damns 97% of Christianity to hell). I have been unable to find a gracious way to call an unrepentant man a heretic. Wilkin could claim he was a better friend to Zane Hodges than I was and many other Free Grace leaders were (which is true if you count only Hodges’s final years post-heresy). Wilkin may try to deny my claims regarding knowing Zane’s teachings (although I attended Zane’s church many years before Wilkin published his Ph.D. dissertation in 1985).^[194] I hope and pray Wilkin repents and does not resort to this.

There *will* be a response from Wilkin and his GES. But I have no intention of writing a rejoinder and continuing an unproductive fifteen-year theological debate with a heretical group. I will not respond. Someone else can respond. This book is not written for unrepentant heretics. It is not written to persuade those who refuse to listen. I will not waste my time. This book is written to alert the Christian community to a dangerous heresy.

Wilkin could very well die defending Hodges's heresy, just like Hodges died clinging to it. Wilkin's employment and entire ministry of over thirty years now depend on his "Godless-Saviorless" gospel view being correct. If good friends who supported Wilkin's ministry and who worked alongside Wilkin for years have been unable to persuade him of his error, it seems the Lord Jesus Christ would need to appear to him (together with Zane Hodges) to change his mind.

Zane was a great man and my friend, but he was a mere man. His polemically incited and misguided exegesis of the Gospel of John against MacArthur did provide absolute assurance, but at the price of omitting John's essential gospel that saves unto justification. How can someone think he can be justified by believing in a guarantee of eternal security while omitting or even rejecting Jesus as God and Savior? This heresy allows a Godless-Saviorless "Christianity." More accurately stated, it is no longer Christianity. Believing this heresy requires repetitious mind control. No prior person or sect in Christian history has made such a preposterous claim. The GES sect of Hodges/Wilkin has followers who aggressively preach it.

Warning: HERESY!

I encourage Christians and theologians outside of the Free Grace movement to join in condemning this heresy. Bob Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society are not the voice of Free Grace. They have abandoned orthodoxy and historical Christianity. All Christians should join together in condemning this heretical sect. The Free Grace community rejects them outright.

I conclude with a warning to those persons who associate themselves with Bob Wilkin and his Grace Evangelical Society. This is a heretical sect. One purpose of this book is to alert the Christian community to this GES sect teaching a dangerous heresy, yet masquerading as the ones who are boldly defending true Christianity. True to heresies historically, the GES rejects almost all other Christian groups because they are not “genuine Christians.” These other Christian groups (over 97% of all Christians) do not have assurance of eternal security. So are they all damned to hell, along with Martin Luther? Yes. Not only the Christian evangelical community, but even the broader Christian community of faith correctly rejects such extreme and unbiblical dogma.

For those remaining within GES, I exhort you. Break free of the brainwashing that has occurred—the incessant repetition for the last fifteen years within the Hodges/Wilkin sect that the sole requirement for justification is believing the GES “promise.” Return to what all prior orthodox Christians for almost 2000 years have taught. Return to the essential requirement to believe Jesus is God and Savior. Join the majority of leaders and academicians who left the Grace Evangelical Society due to Bob Wilkin altering his Affirmations of Belief in 2005. Who wants to stand before the crucified Christ at his judgment seat trying to explain why you

followed a sect that taught a “Godless-Saviorless” ~~Christian~~ gospel? Who wants to be responsible for persons suffering forever because they never believed Jesus was God and Savior, yet who died having (false) assurance of their eternal security?

Do not be deceived by the Grace Evangelical Society Heresy. You cannot be justified—you cannot become a Christian—without believing that the Lord Jesus Christ is God incarnate and Savior from sin. The Gospel of John emphasizes Jesus as God and Savior from the beginning to the end. Unless you believe this (“I AM,” John 8: 21, 24), “you will die in your sins.” THAT is Jesus’s promise—guaranteed.

Appendix A

The Niemelä Fallacy

The defense of this heresy by remaining Grace Evangelical Society members seems to have become an exercise in contorting both Scripture and logic. John Niemelä's attempt at explaining how the GES heresy can still allow for a person to become a Christian prior to the Protestant Reformation deserves "special commendation." I have labeled it "The Niemelä Fallacy."

In 2008, David Anderson pointed out that the GES heresy presents a serious problem for Christianity.^[195] The GES claims a person must believe "Jesus guarantees eternal security" for justification. However, there is zero evidence that any Christian believed in eternal security between AD 100 and 1500. In fact, there is zero evidence that any Christian believed in forensic justification. This doctrine of forensic justification is required for the doctrine of eternal security.

Forensic justification was discovered by Philip Melanchthon about 1530. Roman Catholics had taught God does good works in you to *make you* more actually holy over a lifetime (progressive justification) resulting in salvation. Protestants call this sanctification. Melanchthon used Erasmus's Catholic Nominalism to help produce Luther's famous *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously just/righteous and a sinner).^[196] God declares us righteous through the blood of Jesus Christ even when we are not actually righteous. God imputes (credits to one's bank account) Christ's righteousness instead of literally making a person righteous. Without this divine imputation, no person can be eternally secure. God must *declare* him righteous (rather than the person achieving progressive holiness on earth).

Without God declaring a person righteous, a lapse or fall at any time could damn the person to hell (due to a works-based justification). Only when no works are required for justification—and God justifies the sinner by faith—can the sinner be eternally secure.

Anderson astutely pointed out that without this forensic justification (developed about 1530), no person could have ever believed in eternal security before 1530. The GES heresy *requires* faith in eternal security for justification. Therefore, according to the GES heresy, not a single Christian existed from AD 100 to about 1530. Anderson's cogent argument went unanswered for seven years. Then in 2015, John Niemelä attempted an explanation for the bizarre result of their novel heresy, this total lack of Christians for 1400 years. His article was published in the GES journal (*JOTGES*), written for its membership (not for scholars).

John Niemelä is a good Christian man. But, when I am forced to read articles in *The Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, I no longer need to wonder why serious scholars dismiss evangelicals as unscholarly (even when they have doctorates in theology). The *JOTGES* is not a scholarly publication. Niemelä's 2015 article makes this obvious—it's a classic example of informal logical fallacies.^[197] He commits *circulus in probando* (circular reasoning, argumentation that assumes its premise) and *petitio principii* (begging the question, hiding the conclusion in a premise). I will quote extensive sections from this article before responding by exposing "The Niemelä Fallacy."

On page 64, Niemelä cites David Anderson's 2008 article, "Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification?" "But we have no written record of anyone (from AD 100 to AD 1500)³ teaching forgiveness of post-baptismal sins⁴ once and for all at the point of faith in Christ." Commenting on Anderson's quote in footnote 4, Niemelä states:

Post-baptismal sins is a red herring. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. 18, para. 67, says that some argued for some degree of security. (Augustine does not critique eternal security, but rather a view only slightly less insecure than his own). The real issue is that Jesus paid sin's death penalty on the cross, irrevocably promising everlasting life to believers. That message has always been near to all (cf. the exposition of Rom 10:8 in this article).

My doctorate at The University of Oxford was written on Augustine. I have read all of Augustine's extant writings. So, I probably have a better understanding of Augustine's writings than Niemelä. Augustine's *Enchiridion* does **not argue** "for some degree of eternal security" as Niemelä inaccurately claims. This is an extremely biased reading without objective evidence. The persons whom Augustine referenced believed that faith alone saved a person and works of the Christian were judged by God for payment or temporal punishment. However, there is zero evidence that these persons believed in eternal security. What if a person renounced Christ, or denied Christ under persecution? What if they abandoned their faith in Christ? From all of the evidence we have from this time period and prior, this denial would mean the person was no longer a Christian and did not have eternal life. Niemelä assumes his conclusion. Niemelä's "red herring" is a dead cod.^{[\[198\]](#)}

Niemelä continues assuming his conclusions:

The following is the thesis of this article: We have a written record indicating that Jesus Christ's irrevocable guarantee of everlasting life to everyone who would believe His promise was clearly proclaimed throughout large geographic regions in many languages ever since Jesus Himself proclaimed that message. Romans 10:8 is no less true for the church than it was for Israel [...]

We have a written record indicating that Jesus Christ's irrevocable guarantee of everlasting life to everyone who would believe His promise was clearly proclaimed throughout large geographic regions in many languages ever since Jesus Himself proclaimed that message. [...] The existence of thousands of

lectionaries establishes that the Word was read publicly. [...] Unfortunately, since starting seminary in 1981, professors, seminarians, pastors, and congregants often have said in my hearing that grace was absent for 1,400 years. For years I lacked a good response. *Amazingly*, an interest in textual criticism led to confidence on this topic. Lectionaries offer an insight into what was proclaimed before any sermonizing began. *Eternal security* by faith-alone in Jesus-Christ-alone *was widely proclaimed* by Scripture during those 1,400 years [cites Isaiah 55:11] (italics added).

Niemelä correctly uses the word “Amazingly.” It even qualifies as stupefying that his “interest in textual criticism led to confidence on this topic.” It seems only the indoctrinated are led to confidence from this line of reasoning. Here is a syllogism of Niemelä’s argument:

Major Premise: “Eternal security by faith-alone in Jesus-Christ-alone was widely proclaimed by Scripture during those 1,400 years.”

Minor Premise: Through lectionaries people heard the words of Jesus himself irrevocably guaranteeing everlasting life to everyone who would believe His promise.

Conclusion: Some people during those 1400 years heard Jesus promise them eternal security, believed in eternal security, and so were justified by faith alone in Jesus’s promise.

Do you see the informal logical fallacy in Niemelä’s argumentation? He assumes some persons must have heard the words and also *understood* those words to mean “eternal security.” To the untrained eye, Niemelä’s 2015 article might seem impressive. It has the appearance of scholarly research in the details. However, the conclusion is an informal logical fallacy. Hearers of the lectionaries **did not** hear the words “Eternal security by faith-alone in Jesus-Christ-alone.” Those are not the words of Scripture. Niemelä exchanged the words of Scripture for Hodges’s *interpretation* of those words. Niemelä hid his conclusion in his premises. His impressive-

appearing 2015 article is nothing but a theological magic trick of smoke and mirrors.

The Scriptures (including the Gospel of John) are still read today by millions of persons around the world. They are not finding Jesus's irrevocable guarantee of everlasting life (eternal security). Why not? Because you must wear Zane Hodges's special interpretive reading glasses to find it. No person prior to 1989 understood "the Christ, the Son of God" to mean "Guarantor of eternal security." Even Zane Hodges did not believe this until the later 1980s.

Without forensic justification (developed in 1530), belief in eternal security was not possible. That would be like hearing Scripture read in an unknown language. It was not possible for anyone to understand the words read in lectionaries as Jesus promising them eternal security.^[199] Even modern theologians (outside of the GES) who believe in eternal security do not (mis)understand the words that way.

No independent theological scholar has been convinced. You have to drink the Kool-Aid to believe the GES Heresy. As referenced above, Niemelä himself admitted, "For years I lacked a good response." Somebody please inform him that he still lacks a good response. The Grace Evangelical Society Heresy remains an inexplicable, and literally *unbelievable* HERESY.

Appendix B

The GES Actual Universal Propitiation Heresy

Hodges, Wilkin and his GES claim that Christ's blood has already paid for all sins that separate the unbelieving world from God. This payment is actual, not merely potential. No person will be eternally condemned for their sins since Christ paid for them. Only the sin of unbelief in Christ eternally condemns a person. This view is difficult to derive from Scripture. As will be discussed, numerous verses speak to the requirement for faith to activate that propitiation through His blood. Numerous Scriptures announce sins of unbelievers that still need to be forgiven.

The Hodges/GES View is Illogical

In his 2001 book *Harmony with God*, Hodges wrote this, referencing Rev 20:11–15 and 1 John 2:2: “Thus one can see that the issue at the Final Judgment is not man’s *sin*, since Christ has atoned for that in its entirety. Instead, the issue is whether someone can make it into the kingdom of God on the basis of the works they did on earth, apart from the miracle of new birth that comes by faith alone. [...] *all sin IS paid for!* But if that is true, forgiveness *cannot be* the remission of some unpaid penalty” (emphases original).^[200] GES continues to teach Hodges’s view.^[201] “Just because your sin is taken away does not automatically mean you have been declared righteous. A person whose sins are no longer a barrier between him and God is not righteous positionally or experientially.”^[202]

So if “sins are no longer a barrier,” why does a person need to be “declared righteous” positionally? If the non-Christian has no sin separating him from God, then there is no need to be declared righteous. The reason we must be justified (declared righteous) by faith is because we are sinners. If Christ paid the penalty for all of our sins *whether or not we believe*, then nothing stands between us and God, thereby allowing us to spend eternity in His presence. The only question would be our degree of intimacy fellowship with God. This is universalism. Everyone is saved (justified). The world is sinless from God’s perspective. There is no reason to require the GES mantra to believe that Jesus guarantees eternal security. If Jesus paid for all sins, then even the sin of unbelief in Jesus is paid. Why is this one excluded?

The GES position on propitiation stated above is illogical. I repeat it to highlight the inconsistency. “Just because your sin is taken away does not automatically mean you have been declared righteous. A person whose

sins are no longer a barrier between him and God is not righteous positionally or experientially.”^[203] What?! Of course that person must be righteous positionally in the eyes of God. That is what forensic justification means! A person who has no debt of sin against him is by definition declared righteous! There is no need for justification by faith. This could explain why Hodges quit emphasizing justification after his departure from orthodoxy.

The Hodges/GES View is Unbiblical

This view is also inconsistent with Scripture. Hodges wrote, “The whole world is covered by His grand propitiatory work, whether they believe it or not.”^[204] But that is wrong. Scripture states, “I will deliver you [Paul] from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” (Acts 26:17–18). If the Hodges/Wilkin view of accomplished actual propitiation (not merely potential and conditional upon personal faith) is correct, why would Paul be sent to open their eyes “that they may receive forgiveness of sins”? The context is bringing Jewish and Gentile persons to faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior from sin.^[205]

Peter preached, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). “Then he [Stephen] knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43). “And they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess 2:15–16; italics original). “For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (Rev 16:19). All of these sins *still requiring forgiveness* appear *after* Christ allegedly paid for them on the cross.

So the New Testament contains numerous verses declaring that the unbelieving world still has sins that need to be forgiven by God. A person could try to claim these verses on forgiveness are for intimacy fellowship for unbelievers (experiential righteousness). But intimacy with God without faith in Jesus as God and Savior denies Scripture. “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18) “And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me” (John 16:8–9a). Not believing in Jesus Christ as God and Savior is a sin. Was it only a sin *prior* to the crucifixion when Christ paid for all sins of the unbelieving world? Why does GES exclude only this sin as the one Christ’s blood did not cover and forgive?

Another approach would be to say those sins the Scriptures discuss only receive temporal punishment, not eternal damnation. But this cannot be true when we read Peter’s gospel message to Cornelius and the other Gentiles. “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” (Acts 10:43–44). If the GES view is correct, this is a false statement. Their sins are *already* forgiven. There is no reason to believe in Him to receive remission [forgiveness] of sins. Yet this was the universally prophesied salvific message preached by the apostle Peter. Forgiveness of sins with reception of the Holy Spirit and becoming a Christian required belief in the person of Jesus. It also renders Stephen’s prayer as a martyr meaningless: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” Certainly some judgment of God is temporal, not eternal. But dismissing all post-

crucifixion divine judgment on sin as only temporal screams of interpretive bias, contrary to literally all historical Christian orthodox teachings.

But a reasonably intelligent person can always manipulate meanings to avoid reaching the inevitable conclusion.^[206] The consequences of this heresy are obvious. If Christ in actuality (not potentially) paid for the sins of the world, then even the sin of unbelief in Christ as “Guarantor of eternal security” has been paid and universalism (universal salvation) results.

Great White Throne Natural Consequences Error

Furthermore, if Jesus Christ paid for all sins in actuality then no unbeliever could ever be judged for his or her sins at the Great White Throne judgment. Hodges and GES answer by claiming this “judgment” is to prove no person could be saved by their works. This is an exceedingly myopic and extreme evangelical view. “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Rev 20:12).

Why are the books of works opened if God forgave those sins? Should we propose that only good works are judged and not bad works (sins)? Good or bad works have no bearing if the only sin is unbelief. Faith is not a work. Is unbelief a work? How are non-Christians judged according to their works if all sins are forgiven? Good works cannot even count toward a lesser punishment since the only reason the books were opened was to expose the inability of works to justify. How could people be judged by their works if the only sin remaining was unbelief? Unbelief is not a work. The answer that the books prove their works are not good enough to obtain eternal life has no Scriptural basis.

If sins are not judged by God in Revelation 20, then that means mass murders or dictators who committed genocide will be punished *to the same degree* as those who were morally upright (by human standards). Their only “sin” was unbelief.

Do not be deceived. God judges sin. The greatest is unbelief in Jesus Christ as God and Savior. But other sins are judged for degrees of punishment. The consequences of this aberrant view are not Scriptural.

Hodges proposed a “natural consequences” argument attempting to explain why unbelievers spend eternity in hell with different degrees of suffering. I have combined his numerous comments.

A lost person is not sentenced to hell for the sins Christ died for. Neither does he pay all over again for those sins. Instead, he reaps the consequences of his own estrangement from God. The deeper that estrangement is the more severe his experience of hell will no doubt be (see, for example, Matt 11:22, 24; Mark 6:11). [...] But at the Great White Throne, the issue will not be sins as such, but works, both good and bad. [...] Men do not go to hell because of their sins or their wicked works. They go to hell because their names are not found in the Book of Life. They do not have eternal life. [...] We may think of hell, therefore, as an extension of the law of sowing and reaping. Those who go there are reaping eternal *corruption*. In fact, it is the only suitable place for unsaved sinners. It is the only place that suitably fits their sinful nature and character. [...] there is a distinction made between natural or circumstantial retribution and judicial retribution. [...] provides a drug dealer and row boat example] [...] But hell is the only appropriate place to send unregenerate people who die in their sins. As Jesus said in John 8:24, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” [...] The spiritually dead sinner is cast into “the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15) where he continues to reap unending corruption. [...] Hell is the inevitable consequence of remaining *dead* in trespasses and sins. [...] A cause and a reason are not the same thing. Unbelief is the cause for the unsaved not having eternal life. Not having eternal life is the reason they are condemned to hell. (italics original).^[207]

Hodges is correct that a cause and a reason are not exactly the same. Belief results in eternal life. Having eternal life saves from hell. But unbelief results in condemnation: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, *because* he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18; italics added). *Because* is a cause. Unbelief is the cause/reason they are condemned to hell. Hodges erred by missing the fact that without unbelief (a cause) there would be no reason a person must be condemned to hell. Hodges tried to separate cause and reason. Jesus did not.

Hodges never did explain why a person “reaps the consequences of his own estrangement from God.” There is no estrangement from God without sin. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear” (Isa 59:2).^[208] If Christ paid for all sin then no estrangement exists. Hodges’s attempt at distinguishing sin from bad works is similarly in error. What are bad works if they are not sin? Did a carpenter do bad work by building the home crooked, or the plumber do bad work by leaving a leak in the toilet drain? Good works refer to righteous deeds and bad works refer to unrighteous deeds. Unrighteous deeds are sin.

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “*will render to each one according to his deeds*”: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (Rom 2:5–12).

Trying to distinguish sin from unrighteous deeds (bad works) is a self-serving error. Unrighteous deeds are sin. Sin causes estrangement from God. Sins already paid and covered cannot cause estrangement from God. Unbelief is sin. That sin of unbelief, according to Jesus, results in condemnation for rejecting eternal life. Hodges errs saying a person “reaps the consequences of his own estrangement from God.” There is no estrangement if Jesus as propitiation paid universally for sin.

Hodges uses analogies to explain his “natural or circumstantial retribution and judicial retribution.” The concept is sound, but his examples

fail to prove his point. Rowing a boat in a sea of boiling water is not a natural consequence of human sin. A boiling sea of water is not natural—it requires divine causation. His drug dealer example is true but cannot be transferred to propitiation. Yes, the judicial punishment for sin was paid. But the natural result of sin is not eternal condemnation in suffering corruption. As Jesus said in John 3:18, condemnation results from unbelief in the Son of God (required to pay for sin). It is not natural.

In one sense, Hodges is correct that “Men do not go to hell because of their sins or their wicked works. They go to hell because their names are not found in the Book of Life. They do not have eternal life.” We all sin and do wicked works. We should all be in hell. There is only one reason people's names are not in the Book of Life and they do not have eternal life. Sin is not the reason. The reason is they have not believed that Jesus is God incarnate and Savior from sin. Believing results in forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. Hodges confuses the real issue.

Hodges writes, “the lake of fire (Rev 20:15) where he continues to reap unending corruption. [...] Hell is the inevitable consequence of remaining *dead* in trespasses and sins.” However, this cannot explain eternal suffering. If Hodges is correct, persons should be eternally separated from God’s life. But, they should *not* suffer even his so-called natural consequences of sin. Hell is an inevitable consequence, but not a natural one. Hodges himself noted hell was created for the devil and his angels. Hell is not natural for humans. “Unending corruption” is continual decay, not suffering consequences eternally. Hodges misled Wilkin and some persons within the Grace Evangelical Society.

The Historical View is Correct

Hodges held the traditional historical view of propitiation in 1985. “The saving propitiatory work of Jesus Christ was an outflow of the unconditional love of God to men. By it, every believer is delivered from all judgment that would decide his eternal destiny in heaven or hell.”^[209] But after he changed the meaning of “the Christ” from his John 11:25–27 error, Hodges changed on propitiation. He approvingly quoted Douglas Moo: “Christ, Paul implies, now has the place that the ‘mercy seat’ had in the Old Covenant, the center and focal point of God's provision of atonement for *his people* (p.236, italics added).”^[210] In the next sentence Hodges claims, “This interpretation is completely harmonious with what is covered in the first two chapters of this book. Christ in His own Person is the propitiation for *all* human sin” (italics added). Hodges replaced Moo’s limited extent of “his people” with his own universal “all human sin.” These are not “completely harmonious.” Moo’s statement is historical Christianity. Hodges’s statement is a heresy.

In contrast, we uphold the view Christianity has maintained historically. We understand Christ as propitiation for the sins of the world and Christ as Savior of the world similarly. “For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God [the risen Christ], who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” (1 Tim 4:10). Compare 1 John 4:14, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *as* Savior of the world.” The words of Paul and John do not mean Christ has already saved every human from hell in a universal salvation as Savior of the world (universalism). They mean every human may believe in Jesus as Savior to forgive their sins. Personal faith is

required. I must believe in Jesus Christ as *my* Savior for Him to become my Savior. Faith is the catalyst producing the result.

Allow me an analogy. As a surgeon, I am a savior from cancer for the whole world. I am available for anyone to come to me for salvation from cancer. But if persons do not come to me for the cancer operation, then they are not saved from their cancer. My work as savior from cancer is available to everyone; but, it is not appropriated by everyone. A personal response to me as savior is required for salvation from cancer. Likewise, Jesus is the Savior of all persons—He takes away the sin of the whole world. But a personal response of faith in Jesus as God and Savior is required for salvation. Jesus is Savior to all persons, but in a very special way He is Savior to those who believe in Him. So Jesus “is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:10).

Likewise, Christ’s propitiation for sin in 1 John 2:2 and John 1:29 must be personally appropriated in order for sins to be forgiven. When I believe that Jesus is God and Savior from sin, my sins are forgiven. The apostle John magnifies this personal aspect of faith several times in his gospel. “Therefore I [Jesus] said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.” (John 8:24, Wuest). That is fairly personal.^[211] John also emphasizes this personal aspect with the man born blind, whom Jesus healed. Notice what John records after detailing how the former blind man defends Jesus to the Jewish leaders as a prophet of God. The man worshipped Jesus.

“Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” ... Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” And Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.” Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him. (John 9:32–38)

Similarly, in the climax of John's gospel, Jesus told Thomas, "'Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and *my* God!'" (John 20:27–28; italics added). To believe that Jesus is God and the Savior of the world is not a generic conviction a fact is true. It is a *personal* conviction that Jesus is *my* God and *my* Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ remains God and Savior without personal faith. But without personal faith, my sins are not forgiven. "Christ has accomplished salvation for all people ..., but his atonement is effective for personal sin only for those who receive it."^[212]

Another analogy may help us. In the year 2020, it is a fact that Donald Trump is President of the United States. But, you can believe that Trump's Presidency is legitimate or illegitimate. There are persons who believe that Trump's Presidency is legitimate. They might wear MAGA caps and carry placards supporting Donald Trump as President. They believe Donald Trump is legitimately *their* President. There are other persons who believe that Trump's Presidency is illegitimate. They might riot and call openly for President Trump's impeachment or assassination. They do not believe Donald Trump is legitimately *their* President. I have heard people say, "Trump may hold the title 'President,' but he is not *my* President." Likewise, faith that results in justification is not to believe a generic fact about Jesus generally accepted within Christianity. Faith that saves (justifies) requires me to be convinced that Jesus is *my* God and *my* Savior from sin.^[213]

Most importantly, this heresy cannot be reconciled with the words of Jesus Himself. Jesus declares one sin *will never be forgiven*. This one sin *always* results in eternal condemnation *without hope*. "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word

against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.” (Matt 12:31–32). “‘Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is *subject to eternal condemnation*’—because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit’” (Mark 3:28–30; italics added). Attributing the miracles of the Holy Spirit (performed through the incarnate Christ Jesus) to Satan is a sin that could never be forgiven. This sin resulted in eternal damnation. This is the “eternal sin.”^[214] The universal actual propitiation view cannot be reconciled with this eternal sin. Either Jesus was wrong or Hodges was wrong. I choose to believe Jesus.

Conclusion

Christ is Savior of the whole world. He is *my* Savior only when I believe in Him. Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. His propitiation forgives *my* sin only when I believe in Him. Christ's propitiation for sin is universal in extent but only credited personally with intent.^[215] The Grace Evangelical Society doctrine of actual universal propitiation is another heresy. Despite the GES protests, the logical result of their view is universalism. Hodges's "natural consequences" argument cannot withstand scrutiny. No person ever need believe that Jesus is the "Guarantor of eternal security" or "God and Savior from sin" because the debt for all sins was paid. Therefore, no sin separates humanity from God. So, no person needs to believe in Jesus to be on good terms with God. No separation from God (due to sin) means no hell for anybody. No human will ever be judged by God for his or her sin. That is a heresy.

The Apostles's Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed all state "he will come to judge the living and the dead." The early church understood this as judging sin. Paul wrote, "you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who '*will render to each one according to his deeds*' ... in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Rom 2:6,15). Paul understood God *will* judge sin (Rom 2:12, "For as many as have sinned"). Peter wrote, "*their* lawless deeds—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Pet 2:9). "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which

ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 15). God will judge sin. Jesus promised it: “for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28–29).

I again cite McGrath: “Heresy is best seen as a form of Christian belief that, more by accident than design, ultimately ends up subverting, destabilizing, or even destroying the core of Christian faith.”^[216] Scripture repeatedly warns God *will* judge sin. Deleting God’s final judgment on sin is a heresy.

Heresy is like a lie. If you tell one lie then you must cover it up with more lies. If you create one heresy, then you must cover it up with more heresies. Hodges, Wilkin, and the Grace Evangelical Society were/are wallowing in heresies. They’ve repeated them so many times the heresies have become their truth. I continue to pray “deliver us from the evil.”

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[1] Patristics is the study of the Early Christian Church Fathers.

[2] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a sect is “A group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs (typically regarded as heretical) from those of a larger group to which they belong.”

[3] David Runia, “Philo of Alexandria and the Greek *Haeiesis*-Model,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 53 (1999): 117–47 at 118. This includes to seize (conquer) a city, elect a magistrate, decision for a course of action, a personal inclination from one’s repeated choices, a school of thought or action, a group with common ideas and goals, and a group/sect outside of recognized boundaries teaching false doctrine.

[4] Carlos Raúl Sosa Siliezar, *Savior of the World: A Theology of the Universal Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

[5] Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 59.

[6] McGrath, *Heresy*, 11–12.

[7] Robert Peterson, “Christian Assurance: Its Possibility and Foundations,” *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 18.4 (1992): 10–24. He writes against Zane Hodges’s 1989 *Absolutely Free* unprecedented view of assurance and belief in eternal security as required for justification, without faith in Jesus as God and Savior. He calls it a heresy.

[8] Grace Evangelical Society Website; accessed September 27, 2020 at <https://faithalone.org/beliefs/>.

[9] Thomas Thompson, “The History of Justification by Faith Alone up to the Reformation,” *Monergism* accessed 10-18-2020 at <https://www.monergism.com/history-justification-faith-alone-reformation>. His attempt to connect his Reformed theology with early Christian authors is deficient. See Kenneth Wilson, *Augustine’s Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to “Non-free Free Will”: A Comprehensive Methodology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018) and *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (Montgomery, TX: Regula Fidei Press, 2019); Thomas Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948).

[10] Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 444. Luther never taught eternal security.

[11] Grace Evangelical Society Website; accessed 10-23-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/beliefs/>.

[12] Robert Wilkin, *Confident in Christ* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 7.

[13] Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 96–97.

[14] *Ibid.*, 185.

[15] This is calculated based upon approximately 2.5 billion Christians worldwide, with 1.3 billion Roman Catholics, 300 million Orthodox, and 900 million Protestants. Of the 900 million Protestants, the only ones potentially believing in eternal security are 100 million Baptists and 50 million non-denominational Christians. Half of these adhere to Lordship Justification or Reformed theology (teaching perseverance, not eternal security) leaving 75 million. So 75 million of 2.5 billion is three percent (3%), thereby damning 97% of Christianity to hell with this deviant view.

[16] The Grace Evangelical Society was founded by Robert Wilkin in 1986, who has remained its director since its inception. See editor Wilkin’s note in Don Reiher, “Zane Hodges and GES Did Not Change the Gospel,” *JOTGES* 23.45 (2010): 31–58 at 57: “In 2005 GES admittedly changed our

Affirmations of Belief. We added under ‘assurance’ the fact that assurance is of the essence of saving faith.”

[17] The Free Grace Alliance formed in November 2004. The majority of prominent Free Grace leaders within GES rejected Wilkin’s change. Technically, the FGA formed the year prior “to connect, encourage, and equip believers to advance the grace message around the world.” But, the novel teachings of the two persons controlling GES (Hodges and Wilkin) were already being voiced. Free Grace leaders split from GES the next year over the content of saving faith. See Charles Bing, “The Free Grace Alliance within the Free Grace Movement: It Is What It Is!” Free Grace Alliance National Conference, November 14, 2014. “I repeat, the FGA was not a split of any kind with GES. Doctrinal differences only emerged later.” Accessed 11-12-2020 at <https://www.gracelife.org/resources/articles/?id=23>. The statement is true but the heretical GES doctrine was already being made evident in the teachings of Hodges and Wilkin five years earlier.

[18] John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988).

[19] Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Redención Viva, 1989), 39.

[20] Zane Hodges *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1985), 8.

[21] In addition to the former GES leaders who left GES, the Bible Broadcasting Network (BBN) president Lowell Davey terminated MacArthur’s “Grace to You” program in 1989 after the publication of *The Gospel According to Jesus*. “In a letter dated January 15, 1990, Davey cited a ‘drift by Dr. MacArthur to a theological position that we could not adhere to’ and said that MacArthur’s sermon series on the theology of election ‘convinced us that the direction of “Grace to You” was toward Hyper-Calvinism.” Accessed 28 September 2020 at <http://www.religionfacts.com/john-macarthur> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_F._MacArthur. The popularized term Lordship Salvation is misleading. MacArthur taught Lordship Justification, while other Christians taught Lordship Sanctification.

[22] Zane Hodges, “We Believe In: Assurance of Salvation,” *JOTGES* 3.2 (1990): 3–17 at 3.

[23] Hodges, “Assurance of Salvation,” 14.

[24] Reiher, “Did Not Change the Gospel,” 42.

[25] Zane Hodges, “Assurance: Of the Essence of Saving Faith,” *JOTGES* 10.18 (1997): 3–17 at 7.

[26] Reiher, “Change the Gospel,” 45–46.

[27] Zane Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1: The Content of Our Message,” *JOTGES* 13.25 (2000): 3–12 at 5.

[28] Hodges, “Content of Our Message,” 4.

[29] *Ibid.*, 5.

[30] Reiher, “Change the Gospel,” 53.

[31] *Ibid.*, 53.

[32] Zane Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit: Winning the Wealth of the World to Come* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972); *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1981); *Here Walks My Enemy: The Story of Luis* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1982); Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text with Apparatus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982); *Grace in Eclipse: A Study on Eternal Rewards* (Dallas, TX:

Redención Viva, 1985). This last book mentions both elements but Hodges does not definitively argue belief in Jesus as Guarantor of eternal life is required for justification.

[33] Zane Hodges *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1981).

[34] Zane Hodges *The Gospel Under Siege: Faith and Works in Tension*, revised and enlarged (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1992). 19: “Individuals are saved when they are convinced of that promise and thus they are sure they have eternal life.” The 1981 original edition did not have this sentence.

[35] The same pattern can be seen in *The Hungry Inherit* from its first printing in 1972, then through the 1997 second edition, and then the GES 2016 edition after Hodges’s death.

[36] Wilson, *Augustine’s Conversion and Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism*.

[37] Prov 27:17 “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits [face] of another.” (NRSV)

[38] Reiher, “Change the Gospel,” 31–58.

[39] Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, 11, 14, 18. Hodges uses “Son of God” in the next paragraph.

[40] Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 70.

[41] Zane Hodges, *Hungry Inherit*, 68.

[42] Zane Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, 3rd edn. (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1997), 20.

[43] Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1981), 55.

[44] *Ibid.*, 56.

[45] Zane Hodges, *Here Walks My Enemy* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1982), 133 and 186–7.

[46] Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 8.

[47] *Ibid.*, 41.

[48] Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 39.

[49] *Ibid.*, 40.

[50] *Ibid.*, 169–70.

[51] *Ibid.*, 186.

[52] Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 20.

[53] Zane Hodges, “We Believe In: Assurance of Salvation,” JOTGES 3.2 (1990): 3–17 at 3.

[54] Hodges, “Assurance of Salvation,” 9.

[55] *Ibid.*, 15.

[56] Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, 19.

[57] *Ibid.*, 114.

[58] *Ibid.*, 177.

[59] See Chapter 5 under *Hodges’s Mistaken Appeal to Calvin* for a full discussion on Hodges’s error.

- [60] Martin Luther, *On Christian Freedom*, trans. H. Wace and C.A. Buckheim in Luther's Collected Works (1520). See also *Treatise on Good Works*, LW 44:23–24.
- [61] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 4:6 (1535), trans. Sandys 1575. Note that Theodore Graebner's abridged translation (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1939) omits these essential explanatory texts on pages 84–5.
- [62] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia, 1964), 27:331.
- [63] Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, VI: 273–74.
- [64] Philipp Melancthon was the author but followed Luther's theology in these early years.
- [65] Zane Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994). His writings on Luke, Romans, 1 Peter, and Jude were not published during his lifetime.
- [66] Zane Hodges, *Power to Make War* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1995).
- [67] Hodges, *Power to Make War*, 134–35.
- [68] Zane Hodges, "Assurance: Of the Essence of Saving Faith," *JOTGES* 10.18 (1997): 3–17 at 7.
- [69] Zane Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 130.
- [70] Hodges, *Epistles of John*, 228.
- [71] *Ibid.*, 212–13.
- [72] Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 39.
- [73] David Anderson, "Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification?" *CTSJ* 13 (Spring 2008): 47–59.
- [74] Hodges, "The Content of Our Message," 3–12.
- [75] Zane Hodges, *Harmony with God* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 2001).
- [76] Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 29; see also 55.
- [77] Zane Hodges, *Six Secrets of the Christian Life: The Miracle of Walking with God* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 2004), 11.
- [78] Hodges, *Six Secrets*, 32–33.
- [79] Zane Hodges, "Jesus, God's Prophet," in *The Atonement and Other Writings* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 69–109.
- [80] Zane Hodges, "The Atonement," in *The Atonement and Other Writings* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 13–42.
- [81] Zane Hodges, "Did Paul Preach Eternal Life? Should We?," in *The Atonement and Other Writings* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 43–67.
- [82] *Ibid.*, 64.
- [83] Hodges, "Preach Eternal Life?," 63.
- [84] *Ibid.*, 60.
- [85] *Ibid.*, 63–64.
- [86] Hodges, "Assurance of Salvation," 9.

[87] English Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version and New King James Version.

[88] E.g., Gen 17:5,15—“‘And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.’... And God said to Abraham, ‘As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah.’”; Ephraim Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), 127, 256–7; Rabbi Berel Wein, “The Importance of Names in Judaism (Parshas Shemos)” December 30, 2004: “For in our name lies our soul and self. That is why Jews always placed great emphasis on naming a child, for in that name there lay the history and past of the family and the hopes and blessings for the newborn’s success – Jewish success – in life.” Accessed 11-4-2020 at <https://torah.org/torah-portion/rabbiwein-5765-shemos/>; Rabbi Benjamin Blech, “Judaism & the Power of Names,” Apr 20, 2013; “Indeed, the Bible remarkably tells us ‘As his name, so is he’ (Samuel I, 25:25). Talmudic sages offer countless examples of the connection between the names of biblical characters and their actions.” Accessed 11-4-2020 at <https://www.aish.com/jw/s/Judaism--the-Power-of-Names.html>.

[89] C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 154–156; George Beasley-Murray, *John*, ed. Ralph Martin, vol. 36 of WBC, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 27; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 61; Herschel Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968), 56; I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 129; Raymond Collins, “The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel,” *DRev* 95 (1976): 118–132 at 25; Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 296–297, 487; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* in NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 188–189 where Jesus’s miracles prove his divine relationship.

[90] C. D. F. Moule, *The Origins of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 137; A. T. Robertson, *The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John* (New York: Fleming Revell, 1916), 50; Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 178; William Loader, “The Central Structure of Johannine Christology,” *NTS* 30 (April 1984): 188–216 at 202; Edward Klink III, *John* in ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 117–118, 882–884.

[91] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 17; Nonnos of Panopolis, *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, chap. 1, lines 201–4, trans. M. A. Prost, (San Diego: The Writing Shop Press, 1998), 67–68; Augustine of Hippo, “Tractates on the Gospel of John 7.20 (John 1:34–51),” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); Jean Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 42–43.

[92] Andreas Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 39–40.

[93] Arno Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John: A Complete Analytical Exposition* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1965), 44; John Gill, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Newport Commentary Series (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 48; Frederick Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John with an Historical and Critical Introduction*, translated from the third French edition with update (New York: Funk and Wagnells, 1886), 337; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Revell, n.d.; repr., Hendrickson: Peabody, 1996). Arthur Pink, *Why Four Gospels?* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1921; Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research, 1999), 1:48; Robert Reymond, *Jesus: Divine Messiah* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), 122; Brooke Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 27.

[94] Although the Codex Vaticanus, Papyri 66 and 75, and Codex Sinaiticus support the rendering υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, the Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus and the majority of extant texts support “ὕιὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.” If we deny the use here, then we should also use the Coptic texts in 1:18 over the majority text. This would unquestionably attribute deity to Jesus: “The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” Furthermore, John’s usage equates “Son” with “God.”

[95] Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Poternoster Press, 1998; repr., Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1999), 46. “It was in Jesus’ exaltation to share the divine throne in heaven that the early Christians recognized his inclusion in the divine identity.”

[96] Ibid., 10–11.

[97] Raymond Brown, “Did Jesus Know He was God?” *BTB* 15 (1985): 74–79 at 77.

[98] Keener, *Gospel of John*, 849.

[99] G. T. Burke, “Son of God,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 1125–26.

[100] The abuse of 2 Tim 2:11–13 as an eternal security passage is explained in Kenneth Wilson, “The Mistranslation of ἀρνῆσόμεθα in 2 Tim. 2:11 as ‘we deny [him]’: Correcting Errors in Grammar and Exegesis,” forthcoming.

[101] Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 50, regarding John 5:24: “To doubt the guarantee of eternal life is to doubt the message itself.” See also 57–58, and 112 (which includes John 6:47).

[102] Neither do Wilkin’s other proof texts on the GES website—John 4:14, 6:47, 11:26, and 1 Tim 1:16. Whether or not one believes the doctrine, only a presupposition of eternal security allows these particular texts about eternal life to be interpreted as eternal security. Nothing in the texts themselves teaches eternal security. Unless one adheres to annihilationism, all persons have eternal life quantitatively. Qualitative abundant eternal life experiencing God now is the crux of this gospel (cf., John 17:3).

[103] Much of this chapter was published after sending a copy as a courtesy to Bob Wilkin for his review. I have a copy of his comments. See Kenneth Wilson. “Is Belief in Christ’s Deity Required for Eternal Life in John’s Gospel?” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 12.2 (2006):58–86.

[104] Robert Wilkin, *Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of Free Grace Theology* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2018), 13.

[105] Fred Chay, ed., *A Defense of Free Grace Theology: With Respect to Saving Faith, Perseverance, and Assurance* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2017).

[106] See Appendix II for a discussion of actual versus potential propitiation of sins.

[107] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 55.

[108] John 4:26, “Jesus said to her, ‘I AM, who speaks to you’”; 6:20, “But He said to them, ‘I AM—do not be afraid’”; 8:24, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins”; 8:28, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM”; 8:58, “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM’”; 13:19, “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I AM”; 18:5, 6, and 8, “Jesus said to them, ‘I AM.’ And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, ‘I AM,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, ‘Whom are you seeking?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I have told you that I AM.’”

[109] Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), John 8:21–30. *The Good News Translation* goes too far and paraphrases “if you do not believe that ‘I Am Who I Am’.” *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation*, 2nd edn. (New York: American Bible Society, 1992), John 8:24.

[110] Mark Edwards, *Culture and Philosophy in the Age of Plotinus* (London, 2006), 152; see also Gedaliahu Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, NHS 24 (Leiden, 1984), 100–101.

[111] It should not come as a surprise that evangelism by Jesus would include the emphatic message of John's Gospel to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

[112] N.B. The payment Jesus offered the ruler for selling his possessions and giving to the poor was not entering the kingdom but having *treasure in the kingdom*. The kingdom was not the treasure. The man would have treasure in heaven *without* following Jesus. “If you want to be perfect, *go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*” (Matt 19:21). “Follow me” is not equated with treasure in heaven. Jesus used the call of sanctification discipleship (both sell and follow) to expose the ruler's ignorance of his own imperfection preventing the ruler from seeing himself as a sinner. Selling and giving to the poor would have resulted in treasure (payment) for a good work, but lack of faith in Jesus as God and Savior from sin prevented that good work.

[113] This is my translation of the Greek, Ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι. Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), John 4:26.

[114] These are John 3:15–18, 6:40–69, and 11:25–27. Believing without eternal life anywhere in the context appears in 1:7, 12, 50; 2:11, 23; 4:39–42, 53; 5:24; 7:31; 8:23, 30; 9:35–41; 10:25, 41–42; 11:45; 12:11, 27–42. Thirteen of these are addressed to the disciples after they were regenerated (John 13–20).

[115] E.g., David Anderson, “Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification?” *CTSJ* 13 (Spring 2008): 47–59 at 51.

[116] Anthony Evans, *Theology You Can Count On* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2008), 804–5 and 793–875.

[117] Hodges, “Assurance of Salvation,” 13.

[118] John Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistle of James,” *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 22:312; commenting on Jas 2:18.

[119] John Calvin, “Commentary on Hebrews” *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), commenting on Hebrews 6:4–5.

[120] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845).

[121] Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1:114.

[122] Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 117. See also his *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 240–41: “The *sylogismus practicus* thus locates the grounds of certainty of election in the presence of certain signs (*signa posteriora*) in the life of the believer” (italics original).

[123] Only with the Reformation doctrine of forensic justification (*ca.* 1530s) could assurance of eternal life as eternal security begin to be entertained as a theological possibility.

- [124] The perfect tense of the verb suggests she believed these things prior to this encounter.
- [125] Keener, *Gospel of John*, 844, 848–849.
- [126] Michael Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature, 2011–2013), John 11:25–26.
- [127] Hodges, “Assurance of Salvation,” 14.
- [128] Bob Wilkin, “The Gospel of John and Evangelism,” (video posted on December 6, 2012) <https://faithalone.org/video/the-gospel-of-john-and-evangelism/> accessed 10-25-2020.
- [129] Anderson, “Belief in Eternal Security”, 47–59.
- [130] John Nolland, "Introduction," *Luke 1–9:20*, WBC 35A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989); Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 14–15, and “Introduction,” in Luke 1–9:20, vol. 35A in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989).
- [131] Over 6000 times the Hebrew יהוה (YHWH God) is translated by the Greek κύριος (Lord) in the Septuagint.
- [132] References are usually cited using the NKJV, which the GES prefers.
- [133] Bob Wilkin, “One Word Evangelism,” *Grace In Focus*, 1999; accessed October 24, 2020, <https://faithalone.org/magazine/y1999/99D2.html>
- [134] Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation: What It Means to Believe In Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 131.
- [135] William Shedd, *Romans* (New York, NY: Scribner’s, 1879), 318.
- [136] Bruce Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1892), 142.
- [137] Robert Wilkin, *Secure and Sure: Grasping the Promises of God* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), 30 and 33.
- [138] *Ibid.*, 74–75.
- [139] Even if you attempt to make John 11:25–27 mean “Guarantor of eternal security” it is only one of seven.
- [140] GES, Grace in Focus Radio Episodes, October 23, 2020. “What Did the Samaritans Mean by ‘Savior of the World’?” <https://faithalone.org/radio/what-did-the-samaritans-mean-by-savior-of-the-world/> accessed 10/24/2020. Wilkin and Lazar fail to recognize how John explicates Christ/Messiah as Savior from sin by connecting this to John 1: 29, 36 (not guarantor of eternal life). Wilkin comments that this is the only use of the word “Savior” in John’s gospel yet neglects John 1: 29 (for John 4) that identifies the Christ/Messiah as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Wilkin denies the Samaritans were saved by believing Jesus was the Savior of the world but by “believing in Him” as the Christ, meaning uniquely for Wilkin and GES, “guarantor of eternal life.”
- [141] In modern Rabbinical Judaism, Jews do not say YHWH (the tetragrammaton) or God but refer to G-d as “HaShem” (יהוה, The Name; e.g., Leviticus 24:11, Deuteronomy 28:58).
- [142] John Niemelä, “The Cross in John’s Gospel,” *JOTGES* 16 (Spring 2003):17–28 at 25.
- [143] Hodges, *Epistle of James*, 32.
- [144] The Greek text reads, “ εἰς δὲ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ ἀλλ’ ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει, δοὺς δόξαν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πληροφορηθεὶς ὅτι ὁ ἐπηγγέλται δυνατός

ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι. διὸ [καὶ] ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην ” (NA²⁸).

[145] Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, 21.

[146] See Wilson, *Augustine’s Conversion* and *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism*.

[147] The idea of God giving faith as a gift was originally a Gnostic error by Basilides and then used by Manichaeans, and finally imported into Christianity by Augustine. See Wilson, *Augustine’s Conversion* and *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism*.

[148] Hodges, “Content of Our Message,” 4.

[149] Wilkin, *Secure and Sure*, 25 and 30.

[150] Reiher, “Change the Gospel,” 32, citing Thomas Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ: A Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith* (Milwaukee, WI: Grace Gospel Press, 2009), 30.

[151] Charles Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” *JOTGES* 9.16 (1996): 25–36 at 27. See also Bing, “How to Share the Gospel Clearly,” *JOTGES* 7.12 (1994): 51–65.

[152] Gregory Sapaugh, “A Response to Hodges: How to Lead a Person to Christ, Parts 1 and 2,” *JOTGES* 14.27 (2001): 21–28 at 27–28.

[153] Personal communication with Greg Sapaugh, November 2020.

[154] Anderson, “Is Belief in Eternal Security,” 47, 52–53, and 59.

[155] Charles Bing, “Does John’s Gospel Demand Belief in Eternal Security for Salvation?,” *GraceNotes* No.79 (2018); accessed 10-15-2020 at <https://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=79&lang=eng>.

[156] Anderson, “Belief in Eternal Security,” 57; Anderson cited Helmut Köster, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 8:585–86.

[157] Shawn Lazar, “Genuine Disagreements in the Free Grace Movement,” *GES Blog*, at accessed August 28, 2018 at <https://faithalone.org/blog/genuine-disagreements-in-the-free-grace-movement/>. Lazar attempted to deflect legitimate claims of heresy against GES by calling it “fake news” in his introduction. However, the GES Heresy *is* the fake gospel news.

[158] Anderson, “Belief in Eternal Security,” 54.

[159] Charles Bing, “Does John’s Gospel Demand Belief in Eternal Security for Salvation?,” *Grace Notes* 79; accessed 11-12-2020 at <https://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=79&lang=eng>

[160] *Ibid.*

[161] Kenneth Wilson, “Reading James 2:18–20 with Anti-Donatist Eyes: Untangling Augustine’s Exegetical Legacy,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139.2 (2020): 389–410.

[162] Wilson, “Reading James 2:18–20,” 400–410 citing John Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistle of James,” in *Commentaries*, 22:312.

[163] Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Calvinists and Lordship Justificationists all teach God’s grace and power work within the Christian to perform those good works: they are not good works done by the Christian alone. Only by replacing the object of faith from who Jesus is as God and Savior with “Guarantor of eternal security” can Wilkin and GES find their proof-texts in Scripture to exclude persons adding good works from being Christians.

[164] The bogus misinformed claim of “worshipping Mary” as a divine being or demigod will not be addressed here.

[165] For a refutation of Niemelä’s unscholarly article see Appendix I.

[166] Numerous *unscholarly* internet posts can be located claiming Luther believed in eternal security. Scrutiny exposes the many false assumptions a scholar would not permit.

[167] McGrath, *Heresy*, 59.

[168] Bob Wilkin, GES Blog “Might a Fuzzy View of Faith Lead to a Lack of Assurance?,” July 9, 2018; accessed 10-31-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/blog/might-a-fuzzy-view-of-faith-lead-to-a-lack-of-assurance/>. “Before I respond, let me say that I am friends with all the authors of the book [A Defense of Free Grace Theology]. All of them have been speakers at our annual conference and most of them have written extensively for us.” Wilkin’s accusation of “fuzzy faith” results from following the Hodges deviant view that redefined faith far outside the borders of historical Christianity.

[169] Personal communication with David Anderson (September, 2020).

[170] John H. Niemelä, “Pre-Reformation Belief in Eternal Security: The Word of Faith We Preach Is Near (Romans 10:8),” JOTGES 28 (Spring 2015): 63-80.

[171] John Niemelä, “Was the Gospel Lost Until the Reformation?” *Grace in Focus*, July 1, 2015, accessed 11-9-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/gospel-lost-until-reformation/>.

[172] See Appendix I for a detailed analysis of this logical fallacy.

[173] This is based on personal communication with attendees, who may not have perfect memories.

[174] GES Website, “Beliefs,” accessed 10-21-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/beliefs/>.

[175] Personal communication with Jody Dillow (September 2020).

[176] Fred Lybrand, Blog, April 2009; accessed 10-24-2020 at <https://fredlybrand.blogspot.com/2009/04/>.

[177] Fred Lybrand, Blog, “GES Gospel: Lybrand Open Letter,” Wednesday, April 15, 2009; accessed 10-24-2020 at <http://docyouments.googlepages.com/GESGospel.LybrandOpenLetter.04-14-09.pdf>.

[178] These include *Confident in Christ, Secure and Sure, Is Calvinism Biblical: Let the Scriptures Decide, Grudem Against Grace: A Defense of Free Grace Theology, etc.*

[179] Robert Wilkin, “Christians will be Judged According to Their Works at the Rewards Judgment, but not at the Final Judgment,” in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013). Pages 25–50. I agree with many of these authors’s criticisms of Wilkin’s position, but I do not agree with Schreiner, Dunn or Barber in their positions. Interestingly, Wilkin’s infamous redefinition of faith’s object as the promise of eternal security was not allowed in this book.

[180] Bing, “The Free Grace Alliance,” accessed 11-12-2020 at <https://www.gracelife.org/resources/articles/?id=23>.

[181] Bob Wilkin, “Might a Fuzzy View of Faith Lead to a Lack of Assurance?” GES Blog, July 9, 2018.

[182] Well, sort of correct. Wilkin, while accusing Anderson of misquoting Hodges in the same article, himself misquotes Anderson. Anderson was referring to mental assent. See David Anderson,

“Chapter 3: The Faith that Saves,” in ed., Fred Chay, *A Defense of Free Grace Theology* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2017), 69.

[183] Robert Wilkin, “A Review of Wayne Grudem’s ‘*Free Grace*’ Theology: 5 Ways it Diminishes the Gospel, Part 3,” *JOTGES* 30.59 (2017):19–34; accessed 11-13-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/journal-articles/does-free-grace-theology-diminish-the-gospel-2/>. “Since this is a book about FGT, why doesn’t he discuss the views of Jody Dillow, Dave Anderson, Charlie Bing, Charles Ryrie, Tom Constable, John Hart, R. B. Thieme, Fred Chay, Earl Radmacher, Gary Derickson, Elliott Johnson, or me?” Even Wilkin himself does not mention any GES theologian as prominent.

[184] Grace School of Theology website, accessed 10-20-2020 at <https://www.gsot.edu/accreditation/> “Grace School of Theology is a member of the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS)” and “is accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools [ATS].”

[185] Grace School of Theology website, accessed 10-20-2020 at <https://www.gsot.edu/history/>.

[186] Rocky Mountain Bible College website, “Doctrinal Statement,” <https://www.rmbc.edu/doctrinal-statement.html> accessed 10-24-2020.

[187] E.g., Wayne Grudem, *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways it Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2016). Grudem argues primarily against his former colleague at Phoenix Seminary, Fred Chay, who is Professor of Theology and Academic Dean at GSOT.

[188] Robert Wilkin, *The Road to Reward* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003).

[189] Kenneth Wilson, “Sin as Contagious in the Writings of Augustine and Cyprian,” *Studia Patristica* LXX, Vol.18 (2013): 37–45; “Redating Augustine’s *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2 to the Pelagian Controversy,” *Studia Patristica* XCVIII, Vol. 24 (2017): 431–450; “Chapter 2: A Theological and Historical Investigation,” in ed., Fred Chay, *A Defense of Free Grace Theology* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2017), 33–66; *Augustine’s Conversion from Traditional Free Choice to “Non-free Free Will,”* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (Montgomery, TX: Regula Fidei Press, 2019) with translations into Spanish, German and Portuguese; “Reading James 2:18–20 with Anti-Donatist Eyes: Untangling Augustine’s Exegetical Legacy,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139.2 (2020): 389–410; “Chapter 6: Calvinism is Augustinianism” in ed., Steve Lemke and David Allen, *Critiquing Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2021 forthcoming); *God’s Sovereignty: An Historical, Philosophical, and Christian Theological Analysis* (forthcoming); “Augustine of Hippo’s Tenuous Tension between Stoic Providence and Christian Free Will,” *Studia Patristica*, 2021, forthcoming.

[190] Robert Wilkin, “What Is Free Grace Theology?,” *Grace in Focus*, September 1, 2014; accessed 10-25-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/what-is-free-grace-theology/>.

[191] Peter Engel, *Die eine Wahrheit in der gespaltenen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zur Theologie Georg Calixts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976). Also known as Kallisön with different spellings of his surname.

[192] In the New Testament, the articular use of faith (“the faith”) most often means the doctrine of Jesus as transmitted through the apostles. See Acts 16:6, Paul and Silas “delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith”; Rom 1:5, “For obedience to the faith among all nations”; Rom 14:1 “weak in the faith”; 1 Cor 16:13 “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong”; 2 Cor 13:5, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith”; Titus 1:13 “be sound in the faith”; Col 2:7, “established in the faith”; 1 Tim 1:2, “To Timothy, a true son in the faith”; 1 Tim 1:19, “concerning

the faith have suffered shipwreck”; 1 Tim 5:8, [in not providing financially for his own family] “he has denied the faith”; 1 Tim 6:21, “have strayed concerning the faith”; James 2:1, “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ”; 1 Peter 5:9, [Satan] “Resist, steadfast in the faith”; and, Jude 3, “I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”; and Rev 14:12, “who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

[193] Whether she is likely or not to believe “the perplexing promise” of GES and simultaneously reject Jesus as God and Savior is irrelevant. The fact is that exact scenario is possible with the GES Heresy. For example, Fred Chay sent me the following conversation about his personal admonishment of Wilkin years ago: “Given your view then it sounds like person could be an atheist and become a Christian since you do not need to know Jesus or who Jesus is. He [Wilkin] said, ‘Well I guess that is right.’” Wilkin may have changed his mind since that time. We hope so.

[194] I would like to see Bob Wilkin break his predictable pattern of extremely petty and overly detailed attacks that distract his readers from the main points of error in his heresy.

[195] David Anderson, “Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification?” *CTSJ* 13 (Spring 2008): 47–59.

[196] Philipp Melancthon, *Commentarii in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Wittenberg, Germany, 1540; repr. Leipzig, Germany: Teubneri, 1861 by T. Nickel), 10–13, and 20 “Iustificatio,” and accessed 11-8-2020 at <https://archive.org/details/commentariiinep00melagoog/page/n73/mode/2up>; Stephen Strehle, *The Catholic Roots of the Protestant Gospel* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1995), 66–73; Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 444.

[197] John H. Niemelä, “Pre-Reformation Belief in Eternal Security: The Word of Faith We Preach Is Near (Romans 10:8),” *JOTGES* 28 (Spring 2015): 63–80, cited here at 64, 72, and 79.

[198] To make matters worse, John Niemelä contacted me prior to writing this 2015 article asking for the place Augustine mentioned these “faith alone” persons. I did not provide him with the reference because I suspected he would misuse it. I told him that it was impossible to say these persons believed in eternal security. Niemelä ignored it. He also used equivocation by stating “some argued for some degree of security.” Some degree? He assumed his conclusion without evidence because it fit his heretical paradigm. According to the GES Heresy, *absolute* assurance is required, not “some degree.”

[199] Of course, GES could appeal to a direct revelation to an elect person’s mind by the Holy Spirit.

[200] Zane Hodges, *Harmony with God: A Fresh Look at Repentance* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 2001), 67–75 at 69 and 71.

[201] Zane Hodges, “The Final Judgment,” GES Blog, October 7, 2016; accessed 11-13-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/blog/the-final-judgment/>; “Jesus Is the Propitiation for All, But Only the Mercy Seat for Believers: Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2,” *Grace in Focus*, 2010; accessed 11-13-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/magazine/y2006/06ja1.html>

[202] GES Staff, “Q & A,” *Grace in Focus*, March 1, 2018; accessed 11-13-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/qa-9/>

[203] GES Staff, “Q & A,” *Grace in Focus*, March 1, 2018; accessed 11-13-2020 at <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/qa-9/>

[204] Hodges, “Atonement,” 28.

[205] Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 117–18. Hodges argues Acts 11:18 is not eternal life but experiencing God. But there is no imminent judgment against Gentiles as there was for Jews in Israel at the time of Christ to avoid the 70 AD judgment through Titus. Regarding Cornelius and the Gentiles, Hodges writes, “We might say, ‘They entered into the Christian life’” (italics original). So Hodges inconsistently argues for a present experiential qualitative understanding of life (not longevity of life eternally with God in justification) in Acts 11 while ignoring this insight for his key text in John 20:30–31. He also argues that “*Forgiveness is not a judicial issue between man and God, but a personal issue between man and God* (italics original)” and “Because eternal life and forgiveness are *not the same thing. The former is required for eternal salvation, the later for harmony with God*” (italics original), pages 72 and 99. This is an assumption that he in no way proves to be absolute in this book.

[206] Bill Clinton’s infamous words to the grand jury about fellatio with Monica Lewinsky come to mind, “It depends upon what the meaning of the word ‘is’ is.”

[207] Hodges, “Atonement,” 17, 34, 36–37 and 41.

[208] Other translations use built barriers, cut you off, alienated, etc.

[209] Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, 56.

[210] Hodges, “Atonement,” 25; citing Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 231–32.

[211] GES might respond that Jesus made this statement prior to him paying for all sins on the cross. Therefore, even these sins of the Pharisees are covered by the blood of Christ. But Jesus knew his own death was imminent and the Pharisees would outlive him. This is a prophecy that guarantees their sins remain unpaid.

[212] Anthony Evans, *Theology You Can Count On* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2008), 745.

[213] All analogies can be scrutinized and criticized. This analogy was designed only to explain what the Scriptures (previously cited) demonstrate. In John’s gospel, faith is personal not generic.

[214] Duane Litfin, “Revisiting the Unpardonable Sin: Insight from an Unexpected Source,” *JETS* 60.4 (2017):713–32 at 731. A “hail-Mary pass” attempting to place this in a pre-cross dispensation will result in all Old Testament sins also being rendered uncovered by Christ’s alleged universal actual propitiation. The teaching that this refers to unbelief is special pleading that ignores the context.

[215] David Allen, *The Atonement: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Study of the Cross of Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2019).

[216] McGrath, *Heresy*, 59.