

A Promise Without a Foundation
(An Examination of Extreme Free Grace Teaching on Evangelism)

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There are some grace teachers today who are beginning to promote what I believe is an extreme position, which is eroding the very foundation of the Gospel message, and the hope we have through the finished work of Jesus Christ. They assume that we can evangelize the unsaved community by only sharing the promise of eternal life that Christ gave (John 6:47) without sharing the Gospel that Christ gave (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal.1:11-12).

I never want to misrepresent what people are teaching. But some of the comments and claims are confusing from those who are embracing free grace theology. I've corresponded with some of them and count them as brothers in Christ, while at the same time respectfully disagreeing with them on some of their conclusions. It seems that some are presenting the teaching that we can share the promise of Christ (2 Tim. 1:1) without the Gospel of Christ (1 Thess. 3:2). This poses a problem. Instead of building upon the foundation of the Gospel message they are sharing a promise that has no solid substructure or base to support it (Matt. 7:26). In short, the promise becomes invalidated, discredited, and unsupported without the Gospel message.

In this study, we will examine that the promise of eternal life, which was spoken by Christ, becomes meaningless, if there is no Gospel foundation underlying this promise. We will also learn that it's Biblical to share the Gospel message with the unsaved masses by presenting the clear claims of Jesus Christ as they are unveiled in the Gospel (15:1-4).

1 Corinthians 2:2

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

We should never be ashamed of the Gospel message since Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16), nor should we ever stop

sharing it with those who are unsaved, since it's still "the power of God unto salvation."

What Can We Do?

Psalm 11:3 declares:

"If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Beloved, there is nothing we can do! Without the foundation of the Gospel message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4), we have no message to share with lost sinners, who are on their way to hell. We have no promise of eternal life ("Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" – 1 Cor. 15:18). In fact, we have no hope, no future, and are still under the condemnation of our own sins ("yet in your sins" - 1 Cor. 15:17).

Without the foundation or understructure of the Gospel there is no basis, validity, weight, or substance to any promise that might be shared with sinners who are in need of salvation. This is true even regarding the promise of eternal life. If one attempts to share the promise of eternal life that Christ gave, without presenting the personal claims of Jesus Christ, then the promise becomes invalid or ineffective, since it would be true that "in this life only we have hope in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:19). Failure to communicate the Gospel message to the unsaved takes away the foundation from every promise that Christ gave and the only way that souls can be saved.

Confusing?

The statements below are very confusing, misleading, and extreme by some of those who espouse free grace. As we embrace free grace theology, we must be careful we do not lose our way by disregarding the content of the Gospel message which is the foundation of the free grace message.

Zane Hodges wrote:

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

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

"The simple truth is that Jesus can be believed for eternal salvation apart from any detailed knowledge of what He did to provide it." [Zane C. Hodges, "How to Lead People to Christ, Pt.2," Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society 14 (Spring 2001): 12.]

This conclusion seems rather bizarre to me, since John 3:16 is found in the Gospel of John!

Wilkin adds:

"Biblical faith in Jesus is not faith that He existed, nor faith in His deity, nor even faith that He died for our sins and rose again. In the Bible, to believe in Jesus is to be convinced that He who died and rose again guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him." [Robert N. Wilkin, Secure and Sure (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), 28.]

Bob Wilkin also states:

"You can believe many biblical concepts and still miss the one truth that is saving—the truth of the gospel. For example, you can attest to Jesus' deity, His virgin birth, and His bodily resurrection, and yet not believe Jesus' promise to give you eternal life freely if you just believe in Him for it. There is only one truth that will save: Jesus' guarantee that anyone who believes in Him for eternal life has it." [Robert N. Wilkin, Confident in Christ (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 10.]

In other words, one can have faith in Christ's death and resurrection without understanding why he died, as long as that person believes His promise about eternal life. I like brother Bob. We both believe in free grace. I've had correspondence with him on various matters. But I think he has missed it on this point and may confuse people.

Something New?

Hodges and Wilkin, among others, have supposedly discovered some new truth that both they and theologians have not unearthed down through the

centuries. Amazing! Yes, it's hard to believe! And what they are teaching simply is not true.

As Harry Ironside used to say:

"If it's new it's not true, and if it's true it's not new."

Somehow these men have come to understand through their study of the Gospel of John and other Bible texts that a person no longer must believe in the message of the Gospel to be saved. They no longer must understand about the cross, Christ's sacrificial death and the shedding of His blood, or the burial and resurrection of Christ in order to be saved. In short, the truth that a person must believe, so they can be saved, is no longer the message of the *Gospel*, but only Christ's *promise* to give eternal life.

Is this really what the Bible says? In the remainder of this study, we want to come to grips that without the "preaching of the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18) and the foundation of the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1-4), there can be no valid offer of the promise of eternal life, which Jesus made. Not only do Christians need to understand this truth but unconverted sinners need to embrace this truth before they can be saved. In some ways this teaching of Hodges and Wilkin almost sounds like pluralism. Hindus and heathen all over the world need to know who Christ is and what He has done for them if they are ever going to be saved.

Romans 10:14-15 asks this question to Hodges and Wilkin:

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

"Till the whole world knows,
Till the whole world knows,
I will shout and sing of Christ my King,
Till the whole world knows."

The Chicken or the Egg?

Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Hodges and Wilkin would have us believe that the chicken comes first and there is no need for an egg! They assert that all a person must do is believe in the promise of eternal life that Jesus gave without believing in the origin of the promise which is the death and resurrection of Christ. These men have forgotten that a chicken must hatch from an egg! There needs to be a starting point and for those who want to be saved the origin and foundation of their salvation is the Gospel message.

The Bible repeatedly teaches that sinners need to believe in the Gospel message to be saved. They must come to a knowledge of the Gospel truth before they can place faith in Him for salvation and eternal life (“who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” - 1 Tim. 2:4).

Romans 1:16 declares:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

This verse links believing to “the gospel of Christ” and suggests that a person must believe in the Gospel message in order to be saved. It clearly reveals that the Gospel must be preached to lost sinners and that every sinner must believe in the Gospel message of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection for their salvation.

Acts 15:7 says:

“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.”

Unsaved people are invited to hear the Gospel message and then believe this wonderful message so they might be saved from hell. The Scriptures are unmistakably clear on this point. Unregenerate people need to hear the

Gospel truth and then believe this message in order to be saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2 – “the gospel ... By which also ye are saved”).

Hodges and Wilkin want to focus on the promise of eternal life as the foundation of one’s salvation. The Scriptures do not teach this. Let us remember one thing. We do not believe in a promise to save us. We believe in a Person to save us! Paul declared “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12). Actually, we believe in the Christ who gave the promise!

Acts 16:31

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

So what does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ? It means to place our trust (faith or reliance) in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection for salvation and eternal life. When a person believes in Jesus Christ they are embracing His claims and placing their trust in the fact that Jesus is who He claimed to be and that His death accomplished what He claimed it accomplished.

2 Corinthians 4:4

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

Paul recognized that the Gospel message was the only hope for lost humanity. It was the message that could penetrate through the blinded minds and barriers erected by Satan. Therefore, he preached this message. It was the foundational message that brought “light” into the minds of lost humanity and delivered sinners from spiritual blindness. The message of the Gospel is the foundational message that every unsaved person must hear and believe to be saved. Everything else is secondary to this message. The egg must come first.

Baking a Cake

A wife in the kitchen cannot bake a cake without first knowing and understanding about the ingredients! There will be no cake without understanding the importance of the ingredients or recipe. In a similar way,

I must understand the content of the Gospel message before I can understand the promise of eternal life. I must “come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) and be willing to “come to Christ” (John 6:37), believing in His person and work, before I can come to embrace the reality of the promise of eternal life that He offers. I must have “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4) illuminate my mind and heart before I can embrace the precious promise about eternal life. I need the underlying ingredients (the Gospel message) before I can get to the cake (the promise of eternal life).

I can't get to the promise without first believing in the Christ who gave the promise.

John 6:47

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me (Christ) hath everlasting life (the promise).”

Christ comes before the promise! I must believe in Christ before I can believe in the promise. I must understand about Christ's payment on the cross before I can get to the promise about eternal life.

1 John 5:13

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

It's personal belief in Christ that results in knowing about the promise of eternal life. I believe in Christ and then claim the promise. I don't believe in the promise without believing in the Christ who gave it. Believing in Christ precedes the knowing! Believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is inseparably bound to the promise of eternal life. You can't have one without the other. They are like two sides on the same coin.

Ephesians 1:13 declares:

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

When a person places trust or faith in the Gospel, it's only then that can be saved, sealed, and sure of eternal life. Please note that it's the Gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection that saves sinners ("the gospel of your salvation"). This is not merely a theological truth to know in our Christian life after we are saved; it's a truth that must be heard and known prior to conversion so we can be saved ("after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation"). Elsewhere this is called the "gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:29; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 3:2). The point is this. If sinners are going to be saved, they must understand and embrace the Gospel message by faith. Faith is linked to belief in Christ and the Gospel message ("trusted ... the gospel ... that ye believed").

This once again illustrates the truth that without faith in the Gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ there can be no faith in the promise of Jesus Christ (eternal life). Faith in Christ precedes God's assurance of safety for the believer since the blessings of eternal life and promise of safety come "after that ye believed." The Biblical order is significant – "heard" (Rom. 10:17), "trusted" (Eph. 1:12), and "sealed" (Eph. 4:30).

Faith in the Gospel message paves the way to express faith in the promise of eternal life. The truth is this. You can't understand the promise that Jesus made without knowing the price that Jesus paid. The Gospel path is what leads to the promise of eternal life.

The Root and the Shoot

John 3:15

"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

The analogy of a root and shoot relationship can be used to convey the Biblical order. The root comes before the shoot. In the above verse the believing comes first before the promise of eternal life can be embraced. If we first believe in Christ, who He is and what He has done (John 3:16), then we will immediately possess or "have eternal life" (John 3:15) and "never perish" (John 10:28). The believing precedes the promise and the promise precedes the perishing. The point is this. You can't get to the end without

starting at the beginning! The shoot comes forth from the root. Therefore, our faith must be rooted in Christ and blossom by embracing His promise of eternal life.

1 John 2:25

“And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”

The root of faith is in Christ and the Gospel while the shoot from this original faith embraces the promise of eternal life. You can't have the shoot without the root! The flower blooms because of the root. Faith in the promise of eternal life blooms because of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ (the Gospel).

John 6:47 is worth repeating:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me (the root of faith in Christ's person and work) hath everlasting life (the shoot of faith in Christ's promise).”

John's Gospel says we must have faith in the passion of Christ's death (“whosoever believeth in him” – John 3:16) which in turn leads to faith in the promise of Jesus Christ (“have everlasting life” – John 3:16). We begin with the root and move to the shoot. It's faith in Christ and then faith in His promise.

A Crossless Gospel?

Zane Hodges said:

“Neither explicitly nor implicitly does the Gospel of John teach that a person must understand the cross to be saved.”

Really? I'm sure brother Hodges still has John 3:14-16 in his Bible! When talking to Nicodemus, who was lost, Jesus said: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up (upon the cross to die the sinner's death): That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son (upon the cross), that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

You cannot have the promise of Jesus Christ without the passion of Jesus Christ, as seen upon the cross. John's Gospel presents the truth that the Son was "lifted up" (John 3:14) and that Christ "gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). This is substitution. This is the death of Christ. This is the cross. Lifted up was He to die, "It is finished," was His cry! How can Hodges and Wilkin miss it? It's as clear as the noonday sun!

"Blessed Calvary! Precious Calvary!
'Neath thy shadow I'll ever abide;
Blessed Calvary! Precious Calvary!
"Twas there Jesus suffered and died."

Hodges and others want to camp in John's Gospel and forget about the message of the epistles and the early church. They have also forgotten the Great Commission that Jesus gave.

Mark 16:15

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Jesus did not say, "Go into all the world and give a promise." Yes, there is a promise attached to the Gospel, but the Gospel must be preached. Jesus commanded that we go into all the world declaring the message of the Gospel which was the truth of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Let's stop fooling ourselves and finding exegetical loopholes around what Christ commanded. *To get to free grace a sinner must first hear the Gospel.* Go ye! This is not the "Great Suggestion" but the Great Commission! Nor should it become the "Great Omission" by failing to proclaim the clear message of the Gospel to a lost and dying world, just because of some new revelation found today, which allegedly cancels out the need to share the content of the Gospel message with the lost.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18 says:

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

Paul declared the Gospel to lost people and this message, out of necessity, includes the message of “the cross of Christ” or “the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). Therefore, the cross is the central message of Christianity for it portrays the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the sinner’s behalf (Col. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24). The message and preaching of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18) or the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God (John 1:29) was part of the apostolic message. How can the cross of Christ “be made of none effect” (1 Cor. 1:17) if the Gospel message of the sacrificial death of Christ was not presented by the apostle? Paul knew that if men were impressed by his oratory or rhetoric then he would defeat his efforts to set forth the true meaning of the cross of Christ to the unsaved. There is no getting around it.

The way to the promise of eternal life is the way of the cross!

“I must needs go home by the way of the cross,
There’s no other way but this;
I shall ne’er get sight of the gates of light,
If the way of the cross I miss.
The way of the cross leads home,
The way of the cross leads home;
It is sweet to know, as I onward go,
The way of the cross leads home.”

I’m still singing it!

Some of the “grace thinkers” are starting to miss the way of the cross!

Of course, the Gospel also includes the message of the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:4). Christ rose from the dead to substantiate His claims and promises (Rom. 4:25). Without the resurrection of Christ there could be no promise of eternal life. A dead Christ cannot provide eternal life to the unsaved masses. The promise of eternal life becomes an empty promise without the empty tomb! The resurrection is the cornerstone of the Gospel message and was faithfully shared by Christ’s followers in the early church

(Acts 1:3; 2:32; 4:8-12). During Christ's earthly ministry He always offered the promise of eternal life in view of the prospect of His future resurrection (John 2:19; 11:25) and Messianic claims (Ps. 16:9-11; Isa. 53:9-10). Everything is a flop, failure, and fictitious promise if there is no bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-19). This is why Paul preached unto them "Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). Hodges and Wilkin should take note.

Romans 10:9 declares:

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

The Scriptures confirm that a person must not only believe in the death of Christ on their behalf but also in His bodily resurrection. It's only then that a person can be saved ("thou shalt be saved"). Belief in the risen Lord is an integral part of the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:4).

Turning on the Lights

2 Timothy 1:10

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

Were you ever sleeping in a dark room when someone came in and turned on the lights? This is what happened when Jesus Christ came into the world, died on the cross, and rose again. Suddenly the lights came on! The Gospel message brought illumination or light to a world of lost sinners that were in need of salvation. Paul was talking about salvation when he said "hath saved us" (vs. 9), when he addressed "our saviour" (vs. 10), and when he spoke about the "gospel" (vs. 10) which is the message that saves a person from hell. Therefore, it seems likely that Paul has spiritual deliverance and eternal life in his thinking. The point is this. Through the Gospel message unsaved humanity could now grasp the meaning and promise of salvation and eternal life. A new day had dawned and "the people which sat in darkness saw great light" (Matt. 4:16). Since the

entrance of Jesus Christ into the world, we have great light on this subject and meaning of eternal life. Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection brought the message of eternal life out of obscurity and into the light.

An important Biblical truth is presented in this verse. One can only understand the promise of eternal life "through the gospel" message. The Gospel message about Christ must precede the promise since "life and immortality" (spiritual life and eternal life) are actually brought "to light through the gospel." When the Gospel is presented, the lights come on! First comes the Gospel and then comes the light. It's only after the Gospel has been presented that people can fully understand or comprehend the significance of the promise, regarding eternal life, and claim this promise for themselves. Without the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ the promise of eternal life remains hidden and obscure to the sinner. Let there be light!

Think of this. How can a sinner claim the promise of eternal life, if the sin problem and sin penalty have not been removed, through Christ's payment for sin upon the cross? How can a person claim the promise of eternal life if Christ is still dead and in the grave? These Gospel truths must be shared with the sinner to bring the promise of eternal life out of the darkness and into the light. To share the promise of eternal life with an unsaved person, without sharing *why* the promise is needed, or *how* the promise is obtained, leads a person astray. It can give the sinner false hopes.

Only the message of the Gospel paints the picture of eternal life clearly and provides foundation, meaning, and significance to the promise. Any person that accepts a promise about eternal life without understanding the Gospel message has not allowed "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ ... to shine upon them" (2 Cor. 4:4). As a result, there can be no light about eternal life since "life and immortality" are brought "to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). The one (the light of the Gospel) produces the other (the light of eternal life). You can't have the one without the other. The Gospel light must shine in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6) before the promise of eternal life can be substantiated and personally claimed as one's own gift.

1 John 5:11

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

Life can only come from life! In short, there can be no understanding about the promise of eternal life without the understanding of the Gospel of Christ. One must understand that the life which is promised to them “is in his Son” (1 John 5:11) and that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The message of the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6) must precede the message of “everlasting life” (John 3:36). Without the facts of the Gospel being clearly presented there can be no light or illumination that leads people to understand about Christ’s promise of eternal life.

Psalm 119:130

“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”

It’s the Gospel message of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection that helps the sinner to see and understand his need for Christ’s offer of eternal life (Eph. 1:18). The Gospel is the path which leads to the promise that is being offered. It’s also the very foundation upon which the promise is built. There is no basis to the promise of eternal life without the foundation of the Gospel message.

Psalm 11:3

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

What can, Hodges, Wilkin, and the rest of the free grace gang do?

Harry Ironside said:

“No man preaches the Gospel, no matter what nice things he may say about Jesus, if he leaves out His vicarious death on Calvary’s Cross.” [H.A. Ironside, “What is the Gospel?” in *God’s Unspeakable Gift: Twelve Select Addresses on Evangelical Themes* (Adrian, MI: Lifeline Philippines, n.d.), 35.]

The Gospel is something I believe.

(1 Cor. 15:11 – “...so we preached and so ye believed”).

Eternal life is something I receive.

(Rom. 6:23 – “... the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”).

“My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.”

The Blood

Romans 3:25

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

Dearly beloved, it's faith in the blood of Christ and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, which provides a person with the promise of eternal life. *To get to the promise, I must come through the blood of Christ.* To understand the promise, I must first understand that Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross of Calvary, to pay the penalty for my sins. Christ's blood and sacrificial death is the foundation for my justification before God (Rom. 5:9) which grants me eternal life in God's presence through the risen Lord (Heb. 7:25). Yes, it's faith in Christ's blood. I must first express faith in what Christ has done for me before I can have faith in what Christ has promised me.

I know that both Hodges and Wilkin believe in the precious blood of Jesus Christ but some of their statements seem to be teaching a bloodless promise!

“E’er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.”

I Am Determined

As Christians, we should be determined to share the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to a world that is going to hell, since this is the only message that can save their souls (Rom. 1:16). Paul recognized there was no other message but Christ crucified and risen again.

Romans 8:34

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

The Gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection was not a theological message for Christians to learn after their salvation experience. It was a simple message for lost sinners to embrace so they might be saved. Therefore, the early church, Peter, and Paul were determined to share this message with the unsaved (Mark 16:15; Acts 2:30-37; 4:1-2, 8-12, 22-24, 33; 8:4-5; 17:18; 1 Cor. 15:11; 1 Thess. 1:7-8; 4:14). In the passage below the crucifixion or sacrificial death of Christ on the cross is highlighted. Listen to what Paul the apostle says and then what Hodges and Wilkin say.

1 Corinthians 2:2

“For I (Paul) determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

or

1 Corinthians 2:2

“For I (Hodges and Wilkin) determined not to know any thing among you, save the promise of eternal life given by Jesus Christ.”

This is a promise without a foundation! The prop is taken out from underneath Christ's promise without knowing and believing in His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). It's an empty promise without any support or backing. How can one claim the promise of eternal life if he does not know and believe that Jesus rose again to provide him with eternal life? How can a dead Christ provide eternal life? If our preaching and faith is vain, without the message or truth regarding the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:14), then the promise of eternal life is also vain!

Humpty Dumpty

I have several final thoughts in this study. A gift could not be free unless someone paid for it. In a similar way, the gift of eternal life is free (Rom. 6:23), but it was paid in full by the death of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:13). Every sinner must realize that Christ was the One that paid for their free gift, through His death upon the cross, and rose from the dead to provide eternal life (John 11:25-26). Without this understanding the gift cannot be properly understood and produce the intended result or blessing for the recipient. The concept of eternal life makes no sense without making the claims of Jesus Christ clear.

We have all heard of the story of Humpty Dumpty.

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all of the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty back together again.”

Like Humpty Dumpty, the entire promise of eternal life comes crashing down, when it's not supported by the underlying foundation of the Gospel. Even worse, Hodges and Wilkin are also tearing down the Gospel foundation itself, which underlies the promise of eternal life, by refusing to present the cross and claims of Jesus Christ in evangelism. It would seem that the props are being knocked out from underneath everything – both the promise of eternal life and the Gospel itself. We are now expected to evangelize poor lost sinners without the Gospel message and then give them a promise that has no factual or foundational basis. We must once

again ask, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3).

Consider this. How can any person believe in the free promise of eternal life (John 4:14) without first believing in the Person who gave the promise? The woman at the well asked, “Is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29). Who could ever embrace such a wonderful promise of eternal life without believing in the personal claims of the One who offers the promise? The truth is this. If a person will “believe that Jesus died and rose again” (1 Thess. 4:14) he can receive the free gift and offer of eternal life, understanding that through Christ’s death and resurrection, he can now spend eternity with God.

What good is Christ’s promise of eternal life if there is nothing to back it up? What good is free grace, if we are not able to communicate this message, through the claims of Christ’s death and resurrection? Both the message of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) and free grace is built upon the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24 – “justified freely by his grace”). Therefore, when the Gospel message about Christ is not clearly presented to the unsaved, during evangelistic outreach, the whole message about free grace and eternal life becomes meaningless. This is because both free grace and eternal life are erected upon the foundation of the Gospel message.

A promise of eternal life that is presented without the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24) would be nothing more than a scandalous or fraudulent offer that is too good to be true. The point is this. The entire free grace structure becomes meaningless and collapses without sinners understanding and believing in the Gospel message. In fact, everything breaks down without the Gospel message. The foundation is taken out from underneath the message of grace and the promise of eternal life. We have no grace and promise to share. Our “preaching” is empty (1 Cor. 15:14), our “faith is vain” (1 Cor. 15:17) and “we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19).

“All the king’s horses and all of the kings’ men
Couldn’t put Humpty back together again.”

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 9:16

“For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”

I’ll stick with Paul instead of Hodges and Wilkin on this matter!

Hodges, Wilkin, and others, who are part of what I call the extreme “free grace” gang have put the cart before the horse. *They want the promise without the person and work of Christ.* We must be careful that we do not jettison the very heart of the Christian message which is the good news (glad tidings) of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection to save sinners through the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Paul taught and preached a cross-centered Gospel (1 Cor. 1:18) so that through “the foolishness of preaching” God would “save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). The preaching of the cross was Paul’s business, and the saving of souls was God’s business.

Someone described liberal Christianity in this way:

“A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

I am in no way hinting that Hodges and Wilkins are liberal, Christ-denying apostates. I am simply reaffirming that you cannot have Christ without a cross. You cannot understand the meaning of free grace without the cross. Is there any good news without the cross? Impossible! Is there a promise and the hope of eternal life without the cross? Never! Free grace without the message of the cross? Never! A person must understand what grace is if they are ever going to be saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9).

“Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain
Free to all a healing stream,
Flows from Calv’ry’s mountain.

Near the cross I'll watch and wait,
Hoping, trusting ever,
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river.

In the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river."