

Four Free Grace Views Corrections and Clarifications

By Bob Wilkin

In the last issue I pointed out that there have been two major issues in Free Grace theology, both concerning what a person must believe to be born again. Issue one is whether a person must believe that what he receives by believing in Christ is everlasting or not. Some say, Yes, he must believe that his salvation/life/justification cannot be lost. Others say, No, he need not believe that.

Issue two is whether a person must believe in what some call *the five essentials*. At the heart of these essentials are three points: Jesus is God; He died on the cross by shedding His blood for our sins as our substitute; and He rose bodily from the dead on the third day. Some say, Yes, a person *must believe* those things to be born again. Others say, No, while those are essential truths about Jesus Christ, a person *need not believe* those things in order to be born again.

Corrections and Clarifications on the Two Issues

First, regarding the expression *the five essentials*, J. B. Hixson, in response to my article, reminded me that he does not like that designation. He pointed out that his five points really form one proposition, not five propositions.ⁱ

I used that expression to save space each time I mentioned the view. I had no intention of misleading the reader. I should have pointed out that some of the people call their view of the object of saving faith *the five essentials*, and some do not.

Second, in terms of issue one, the eternity of the gift, I didn't point out that among those who say No, one need not believe that, there are three different sub-groups.

What if a person believes, when you witness to him, that salvation begins by faith alone in Christ alone, but that it definitely can be lost due to sinful deeds? In other words, he believes that the very moment you shared with him he is saved for the moment, but he believed that he could lose it any minute. Is that person born again if he also believes in the deity, death, and resurrection of Jesus, properly understood?

Some say, No, if he believes that it can be lost, then he is definitely not saved yet. According to this view, only those who have never thought about whether it is eternal can be saved without believing in the eternity of the gift.

Others take an agnostic position. They say that if a person, at the moment of faith, believes he is saved right now, but that he can lose it in the future, then we do not know if he is born again yet or not. One who holds this view told me that only God knows about such cases.

Still others say, Yes, he is definitely saved even if he believes from the start that salvation must be maintained by good works.

Clarifications and Corrections on View One: Eternality, Deity, Death, Resurrection

I received an email from one of the people I cited as holding to view one, that one must believe both in the eternality of the gift and in the deity, death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. In the email he told me he did not believe that one must believe in the eternality of the gift in order to be born again, that one merely needed to believe the five essentials. He also asked why I thought he held that view.

I emailed him back giving him some quotes from a 2006 article which he wrote. For example, expecting a Yes answer, he wrote, “Is this biblical truth [i.e., eternal security] merely a tack-on to the Gospel, or is it part and parcel with the message of salvation?”ⁱⁱ He went on to emphasize his point: “Eternal security is a major, non-negotiable part of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!” (exclamation point his).ⁱⁱⁱ For him “the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” is the message of salvation and not a message that is broader than that.

I asked him to get back to me and explain whether I misunderstood his 2006 article, or if I understood him correctly and he has since changed his view. As of press time I’ve yet to hear back from him.

In any case, there are Free Grace believers who hold that to be born again one must believe both in the eternality of the gift and the death, deity, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. If I mis-categorized some, I am sorry. That was not my intention.

Reactions to My Earlier Article

For the most part, the reactions to my July-August article on Four Free Grace Views has been positive. Here is a sampling of some of the emails I received:

I read your article in the latest issue of *Grace in Focus* and I would like to commend you for its irenic nature. The Free Grace movement could use a lot more of that. I believe the “factions” truly are a test—a test to see who will follow the law of love.

—DB, email

I appreciated your carefulness, and irenic posture throughout, in your article in the latest *GIF*. You're at your best when simplifying seemingly complex issues to their elemental level. Thanks.

—PC, email

Thanks for the latest issue of *Grace in Focus*. It is never a discouragement but always an encouragement to receive your newsletter. I have never sensed you or even GES being “hostile or vitriolic” but simply seeking to lovingly expound the Scriptures. The articles by Zane Hodges were excellent. And you can count on my prayers for the hastening of the completion of the commentary—if the Second Advent does not occur first.

—BF, email

In reading this latest newsletter I could not agree with you more. I have been saying basically the same thing for months now. Bob, you cannot believe the differences I am finding with just the Free Grace people here. I am thankful to you for leading me in the right direction through your books and writings. Thank you.

—SL, email

I sense that we are getting past the initial shock that we are not in complete agreement on the precise object of saving faith and that we are beginning to carefully consider what others are saying, instead of just ruling out all views other than our own. In addition, the tone of the discussion seems to be improving. I see these as very helpful signs.

I was in Omaha at the end of July for a regional conference. We had two panel discussions about the four Free Grace views. The discussion, and the comments and questions from the audience, were very edifying.

Hopefully everyone in the movement can rejoice that there are a multitude of us who say the sole condition of everlasting life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from works of any kind, before or after the new birth. The fact that we have four different views about precisely what one must believe is not really a new development. These four views have been with us since GES started in 1986, and certainly long before that. Now just happens to be the time when the differences are apparent and are under discussion. I, for one, rejoice in the discussion.

ⁱ He states it this way: “These [are the] five core essentials of saving faith—viz. (1) Jesus Christ; (2) the Son of God who died and rose again; (3) to pay for one’s personal penalty for sin; (4) gives eternal life to all who trust Him and (5) Him alone for it” (*Getting the Gospel Wrong: The Evangelical Crisis No One Is Talking About*, p. 100).

ⁱⁱ Dennis Rokser, “Does It Really Matter What You Believe about Eternal Security?” *The Grace Family Journal*, Spring 2006, pp. 5-6.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 6.