

THE MINIMALIST GOSPEL IN THE CONTEXT OF ANIMISTIC WORLDVIEWS

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INTRODUCTION

We who are opposed to Lordship Salvation¹ are generally considered to be advocates of a “free grace” position. All free grace promoters see Lordship Salvation as in some sense perverting the “gospel for evangelism” with the excess baggage of works. But at least since about 1999 some very prominent free grace leaders associated with the Grace Evangelical Society (GES) began teaching that “the gospel” for evangelism is often presented with the excess baggage of too much theological information – even including the death and resurrection of Christ. The

¹ See the paper on “Lordship Salvation and Free Grace.”

claim was being made that “there is only one truth that will save: Jesus’ guarantee that anyone who believes in Him for eternal life has it.”² The author of this claim tells us frankly in one place that “*biblical faith in Jesus is not faith that He existed, nor faith in His deity, nor even faith that He died for our sins and rose again. In the Bible, to believe in Jesus is to be convinced that He who died and rose again guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him.*”³ It appears to us that the free grace effort of GES to avoid the Lordship Salvation ditch on the one side has driven some into another ditch on the opposite side. This other ditch was introduced in one article with the incredible “Deserted Island Scenario.”

ILLUSTRATION 1 **THE DESERTED ISLAND SCENARIO**

It goes like this: “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 [free] 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... 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... 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... That’s why the man on the deserted island can get saved with only the barest minimum of information. When he believes John 6:47 he is believing in Jesus as the Christ ...”⁴ Really? Is such a claim valid?

Our island friend has never heard about Christianity in his life. So how could he have been “*convinced that He who died and rose again*” was the “Jesus” of John 6:47? Jesus also said, “He who hears My word, and believes Him [the Father] who sent Me, has eternal life” (5:24). But our island friend has no understanding of either God the Father or that this Jesus was sent by Him to earth. How then could He have eternal life? And how could he have possibly known that this Jesus was even a “person” and not the moon’s wife, or a red stone that answers prayer or the creative spirit of a dead crocodile? With his worldview, what would be his understanding of sin? Stepping over food in an open market? Planting sweet potato when the moon is full? Or eating the white man’s new corn after it’s exploded? Does some god have anything to do with me? And, if so, which one? Or ones? How could anyone with absolutely no understanding of Old Testament history comprehend the meaning of “the Christ” in the Johannine sense?

² Robert N. Wilkin, *Confident in Christ* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 10. At this time the author clearly identified this one saving truth as “the gospel.” However, some who promote this new *gospel for evangelism* now acknowledge that this “*one truth that is saving*” is never identified in Scripture as “*the gospel*.”

³ Robert N. Wilkin, *Secure and Sure* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), 28

⁴ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ: Part. 1, The Content of Our Message,” *JOTGES* 13:2 (Autumn 2000) 4.

For years, many of us have been involved in evangelizing indigenous folk around the world – including islands in the South Pacific. We believe that this new gospel cannot be supported by either the totality of biblical revelation or our experience. Our view is more compatible with the teaching of the Free Grace Alliance (FGA),⁵ which began in part by former GES leaders. Our experience over recent years and on many different fields has convinced us that the Holy Scripture can best be taught by building on firm foundations using a chronological approach in our teaching.⁶ We will briefly discuss our own view under these six headings: 1) The Gospel in Church History, 2) The Gospel According to John, 3) The Gospel According to Paul, 4) Dispensational Distinctives Due to Progressive Revelation 5) The Sinner’s Worldview and thus 6) The Need for Repentance.

1. THE GOSPEL IN CHURCH HISTORY:

Church history started at Pentecost. At that time Peter addressed his fellow Jews, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men who put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held by its power... So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:22-24).

On what basis were they saved, baptized and added to the Church? In contrast to our friend on the deserted island, at least they knew something 1) about God the Father, 2) about God the Son – especially regarding His death, burial and resurrection and 3) about man – his sin and need of salvation, and repentance. Both Peter, and later John, were building on a worldview which included Judaism with its Mosaic laws and prophetic Scripture. And, to our knowledge, during all these centuries of church history, true believers have always included the death, burial, and resurrection of the divine Christ in their evangelism and presentation of “the gospel.” For this basic reason, the Chronological teaching program begins with God, His work of creation and His triune nature and attributes, His laws, and His judgment for man’s sin. Without these firm and foundational truths in place, Jesus Christ and New Testament teaching make little or no sense.

We have identified this new teaching, as illustrated by *The Deserted Island Scenario*, a “Minimalist Gospel.”⁷ Most of the theologians who propagate this Minimalist Gospel are solid believers in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, who was/is divine. They are convinced of God’s unapproachable, righteous standards and man’s total inability to meet them. They are firmly convinced that salvation is by God’s grace alone. They clearly know and believe WHO Christ is and WHAT He has done for our redemption, and in our judgment that is why they are saved!

⁵ <http://www.freegracealliance.com/> or www.gracelife.org See Charles Bing, *The Grace Life*.

⁶ The chronological teaching approach is based on Trevor Mellwain’s excellent, *Building on Firm Foundations (BOFF)*. For more information, see “Conclusion” in this paper.

⁷ Some have labeled this teaching as a Crossless Gospel, but we prefer Minimalist Gospel as those who hold this view believe and teach the absolute necessity of the death of Christ on the cross.

Those who are Minimalist gospel believers are emphatic that the cross of Christ should be preached just as Paul and the Apostles did, as it aids in the process of bringing sinners to faith in Jesus Christ. However, it is not absolutely necessary for a lost sinner to hear and believe that Christ died on the cross bearing his/her sins. Zane Hodges wrote:

What is my point? That we should not preach the cross of Christ to men? Not at all. I will make it emphatically clear a little later on that I think we should. ... In the light of what we have just said, should we preach the cross of Christ? The answer to that is emphatically yes. And the most obvious reason for doing so is that this is what Paul and the other Apostles did. ... Why should men trust Christ for eternal life? The gospel gives us the wonderful answer. They should do so because Jesus has bought their salvation at the cost of His own precious blood. ... The preaching of the cross greatly facilitates the process of bringing men to faith in God's Son.⁸

If the work that Christ accomplished on the cross is not absolutely necessary for a lost sinner to hear and believe, then we are certainly wasting an enormous amount of precious missionary years to learning language and teaching the Word chronologically.

The Minimalist Gospel is so recent that *it virtually has no history!* Why would God keep us in the dark for these last 2000 years on something so vital for the salvation of souls? That alone should make us think it through carefully, and with a good measure of holy suspicion. Is God only recently giving us *new revelation* on “the gospel” that HE so clearly spelled out – especially in the writings of John and Paul? Not likely!⁹

The GES arguments are almost exclusively based on a most unique and unfortunate interpretation of the Gospel of John. We will illustrate this by giving some example statements by several witnesses:

2. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN:

a. The Witness of John the Apostle: The whole book of John is the Apostle John's witness of what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. Concerning himself he closed his book with these words:

“This is the disciple who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written” (Jn. 21:24-25; NASB, 1976).

John's purpose in writing under divine inspiration is clear: He wrote: “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples,¹⁰ which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you [the reader] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31). “Christ, the Son of God,” is certainly a declaration of the divinity of Jesus as God. His name is not simply, Jesus. “His name” represents all that He is as both a human and divine person. So we believe that spiritual life comes at least in part through belief in the fact that the Jesus John talks about is, in fact, the

⁸ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ”

⁹ This is a euphemism for “Absolutely NOT!”

¹⁰ For example, Luke (in his Gospel) made mention of about 40 different “signs” or miracles that Jesus performed.

divine Messiah (or Gr. *Christ*), promised in the Old Testament. To us, knowledge of Christ's deity is critical to one's conversion. In the *Johannine sense*, it is precisely because "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," that he can guarantee eternal life to those who believe that He is who He claimed to be and did what He came to do. To support his purpose, John brings forth several other witnesses to the divinity of our Lord Jesus.

b. The Witness of God the Holy Spirit: Without violating John's unique personality, God the Holy Spirit inerrantly inspired every word written by John in his "Gospel." The Holy Spirit bore witness of the Son at His baptism (Jn. 1:32-33). It is the Spirit who gives [spiritual] life" (3:5-8; 6:63). As "another Helper" and "the Spirit of Truth" (14:16-17), the Holy Spirit was sent to this planet by both the Father and the Son (3:34; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7) to abide in and with every believer (14:17). He teaches us and brings to our remembrance the words of Jesus (14:26). One of His main ministries as "the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father" is to testify (or witness) about Christ Himself (15:26). He is the one who convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-11). This divine work is essential for one's salvation.¹¹ His main ministry is to bear witness, not of Himself, but of Christ (16:13-14). And He often refers to His own words in the Old Testament that He inspired Moses and the OT prophets to write.

c. The Witness of the Old Testament, Moses, the Law, and the Prophets: The contrast is made between Moses giving The Law to Israel in the OT, and Jesus giving Grace and Truth to believers in this new dispensation (Jn. 1:17). The Israelite's trust in the raised snake for healing (3:14) is used as an illustration of the believer's trust in the raised, crucified Christ for salvation (3:15-16; 8:28). Jesus said, "the Scriptures...testify about me" (5:39). Moses and The Law accuse unbelievers who reject Christ (5:44-47). As the manna came down from the sky to give physical life to Israelites, so Jesus, the Bread of Life, came down from Heaven to give spiritual life to believers (6:29-40). Jesus is the fulfillment of OT Scripture as coming from David and Bethlehem (7:42). Jesus used the Law of Moses to show Israelite unbelievers their spiritual need (7:19ff, 8:17-18). Often OT Scripture is fulfilled (12:37-41; 13:18; 15:25). In fact, how could anyone, (including our "Deserted Island" friend), with no understanding of Old Testament history, comprehend the meaning of "the Christ" in the Johannine sense?

d. The Witness of God the Father: The Father explains the Son (Jn. 1:18). "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand" (3:35). Jesus made "Himself equal with God, His own Father." (5:18). The "Father loves the Son and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel... Not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (5:20-23). The Father "gave to the Son also to have life in Himself" (5:26). Jesus correctly claimed, "the Father who sent me testifies [or witnesses] about me" (8:18-19). The Father sent Jesus to earth (8:42, 12:44-50; 14:24). The "Father glorifies the Son" (8:54). The Father and the Son are one (10:30, 38; 14:11). They are glorified together (13:31-32). He who hates the Son hates the Father also (15:23-24). The Father's voice from heaven was actually heard (12:28-30).

e. The Witness of God the Son: Jesus Himself gave witness of Himself, and His witness was true! (Jn. 8:14-18). He manifested omniscience: For instance: He knew that Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit" (1:47-48). And because of such knowledge, Nathaniel immediately gave this witness, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of

¹¹ But this does NOT mean that the unbeliever needs to know all about the work of the Holy Spirit to be saved.

Israel” (1:49). Jesus, knowing that Judas was “a devil” (6:69), prophesied that he, Judas, would betray Him (6:64, 70-71). Jesus prophesied his own crucifixion (3:14; 12:32-33, 8:28) at the hands of the Jews (7:19; 8:40). And He prophesied His personal resurrection after 3 days (2:19-22); He manifested omnipotence: For instance, he instantly changed water into wine – with an obvious appearance of age – thus manifesting his glory (2:11) and vindicating the witness of John the Apostle (1:1-3). And as “The Resurrection and the Life” (11:25), He raised Lazarus from the dead (11:43-44) and thus many Jews who witnessed this “believed in Him” (11:45).

As God the Son, Jesus made a vast number of claims about Himself saying “My testimony [witness] is true...” (8:14). And all the claims themselves are so incredible that many expositors have noted that there are really only three options available: Either Jesus was 1) a mentally deranged LUNATIC, or 2) a skillfully deceptive LIAR or 3) the gloriously-sovereign LORD GOD, the creator of everything in existence. We believe Him to be the LORD of glory partly because what Jesus SAID was supported by what Jesus DID.

1) What HE SAID – “I AM”: Jesus claimed that “if you knew Me, you would know My Father also” (8:19) and “unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” (8:24). That’s because, as He clarified: “before Abraham was born, I AM” (8:58). His name, I AM, in Greek is a phrase of two words sometimes used alone without a spoken object (as in 8:24, 28, 58; 9:9; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8). The same two-word phrase often occurs with objects: I AM: “*He*, who is speaking to you” (4:26) ... “the Bread of Life” (6:35, 48) ... “the Bread that came down out of heaven” (6:41)... “the Living Bread that came down out of heaven” (6:51)... “the Light of the World” (8:12)... “*He* who testifies about Myself” (8:18) ... “the door of the sheep” (10:7)... “the door” (10:9)... “the good shepherd” (10:11, 14) ... “the resurrection and the life” (11:25)... “the way, and the truth, and the life” (14:6) ... “the true vine” (15:1)... and “the vine” (15:5). Jesus also said, “unless you believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins¹²... “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM ...” (8:24, 28) He often identified Himself simply as I AM (8:58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8).

A few other spoken CLAIMS: For example: Christ claimed: The “Father loves the Son” (5:20) and the “Son also gives life to whom He wishes.” (5:21); The “Father ... has given all judgment to the Son” (5:22, 27) ... “and my judgment is just” (5:30). “I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (5:30; 8:42). “He who hears My word, and believes Him [the Father] who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (5:24).¹³ The “dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. (5:25). The Father “gave to the Son also to have life in Himself” (5:26). He claimed, “He (Moses) wrote about me” (5:46). Speaking of Himself, He claims perfection with these words, “there is no unrighteousness in Him” (7:18); Those who followed Him would have the Light of life (8:12). He claimed, “I and the Father are one” (10:39)

2) By What HE DID -THE SIGNS: Jesus Himself claimed; “the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify [or witness] of Me” (10:25b). Although Jesus performed “many other signs” John selected only certain ones with the purpose that the reader would “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” and that by believing, they would “have life in His

¹² Would this also apply to our “Deserted Island” friend?

¹³ Obviously our “Deserted Island” friend knew nothing about Jesus’ Father, nor that He had been sent to earth by Him. And yet it sounds like both are conditions for the reception of eternal life.

name” (20:30-31). In the first sign, Jesus instantly changed water to wine.¹⁴ This beginning of the signs was meant to “manifest His glory and His disciples believed in Him” (2:11), possibly as the sovereign creator of all things (1:1-3) with an appearance of age. After cleansing the temple, Jesus prophesied of his coming death and resurrection in three days as a future “sign” (2:18-22). During the Jerusalem Passover “many believed in His name beholding His signs which He was doing” (2:23). Nicodemus testified that no one could “do these signs... unless God is with him” (3:2). And Jesus Himself indicated that unless the people saw signs and wonders, they would not believe (4:48).¹⁵ Jesus claimed, “the very works that I do testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me (5:36). It sounds like many “believed in Him” as “the Christ” because of His many “signs” (7:31). After he healed the man born blind, even some of the Pharisees were saying, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs” (9:16)? Jesus said, “though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (10:36). Even prior to His raising Lazarus from the dead, Martha testified to Jesus, “Lord, I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world” (11:27). Then afterwards, many who “beheld what He had done, believed in Him” (11:45), no doubt realizing that He was indeed who He claimed to be, “the resurrection and the life” (11:25). And, of course, He DID many other things, including many more SIGNS.

f. The Witness of John the Baptist: John “came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him (Jn. 1:7-8). John the Baptist “bore witness” of Christ (1:15). Most of what John said about Christ after 1:19 is described by the author as “the witness of John” (1:19).” When John “saw Jesus coming to him, [he said] “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John testified of Jesus as “a Man who has a higher rank than I, for he existed before me” (1:29-30 NASB). When he baptized Jesus, “John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, ‘I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven’” and remaining on Jesus (1:32). He said, “And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (1:34). And the Jews knew that John the Baptist had “borne witness” to the divinity of Christ (3:26). John said, “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him’” (3:28). Then John spoke of Christ as the bridegroom who had come from heaven above having been sent by God. John saw himself, who is from the earth, as merely the friend of the bridegroom. John said, “He [Christ, who is above all] must increase, but I must decrease” (3:30). He also said, “He who has received His witness has set his seal to *this*, that God is true” (3:33). Speaking of John the Baptist, Jesus said, “There is another who testifies [bears witness] of me. I know that the testimony [witness] which he gives about me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified [born witness] to the truth” (5:32-33). Many said, “While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man [Jesus] was true” (10:41).

g. The Witness of Other Jewish Believers: As examples, we first mention only those who appear in the very first chapter of the book. To the Apostle John, Jesus was the Creator God of

¹⁴ Normally a vine turns water into wine. The rootstock takes moisture and nutrients from the ground and eventually grapes are borne. The grapes are harvested, crushed and the juice through the process of fermentation over days becomes wine. Jesus in an instant did what normally takes months.

¹⁵ John wrote, “many followed Him, because they saw the signs...” (6:2). However, as indicated in 6:14, Jesus knew that many followed Him, not because they saw (with perception) the signs, but because their physical needs were met (6:26; 12:37).

everything (Jn. 1:1-3) who became flesh in history (1:14). To John the Baptist He was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” (1:29) “the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (1:32) “the Son of God” (1:34). To Andrew, He was the Messiah [or Christ] of OT Scripture (1:41). To Philip, this “Jesus of Nazareth,” was “Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote” (1:45). Nathanael boldly declared Him, not only as Rabbi, but also as “the Son of God... the King of Israel” (1:49).

Other Jewish believers (men and women) bore witness to the DIVINITY of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. Some at the wedding feast in Cana recognized Jesus as God the creator of all things – even with an appearance of age. In this first sign (changing water to wine) Jesus “manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him” (2:11). Jesus prophesied of his coming death and resurrection after 3 days (2:17-22) as pictured by Moses lifting up the snake in the wilderness “so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life” (3:15). Nicodemus at least recognized Jesus as one who had “come from God *as* a teacher” for as he said, “no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (3:2-3). The officer, whose son was near death (4:43-54), and the lame man at the Bethesda Pool (5:1-9) both simply believed that Jesus was telling them the truth. The man born blind showed his faith by his worship (9:38). And there were others...

h. The Witness of Samaritan Believers: To the Samaritan woman, at first, she perceived Jesus as only a “prophet” (Jn. 4:19). But she did have faith in the coming of Messiah or “He who is called Christ” (4:25). Then “Jesus said to her, ‘I AM *He*, the *One* speaking to you” (4:26).¹⁶ It must have been then, or soon after, that she recognized Jesus as the Christ (4:29). Then, because of the woman’s witness of Christ’s omniscience, “many of the Samaritans believed in Him” (4:39). And after hearing Him in person for two more days “many more believed in Him because of His word” (4:40-41). In fact, they said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the World” (4:42). Certainly, any Samaritans who believed that this Jesus was not only *the Christ* but also *the Savior of the World* must have known that He was indeed the promised Jewish Messiah of whom the OT Prophets had spoken.

i. The Witness of Unbelievers: Some “officers” testified that “Never has a man spoken the way this man [Christ] speaks” (Jn. 7:46). Although not saying this “on his own initiative,” Caiaphas, “being high priest that year... prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation” (11:51-52; 18:14 NASB). At least three times Pilate, a Gentile politician, said “I find no guilt in Him” (18:38; 19:4, 6). He even “made efforts to release Him” (19:12) and later “wrote an inscription and put it on the cross... JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (19:19). He refused pressure to follow the request of the chief priests to instead write, “He said, I am King of the Jews” (19:21-22).

3. THE GOSPEL OF PAUL:

Like John, Paul proclaimed the Gospel, emphasizing both the PERSON and WORK of Christ. He spoke and wrote much to explain WHO JESUS IS and WHAT JESUS DID.

A. ACTS: At his conversion, Paul recognized WHO Jesus was/is – the Son of God (Acts 9:20). He “kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus (or One) is the Christ” (9:22). Then after some chronological teaching Paul

¹⁶ It may be significant to realize that both *He* and *One* are italicized signifying that they are not in the original text.

identified his evangelistic message on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as “good news” or the Gospel (13:32). It was a message to be received by faith alone (13:39). Much of his preaching was “explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ” (17:3). Some Athenians became believers after hearing Paul’s gospel (17:34), which included God’s creation (17:24) and the earth-shaking news of “Jesus and the resurrection” (17:18. 31-32). Paul was often “solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” (18:5) “demonstrating [this] by the [OT] Scriptures...” (18:28).

B. CORINTHIANS: Although Paul’s writings preceded John’s (by about 30 years) both wanted their recipients to know that Jesus was/is the divine Christ. *Christ* was the focus of the gospel. His name was not simply “Jesus.” In a letter to the Corinthian church, Paul makes direct reference to our Lord Jesus 11 times in the first 10 verses (1 Cor. 1:1-10).¹⁷ And his favorite name seems to be “our Lord Jesus Christ!” He desired that men “call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). Paul defines his “gospel” as “the cross of Christ”¹⁸ and “the word of the cross” (1:17-18). Paul knew that “through the foolishness of the [gospel] message preached,” God would “save those who believe.” So He boldly declared, “we preach Christ crucified” whether to Jew or Gentile (1:21-23). And again, “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (2:2). It was “in Christ Jesus” that Paul became the father of the Corinthian believers “through the Gospel” (4:15). Corinthian believers were sinners “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...” (6:9-11). In reference to “the gospel...by which also you [Corinthians] are saved,” Paul emphasized “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” (15:1-4). Christ, [and not just someone called “Jesus”] had been “preached, that He has been raised from the dead...” (15:12). All these truths were a big part of Paul’s Gospel for the evangelization of the Corinthians.

C. GALATIANS: Paul considered the Galatians foolish and bewitched for putting themselves under law after receiving his Gospel in which “Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified” (Gal. 3:1). Paul emphasized the CROSS-message of the Gospel (with no mixture of circumcision) even though he knew it to be an “offense” or “stumbling-block” to some (5:11). In fact some were even “persecuted for the CROSS of Christ” (6:12). And Paul himself wrote, “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the CROSS of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1:12-24).

D. ROMANS: Later, from Corinth, in about AD 58, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. His burden, especially in the first eight chapters, had to do with the “gospel of God,” which God had “promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:1-2). His gospel concerned God’s Son, “who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh [and] who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead...” (1:3-4). Concerning this “gospel of His Son” (1:9) Paul indicates his eagerness “to preach the gospel” in Rome. And why was this? His answer is clear: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (1:15-16). But for the Gospel to

¹⁷ Only once (v. 5) does Paul use the pronoun, “Him.”

¹⁸ See also Gal. 6:12-14 and Php. 3:19.

make sense, the recipient MUST know at least something about his/her sinful condition before a Holy, righteous God. Many have noted that Romans is a study on righteousness.

Following his introduction, Paul states his theme (1:16-17). To show why righteousness is needed, he methodically deals with the universal sin and condemnation of all the gentiles (1:18-32), moralists (2:1-16) and Jews (2:17-3:8). He then makes a summary statement for this first section stating that all humanity is condemned because of universal sin (3:9-20). That's the bad news. Then he deals with the good news or the Gospel. He clarifies God's program for the imputation of righteousness through the justification of the sinner by faith, not law-keeping. (3:21-5:21).

4. DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIVES FROM PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Paul told the Galatians that the Gospel he preached was given to him by direct revelation. He "neither received it from man, nor was [he] taught it." He received it "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12ff). This may be why he sometimes referred to "my gospel." (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8). Although John wrote his Gospel, letters and Apocalypse about 30 years after Paul wrote his letters, both have uniquely given us Divine revelation for this present dispensation of Grace. We agree with Ryrie who wrote: "The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; [but] the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations..."¹⁹ This is due to "progressive revelation."

The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) record an interim time between the birth of Jesus and the birth of the Church. At that time, the Apostles were all preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom primarily given to the Jews. Even the Apostles themselves had no real comprehension of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ until after these events took place (Lk. 18:31-34). Since Paul's letters had been in circulation for several years, it was not necessary for John to repeat Paul's writings. John was writing about a period of time prior to Paul's revelation. John's Gospel was uniquely different from the other three synoptic Gospels, which essentially were related to the gospel of the Kingdom, which the Jews rejected. And Paul's Gospel was uniquely different from the Kingdom message of the Synoptics. Both Paul and John (in that order) were given special revelation on the Gospel for this present dispensation of grace. The meaning of these events in relation to salvation became clear through Paul's message and writings. And Paul's revelation of his Gospel, as well as John's writings, is for this dispensation of grace, or until the rapture.

The basis and requirement for salvation during this present dispensation of grace is clear. We must place our confidence in the DIVINE PERSON of Christ, knowing at least something as to WHO He really is and WHAT He has DONE for us, including His death, burial and resurrection. In emphasizing who Jesus is, John makes it clear that He is the promised Son of God. And, of course, none of this would make any sense unless one had a concept of personal sin and need of salvation. In all this we are not saying that to get saved, one must know and believe all that John and Paul have written. A lifetime of thorough study of either John's *Gospel* or Paul's *Romans* would not be sufficient to master their contents. But the sinner must at least know and believe something about their personal sin and need for a divine Savior. And that

¹⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 115.

Savior is the divine Christ who died (in payment for our sin), was buried and then rose from the dead. This is the reason for teaching the Word chronologically.

5. THE SINNER'S WORLDVIEW:

Every people-group in the world has a worldview – a view of their world as they see it. We could say that a “world view provides a model of *the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*.”²⁰ Every newborn infant begins to construct a mental view of his world. The child’s worldview centers first on himself, his personal needs and his mother. Then it includes family, friends, community, school, church, government etc. “A worldview is, first of all, *an explanation and interpretation of the world* and second, *an application of this view to life*.”²¹ A worldview is also “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world.”²² Thus we all develop a worldview based on our individual cultures, whether they be Western, Eastern or Tribal.

Before any “gospel” can be presented the missionary must realistically face “The Worldview Scenario” of the people they intend to reach. And what sort of worldview would our “Deserted Island” friend likely have? Remember, as we are told, “He has never heard about Christianity in his life.” So the few words he could read²³ of John 6:43-47 would have generated numerous questions. Based on the experience of our missionaries in the South Pacific and elsewhere, his worldview would likely be quite like the one we picture here:

ILLUSTRATION 2 THE WORLDVIEW OF OUR “DESERTED ISLAND” FRIEND

Who or what is this Jesus anyway? Is Jesus a human? A spirit? An animal? An object? Or a mixture of these? Would Jesus be male or female? Old or young? What if our friend had somehow heard that this Jesus was sort of god-like? Maybe even a son of God? Would that help him to understand this “new gospel” better? Not likely! You see, our friend is devoted to Koko, the only god he knows about. Koko is the partially loving spirit of a dead crocodile, who created several things and gets really mad when tribal taboos are broken. He sends his thunder-man, Hupakishi, (his Big-noise, Light-person) who burns down trees and houses, and severely injures little children around the in-house, open fires.

God-Koko has two wives, the sun-goddess and the moon-goddess. Perhaps one might be the ancestor-mother of this Jesus! But if so, which one? The sun is the ancestor-mother of all the evil spirits. The moon is the ancestor-mother of three lines of non-peoples. One line is good spirits. The other two lines are visible non-peoples, either dark or light in color. But our island friend happens to be a Kohootchi, which simply means “the people.” And the Kohootchis are all good descendants of Pahatka, the warrior-protector of God-Koko. Except for those who break certain taboos like eating fish from tin cans, or stepping over food in an open marketplace, all Kahootchis are sinless in the eyes of Koko, and most, like our “deserted island” friend, have no need for “salvation” of any kind.

²⁰ Brian Walsh and J. R. Middleton, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1984), 3.

²¹ W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 29.

²² James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 15-16.

²³ It would be interesting to know how our *Deserted Island* friend learned how to read the language of the note.

But our friend would likely have many other “worldview” thoughts such as these: Which Jesus wrote this note? Is the ancestor-mother of this Jesus the sun? Probably not – if living forever is something good. He had heard of a dark non-people “Jesus” who was a hairless, old witchdoctor with sorcery powers. And then there were two boys, each named, Jesus, possibly still living on the non-people island of Piatchiatchi. But no Kahootchi has the name, Jesus. And this “everlasting life” is something else! Is that something good or bad? You see, it depends on what form our island friend will have when he enters the world of Kahootchi Witches at his death. Living forever, as either a toad or a death-adder snake would be humiliating and awful! He would be hated by every dead Kahootchi living in Witch-land... And forever and ever! But all this only scratches the surface of the Kahootchi worldview, which governs everything they think, say or do.

How in the world could the words in John 6:43-47 make any sense to one with such a worldview? Obviously, our Deserted Island friend must *repent*, or literally *change his mind* about his whole religion, which so controls how he thinks, believes, talks, and acts about everything. Before he can accept Christ for who He is and what He did and why, he must learn something about God and His view of sin, His laws and His relationship to Christ. To accept Jesus as the Christ, He must know who God is. The *Good News* makes no sense to one either oblivious or antagonistic to the *Bad News* about divine laws, sin and judgment.

Trevor McIlwain teaches, “God’s fundamental form of teaching throughout all history is clearly progressive. God gradually unfolded the Bible’s message over the ages. This God-controlled unfolding of truth has been likened to the growth of grain, ‘...first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn of the ear’ (Mark 4:28). God chose to make known His nature and character, His plan for the world, His purpose of redemption through Christ, and all other spiritual matters through progressive revelation... All doctrines begin in seed form in Genesis and are progressively revealed, little by little, throughout the Old and New Testaments.” All of this is the purpose for the Chronological Teaching program.

Our island friend needs to be gradually exposed to a lot of truth that he simply does not have. But such exposure would do no good unless there was a drastic change in his thinking. The biblical language for such a change is called repentance. And we believe that without repentance there can be no salvation.

6. REPENTANCE:

The folk at Lystra knew little or nothing about any biblical worldview. And they obviously had a different worldview from Paul and Barnabas. So, the missionaries made it clear: “We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the Heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15). Later, in Paul’s speech to the elders at Ephesus, he declared that they were going about “solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). And near the end of his life, he gives a marvelous witness to the Philippian church (Phil. 3:1-21) of his repentance, or change of mind, from trusting in his inherited privileges and personal achievements for salvation (vs. 4-6), to trusting in “Christ Jesus my Lord.”

A Savior makes no sense to the self-claimed righteous! We all have need of the knowledge of a holy God, whose standards/laws are impossible to keep. When we see this, then we recognize that we do in fact need a Savior. This is a basic reason for teaching the Word chronologically,

building on firm foundations. And such building necessitates a change in a person's worldview. And any change in worldview necessitates repentance. Therefore "the Free Grace position holds that repentance is necessary for salvation... repentance is a change of mind, attitude and disposition which implies and normally leads to an outward change in life and conduct, though the latter is not essential to the term itself. The focus of repentance must be determined by the context. Regarding salvation, repentance is implied in the call to believe in Christ."²⁴ The author of "The Deserted Island Scenario," along with most other GES followers, claimed that "Repentance is not necessary for salvation." But our view would be more like Dr. Robert Lightner when he wrote. "There is no question about it; "repentance is necessary for salvation."²⁵ We believe that repentance is applicable and necessary for the salvation of people in any world culture, even Western cultures like those in America which were founded on a biblical, Judeo-Christian world-view. Unfortunately, that worldview is rapidly changing through the systematic, devastating brainwashing of our educational system, which is built on another religion with another worldview – the evolutionistic Naturalism of Secular Humanism.

CONCLUSION

Those who have even a limited knowledge of Animistic or tribal worldviews are no doubt convinced of the urgency (and the blessing) for Chronological Teaching of key biblical stories in the tribes. But for those among us in support role ministries or for those who have been favorably impressed with a "Minimalist Gospel" this need may not be as clear. For these, we highly recommend that you read (maybe again) a copy of *Building on Firm Foundations, Volume I, Guidelines for Evangelism and Teaching Believers*, by Trevor McIlwain. Basically this same material appears in a larger format as *Firm Foundations – Building According to Plan, Part 1*, (pp. 3-60) of *Firm Foundations Creation to Christ (FFCC)* by Trevor McIlwain with Nancy Everson. With the Foreword written by Richard Sollis, these sources give an excellent rationale for the necessity and fruitfulness of teaching the Word, using the Chronological Approach with key stories from biblical history. Another excellent *rationale* for our Chronological teaching program is an article written by Dr. Donald Pederson, who writes, "Missionaries face the formidable task of attempting to communicate an alien message in a language that they speak imperfectly to a people whose worldview differs in significant ways from their own and from the biblical worldview as presented in Scripture."²⁶ Any reading and study of this material would be a tremendous help and blessing to you.

And this teaching program, and others like it, are increasingly becoming more essential in our Western, non-animistic churches and schools. That's because *evolution*, under the guise of *true science*, is increasingly being accepted by evangelical schools and churches through the aggressive ministries of groups such as BioLogos. BioLogos insists that there is (or should be) harmony between *science* and *faith*. The problem with this is that BioLogos equates "nature," or "science" with "*evolution*, and "faith" with "evangelical Christian believers" (except those who believe in YEC and/or ID). This, of course, has very serious implications for all Young Earth

²⁴ Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation, A Biblical Evaluation and Response*, 91.

²⁵ As quoted in Bob Nyberg's helpful article, "Repentance versus Faith," available on his website at: http://www.4himnet.com/bnyberg/The_Free_Grace_Gospel-Repentance_vs_Faith-Nyberg.pdf

²⁶ Dr. Donald Pederson, "Biblical Narrative as an Agent for Worldview Change." This article was published in the *International Journal of Frontier Missions (IJFM)*, (Vol. 14:4. Oct.-Dec. 1997); pp. 163-6. See http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/14_4_PDFs/03_Pederson.pdf

Creation (YEC) mission groups as well as Intelligent Design (ID) groups. We accept a YEC position with God as the Intelligent Designer.

Note:

We understand some subscribe to the gap theory in relation to the age of the earth. Though we do not wish this to be a point of division, the gap theory is contrary to the teaching statement and the basic foundations of chronological evangelism. The problem, though, is more complicated: most old earth creationists who oppose biological evolution believe in the gap theory because they accept the geological record of a millions-of-years, old-earth, timetable and obviously the fossil record of dead animals (including dead people), in the old-earth geological evolution involves millions of years of death (human, and animal) prior to Adam's fall (after the 6 days of creation). And yet the Bible clearly teaches that "Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world and death through sin" (Rom. 5:12). And "Death reigned from Adam until Moses" (5:14) and "Sin reigned in death" (5:21). Again, Romans speaks of "Sin resulting in death" (6:16) and death as "The wages of sin" (6:23). And "The law of sin and of death" (8:2). "For since by a man [Adam] came death, by a man [Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:1). "The sting of death is sin" (15:56). This paper is not intended to judge those who believe the gap theory, but it does express a teaching direction contrary to the assumption within the gap theory. It should be noted as well that *Answers in Genesis* lists 5 different variations of the "gap-theory." Many of these variations do not support an evolutionary model.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

BOOKS:

- Stegall, Thomas L. [*The Gospel of the Christ*](#), (Grace Gospel Press, 2009).
- Hixson, Whitmire and Zuck, *Freely By His Grace—Classical Free Grace Theology*, (Grace Gospel Press, 2012).
- Hixson, J. B. *Getting the Gospel Wrong—The Evangelical Crisis No One Is Talking About*, (Xulon Press, 2008).

ARTICLES:

- Lybrand, Fred "[GES Gospel: Lybrand Open Letter](#)"
- Nyberg, Bob "[Free Grace Gospel—Repentance Versus Faith](#)"
- Nyberg, Bob "[Free Grace Theology—Zane Hodges and Theological Legalism](#)"
- Nyberg, Bob "[The Free Grace Fracture](#)"
- Nyberg, Bob "[The Free Grace Gospel—Clarifying the Issues](#)"
- Nyberg, Bob "[The Sin of Unbelief Revisited](#)"
- Plimpton, Chet "Synopsis—Minimalist Gospel"
- Sapaugh, Gregory P. "[A Response to Hodges: How To Lead A Person To Christ](#)"