

A REVIEW OF J. B. HIXSON'S
GETTING THE GOSPEL WRONG:
THE EVANGELICAL CRISIS NO ONE IS
TALKING ABOUT¹

BY BOB WILKIN

I. INTRODUCTION

I've known J. B. Hixson since his early days as a seminary student at Dallas Theological Seminary. We've been friends for a long time.

Hixson is the Executive Director of the Free Grace Alliance (FGA), which he promotes at the end of the book (p. 405).

Slightly more than half of the endorsers are members of the FGA. More tellingly, five of the seven members of the FGA Executive Council are endorsers,² including President Charlie Bing, President Elect Fred Chay, Vice President Fred Lybrand, Treasurer Phil Congdon, and Member-at-Large Larry Moyer.³ In addition, the Founding President Emeritus of the FGA, Dr. Earl Radmacher, is the lead endorser who wrote the foreword to the book. (However, Dr. Radmacher asked me to mention in my review that the version of the book he endorsed did not contain the four-page endnote on pages 152-55 which is highly critical of Zane Hodges, me, and GES.) While the FGA is not the publisher, it appears that this is a book which the FGA heartily endorses.

This work is Hixson's doctoral dissertation. He completed his doctorate in 2007 at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, PA. While

¹ J. B. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong: The Evangelical Crisis No One Is Talking About*, NP: Xulon Press, 2008. 405 pp. Paper, \$21.99.

² Actually one could say that six of the eight FGA Executive Council members endorse this book if you count Hixson who is on the Council.

³ Hixson, pp. v-xi. See http://www.freegracealliance.com/about_leadership.php for a list of the current FGA Executive Committee. Accessed July 18, 2008.

there is some new material added (e.g., endnote 19 on pp. 152-55) most of the material is word for word what he wrote in his dissertation.

Though the book is written by a long-time friend, and though it represents the view of an organization that calls itself Free Grace, this book is a direct assault on GES and its view that all who simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have eternal life that can never be lost.⁴ It is, however, a very poorly devised attack as we shall soon see.

II. STRENGTHS OF *GETTING THE GOSPEL WRONG*: HIXSON'S FIVE⁵ FALSE GOSPELS

Hixson is not afraid to take on some of the biggest names in evangelicalism today, including Billy Graham, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, T. D. Jakes, and Brian McLaren. He is to be commended for giving examples from leading Evangelicals of the false gospels he confronts.

Most *JOTGES* readers will find themselves in agreement with his discussion of "The Purpose Gospel" (pp. 195-222), "The Puzzling Gospel" (pp. 223-52), "The Prosperity Gospel" (pp. 253-76), "The Pluralistic Gospel" (pp. 277-300), and "The Performance Gospel" (pp. 301-30). Indeed, if that was all there was in this book, it might be a helpful addition to Free Grace literature.⁶

The purpose gospel is characterized by underemphasizing and redefining sin, by overemphasizing the present life while "it downplays or ignores entirely the eternal aspect of salvation" (p. 198), and by having a lack of a sense of urgency.

⁴ See Chapter 3 and especially the four-page endnote on pages 152-55 where Hixson directly mentions GES in a negative light. Indeed, it is clear from that endnote that Hixson is charging GES with proclaiming a false gospel (Gal 1:6-9). In his view a person is not born again simply by believing in Jesus Christ. He calls that a false gospel.

⁵ Actually, as we shall see, Hixson identifies the message that all who simply believe in Jesus for eternal life have it, the message of GES, as a sixth false gospel (p. 155 n. 19).

⁶ Of course, even if it only contained those chapters, there would still be plenty of technical errors in the book that would need correcting before it was ready for publication. In addition, there would also remain the glaring problem, discussed below, that Hixson evaluates each of these gospels not against Scripture, but instead against his own synthesis.

Hixson calls his second false gospel *the puzzling gospel* for this reason: "Many gospel presentations are puzzling since they invoke such generic phrases as 'Come to Jesus,' 'Give your life to Him,' 'Invite Him into your heart,' 'Turn your life over to Christ,' etc." (p. 223). Hixson suggests appeals like this "are vague and unhelpful in the absence of sufficiently clarifying explanation" (p. 223).⁷

The author's major criticism of *the prosperity gospel* is identical to his major criticism of the purpose gospel, emphasizing the present life while underemphasizing or ignoring the life to come.⁸

Hixson's rejection of the purpose and puzzling gospels was rather mild. He reacted more negatively to the prosperity gospel. However, his critique of the fourth false gospel, *the pluralistic gospel*, is by far the strongest. Hixson strongly rejects the idea that all religions are equally valid and equally successful paths to the kingdom of God. Hixson stresses that only Christianity and only faith in Jesus Christ will give someone eternal life (p. 278).

His reaction to the fifth false gospel, *the performance gospel*, is as follows:

It is axiomatic that postmodernism's proclivity for moral relativism has made disturbing inroads into the church. So much so, that in many cases, it is difficult to distinguish between the world and the church. Understandably, this has many evangelicals concerned about the state of the church and passionate about moral reform. Indeed *all evangelicals* should stand united in calling God's people to moral purity and godliness. In such a context, however, some evangelical leaders seem bent on adopting a soteriological method that makes man's entrance into heaven contingent to varying degrees upon his own good behavior (p. 321, italics his).

Hixson's discussion of all five false gospels is generally on target.

⁷ For more on puzzling unbiblical appeals, see Bob Wilkin, "The Subtle Danger of the Imprecise Gospel," *JOTGES* (Spring 1997): 41-60. AWANA ministries have also been speaking out about imprecise gospel invitations for years.

⁸ For example, Hixson says, "Osteen is more concerned with living life now, not what [sic] awaits individuals on the other side of the grave" (p. 258, italics his). Evidently Hixson meant to say that Osteen is more concerned with living life now than with what awaits individuals on the other side of the grave.

III. TECHNICAL ERRORS

Many technical errors are found in this book. These errors reflect a lack of attention to detail that permeates everything in the book, including the exegesis and theology.

A. SPELLING ERRORS

There are numerous spelling errors including “Foreward” instead of “Foreword” (cover, pp. i, xvii),⁹ postrequisite,¹⁰ and Christ’s name misspelled in Greek as “Χριστος.”

On several occasions Hixson fails to hyphenate a Greek word that he breaks between two lines (pp. 92, 108).

Hixson is extremely inconsistent in the way he abbreviates states. Common practice in scholarly literature is to use the two letter postal codes. Hixson does this at times. However, he employs at least three other methods in this book as well. He sometimes uses two capital letters, each followed by a period (e.g., N.J.).¹¹ At other times he uses two letters, the first capitalized and the second lower case followed by a period (e.g., Pa. and Az.).¹² And sometimes he uses three or four letters followed by a period (e.g., Tex.,¹³ Cal. [pp. 67, 375], Mass. [p. 380], Minn. [p. 381], and Tenn. [p. 397]).

⁹ If Hixson used a computer in writing this book, it should have identified Foreward as a misspelled word. Spell checking the document should have revealed the error as well. This is, actually, an archaic word, but it is not a word in current usage and in any case it does not now mean, nor has it ever meant, the preface to a book.

¹⁰ Hixson, pp. 32, 301, 302 (2xs), 312, 314 (2xs), 317, 318, 321, 339, 371, and 372. Again, the computer flags this word as misspelled. I realize that Hixson is attempting to coin a new word here. However, it would have been much better to simply use an actual word.

¹¹ E.g., see Hixson, pp. 156, 189, 325, 378, 384, 397, 398. Once he abbreviates New Jersey differently, giving the common form NJ (p. 362).

¹² See notes 16-18 for details.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 155, 159, 171, 179 (2xs), 182 (2xs), 375, 384, 395 (4xs), 396 (2xs).

More puzzling is the fact that he varies the way he abbreviates individual states. For example, he abbreviates Texas, Pennsylvania, and Arizona, as Tex.¹⁴ or TX,¹⁵ Pa.¹⁶ or PA,¹⁷ and Az., AZ., or AZ,¹⁸ respectively.

B. ATTRIBUTION ERRORS

Fair citation of someone's words requires that the individual be identified in the text along with their quote. Yet Hixson more than half the time fails to indicate in his text the identity of the person he is quoting,¹⁹ even when he gives extended block quotes that contain one or more paragraphs.²⁰ Since most do not take the time to read endnotes, most readers gain the impression that unless Hixson provides attribution, the quote is from something Hixson himself wrote or said.²¹

C. TAKING QUOTES OUT OF CONTEXT

Hixson is guilty of taking snippets out of what someone wrote and presenting them without their context. For example, consider the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. vi (2xs), viii, ix (2xs), x (4xs), xi, xvi (3xs).

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 74, 175, 186, 376, 380.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. v, viii, 401.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 276 (Az.), 163 (AZ.), vii (AZ).

¹⁹ For example, in Chapter 3 there are 152 endnotes. Of the first 50, 27 represent material Hixson wrote himself and chose to put in notes. Those are endnotes 2, 6, 7, 8-10, 12, 13, 16-19, 24, 27-30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 41, 43-45, 48, and 50. Of the other 23 citations, there are 14 where he fails to state in the text the person he's quoting (endnotes, 3, 11, 14, 20, 22, 23, 26, 31, 33, 40, 42, 46, and 49). Only nine times—less than half the time!—does Hixson indicate the source of the quote in the text (endnotes 1, 4, 5, 15, 25, 35, 37, 38, and 47).

²⁰ For example, Hixson gives no attribution in the text before a three-page long quote from a journal article he cites (p. 180 n. 105), which takes up parts of two pages in his book (pp. 127-28). However, awkwardly after the block quote he writes, "As Hodges suggests..." (p. 128).

²¹ The reason this is not considered fair use of an author's words is that it requires the reader while reading a passage to go to the end of the chapter and find the right endnote in order to see who actually made the comment. This is needlessly time consuming and studies show only about 1 in 100 people will do it. The net effect is to minimize the contributions of others. This repeated failure to give credit in the text to people he is quoting is disturbing, unscholarly, and unfair.

following quote from John MacArthur's book *The Gospel According to Jesus*, which appears on page 115 of Hixson's book:

[F]aith encompasses obedience.... Modern popular theology tends to recognize *notitia* and often *assensus* but eliminate [*sic*] *fiducia*. Yet faith is not complete until it is obedient.... The real believer will obey.... A concept of faith that excludes obedience corrupts the message of salvation.... Clearly, the Biblical concept of faith is inseparable from obedience.... Obedience is the inevitable manifestation of true faith.

Notice all of the ellipsis marks (...).²² Typically those are used to cut out extraneous information that isn't crucial. For example, an author might leave out a laundry list of Scripture passages if he feels that it isn't central to what the individual he is quoting is saying.

However, the endnote here gives a clue to what Hixson did. Hixson took this quote from three pages in MacArthur's book (pp. 173-75 in the first edition of the book, though Hixson on p. 169 n. 72 mistakenly says it appears on those pages in the revised and expanded edition!). There is no way that Hixson's choppy citation of MacArthur fairly gives the context of *three pages!*²³

It turns out that what Hixson did for the most part was give the first sentence of a paragraph and then leave out the rest! At best, this is an inappropriate treatment of someone's writings. While I disagree with what MacArthur is saying, he is entitled to a fair presentation of what he actually wrote.

D. MISCONSTRUING THE WORDS OF OTHERS.

Worse yet is what Hixson did with the words of Zane Hodges. Concerning Hodges he says, "Hodges refers to the traditional view of the

²² Yes, Hixson used four dots, not three. While this is not the simplest way to handle ellipses, this is one of the acceptable methods according to The Chicago Manual of Style (11.55-65).

²³ This practice of condensing multiple pages into one paragraph occurs again in the very next quote on p. 115. If one takes the time to read Hixson's endnote (p. 170 n. 73), he learns the material cited took up three pages in the original. Yet the quote is just ten lines long in Hixson's text! Three times material is left out as indicated by ellipsis marks. Evidently Hixson again left out huge chunks of material in each of these three places. That isn't fair to the author or the reader.

gospel, as including the death and resurrection of Christ, as ‘flawed’” (p. 152 n.19). It is poor scholarship to put one word, in this case *flawed*, in quotes. That is an extreme example of what is meant by taking something out of context.²⁴

Hodges actually wrote, “Let me say this: All forms of the gospel that require greater content to faith in Christ than that Gospel of John requires, are flawed.”²⁵ It is true that a few paragraphs after making the charge about Hodges, Hixson does give that very quote. However, Hixson does so to show that Hodges and others have “an unbalanced appeal to the priority of the Johannine Gospel,” (p. 153, n. 19), not to explain what Hodges meant about flawed presentations.

In order to represent Hodges fairly, Hixson not only should have given the full sentence containing the word *flawed*, but he also should have cited the following words by Hodges from the same article since they are crucial to understanding what Hodges believes: “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.”²⁶ However, instead of doing that, Hixson slanders Hodges and claims that “According to Hodges, details such as who Jesus is (i.e. [*sic*] the Son of God) and His work on the cross are not relevant to the precise content of saving faith” (p. 153 n. 19). If Hodges says he considers the preaching of the cross *essential*, then how on earth can Hixson claim he believes *the cross is not relevant*? Hixson has grossly misrepresented what Hodges wrote. The integrity with which Hixson treats sources is startlingly poor.

E. WRONGLY CATEGORIZING LITERATURE

In the bibliography the word *Monographs* appears before a list, not of monographs but of books (pp. 375-84). Not a single book in the 99 books listed by Hixson is accurately called a monograph. Indeed Hixson even lists *two booklets* as monographs!²⁷

²⁴ Amazingly, Hixson even cited the wrong article! Hixson on p. 152 (n. 19) says that Hodges made this claim in the second of a two-part article he wrote. Yet the word *flawed* doesn't appear in that article at all. It appears in part 1 (see the next note). This is another example of irresponsible reporting.

²⁵ Zane C. Hodges, “How to Lead People to Christ, Part 1” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2000): p. 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Zane Hodges's *Dead Faith: What Is It?* (p. 378) and Dennis Rokser's *Seven Reasons Not to Ask Jesus into Your Heart* (p. 381).

F. REPEATEDLY GIVING INCORRECT BOOK TITLES

I don't recall ever finding an author misstating the title of a book. Yet after I found a handful of titles Hixson inaccurately cited,²⁸ I decided to check out some of the books in his Bibliography. By my count he misstates the titles of more than a dozen.²⁹ Somewhat comically, the subtitle of Charles Ryrie's well known book *Basic Theology* is given as "A Popular Systemic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth (p. 147, n. 1, underlining added). The correct word is *Systematic*, not *Systemic*! Dr. Ryrie isn't that kind of doctor!

G. NO SCRIPTURE OR SUBJECT INDEX

It is very helpful in a book which cites many authors and much Scripture to have indexes. That Hixson's book lacks these indexes greatly weakens its usefulness.

H. HALF OF THE HEADERS ARE WRONG

After the table of contents, all of the headers on the left hand pages normally give the title of the book, while all of the right hand pages give the title of the chapter under discussion. This book gives the *title* of the

²⁸ He leaves the question marks off book titles by Walter Chantry (p. 376), John MacArthur (p. 327 n. 32), and Gordon Clark (pp. 167 n. 67, 169 n. 71, 192 n. 152). He once fails to capitalize the first word in Jody Dillow's book *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (p. 159, n. 32, second reference). He repeatedly leaves the comma off the subtitle of John MacArthur's book *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean He Says, "Follow Me"?* (pp. 169 n. 72, 176 n. 88, 177 n. 93, 184 n. 127, 189 n. 142, 190 n. 144, 323 n. 3, 327 n. 32, 379, twice). Hixson also leaves the last four words off the title of my dissertation (p. 401). He also once leaves the question mark off of the title of one of the most famous booklets of our day, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (p. 326 n. 20).

²⁹ For example, in the Bibliography he misstates the titles or subtitles of books by the following authors (if there is only one listed, I just list the author; if more than one, I give an abbreviated title): David Barton (p. 375), James Montgomery Boice (p. 375), Walter Chantry (p. 376), R. Alan Day (p. 377), Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart (p. 378), T. D. Jakes, *Loose That Man & Let Him Go* (p. 379), John MacArthur, *The Keys to Spiritual Growth* and *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 1989 and 1994 editions (p. 379), Brian McLaren (p. 380), Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (p. 382), R. C. Sproul, *Before the Face of God: Book One, Before the Face of God: Book Four*, and *Before the Face of God: Book Three* (p. 382, and yes, Hixson inexplicably lists Book Four before he lists Book Three), and John Stackhouse, *No Other Gods Before Me?* (p. 383).

book as the header on both sides. The reader looking for a chapter in the headers will be frustrated since it isn't to be found.

I. PLAGIARIZING THE WORDS OF GES

Last words are lasting words, the saying goes. That is especially true for the last words of the conclusion of an entire book. Yet the concluding words in the chapter entitled, "Summary and Conclusion," are not the author's own words at all. Hixson concludes with this statement which is entirely without attribution:

No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in Jesus Christ, such as a promise to obey, repentance of sin, pledge of obedience or surrendering to the Lordship of Christ, may be added to, or considered a part of, faith as a condition for receiving eternal life (pp. 339-40, underlining added).

Yet that is almost verbatim what the GES Affirmations say:

No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one's sin, baptism or submission to the Lordship of Christ, may be added to, or considered part of, faith as a condition for receiving everlasting life"(underlining added).³⁰

However minor, this is still a form of plagiarism that is of questionable integrity.³¹

J. SUMMARY

How all these errors we have noted ever escaped the attention of Hixson himself, his dissertation readers, his book editor, his FGA endorsers, and those who proofed the book for him, is hard to imagine. These errors alone show that this book was not ready for publication. Hixson should not have rushed this book into print before he exercised due diligence.

³⁰ See <http://www.faithalone.org/about/index.html> and then click on Affirmations of Belief. Look at the third paragraph under the first heading, "Salvation."

³¹ Regardless of how this happened, it further illustrates the lack of due diligence taken in the writing of this book.

IV. A MAJOR MISSTATEMENT: THE ACCEPTED VIEW OF THE GOSPEL FOR 2000 YEARS?

Hixson speaks favorably of “the accepted view of the gospel throughout two thousand years of church history” (p. 152 n. 19).³² Such a statement is laughably false. No one who has studied church history thinks that there has been some accepted view of the gospel for the first 2,000 years of church history. Certainly since the Reformation there hasn’t been one accepted view. However, even before the Reformation there was not one accepted view.

Hixson speaks as though anyone could turn to a book on church history and find a statement on *the accepted view of the gospel*. He gives the impression that you could walk up to any minister, priest, or pastor of any group or denomination today and they’d all be able to tell you the accepted view of the gospel.

Free Grace Theology does not consider the gospel of Rome, which is certainly *one of the views of the gospel*, to be the Biblical gospel. Nor do we consider the gospel of Mormonism, Arminianism, Calvinism, or Unitarianism, *four other views of the gospel*, to be the Biblical gospel.

Hixson, of course, doesn’t cite any evidence that there ever has been “an accepted view of the gospel.” The very idea is preposterous.³³

V. THEOLOGICAL ERRORS

A. SPEAKING POSITIVELY OF CALLING FOR A DECISION

While criticizing a website, Hixson makes this comment: “Even Got-life.org, which at least calls for a decision on the part of the viewers, downplays the urgency by suggesting that the only consequence of failing to get life, is continued lack of personal fulfillment and a prolonged feeling of isolation” (p. 213, italics his; underlining added). The portion underlined shows that Hixson feels it is appropriate to call for a decision.

³² In fact, in the context he is lambasting Zane Hodges, John Niemelä, and me for rejection of it.

³³ In addition, it is hard to reconcile this claim by Hixson with the fact that he has five chapters exposing modern day false gospels. Does Hixson believe that those false gospels today agree with “the accepted view of the gospel throughout two thousand years of church history”?

Yet there is no proof elsewhere in the book that faith is a decision³⁴ or in what sense a person must decide anything to be born again.

Most Free Grace people do not call for the unbeliever to decide to do anything. Rather, Free Grace people make it clear that all who simply believe in Jesus have everlasting life that can never be lost.

B. IMPLYING PROFESSIONS OF FAITH ARE REQUIRED FOR ETERNAL LIFE

Note Hixson's summary statement about John 20:31:

The object of saving faith, then, must include the essential truth that Jesus is *the Son of God who died and rose again*. This does not mean that one must affirm a fully-developed doctrine of the deity of Christ with all of its theological intricacies; nor does it mean that one must explicitly articulate the phrase *deity of Christ* as part of his profession of faith. Rather, believing in Jesus as the Son of God means understanding that Jesus is who He says He is: the divine Son of God who alone can forgive sin and grant eternal life (cf. John 11:25-27) (pp. 89-90, italics his; underlining added).

By using words like *affirm*, *articulate*, and *profession*, Hixson seems to be implying that one must make some sort of profession of faith to be born again. This profession must evidently include an affirmation of one's belief in the deity of Christ. Precisely what someone must affirm and profess about the deity of Christ is never stated by Hixson (or the apostle John!).³⁵

Is Hixson's terminology merely careless here, so that no affirmation is really required? This type of imprecision leaves Hixson's basic theology obscure.

A few pages earlier, while discussing saving faith, he writes as well:

A profession of saving faith zeroes in on the correct kernel of salvific truth within the broader good news about man's salva-

³⁴ In fact, this cannot be proven since faith is not a decision. It is a conviction that something is true. For more discussion on this point see my book *Confident in Christ*, pp. 6-7, 248 n. 8.

³⁵ Actually John makes it clear that no profession of any kind is required. See John 12:42-43. Nicodemus is given in John's Gospel as an example of the secret believer (cf. John 3:2; 7:50; 19:38-40). In the Fourth Gospel believing in Jesus for eternal life, not affirming His deity or other truths, is the sole condition of eternal life (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:25-27).

tion...In the course of explaining the gospel, at some point the moment comes when, having sufficiently addressed man's predicament and God's provision, the sinner is ready for specific instruction on how to appropriate God's free gift of eternal life by professing faith in someone or something" (p. 84, italics his; underlining added).

Note that Hixson here states without qualification that the appropriation of God's free gift of eternal life is "by professing faith." He doesn't say that it is *by believing*, but *by professing one's belief!* What is this supposed to mean? The theology here is muddy, to say the least.

C. IMPLYING THE ROMANS ROAD ³⁶ IS A FINE APPROACH

In a passing comment about various options that Biblically-sound evangelists have, Hixson makes this interesting comment: "Some evangelists might employ evidentiary apologetics; others might use the Romans Roadmap" (p. 85). It is hard to imagine what he means by "the Romans Roadmap" other than the famous Romans Road approach.

While there are a number of slightly different Romans Road approaches, nearly all of them end in Rom 10:9-10 and a call for the listener to both believe in Jesus with their heart and to confess him with their mouths.

Yet later in the book Hixson specifically rejects the view that Rom 10:9-10 is teaching the need to confess Christ publicly to be born again (pp. 219-21 n. 46).³⁷ While that is certainly good, it is perplexing that he would speak favorably of the Romans "Roadmap" approach at all, especially without at least giving a disclaimer about how it typically ends in a faulty explanation of Rom 10:9-10 and in a faith-plus-confession condition for eternal life.

³⁶ This is also referred to in the literature as the Roman Road and the Roman's Road.

³⁷ See also p. 212 which is where Hixson makes this statement, to which n. 46 refers: "Nowhere does Scripture demand verbal declaration of one's faith as a requirement to gain eternal life." Hixson contradicts his earlier statements on the necessity of a profession of faith. This is another example of the lack of precision in Hixson's theology and in his writing.

D. STATING THE OBJECT OF SAVING FAITH DIFFERENTLY AT THE START AND END OF CHAPTER 3

Another problem is that Hixson gives two significantly different statements about the content of saving faith. For example, in his summary at the end of the third chapter, Hixson puts the saving message this way:

Saving faith occurs when one believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died and rose again to pay his *personal* penalty for sin, as the only One who can give him eternal life (p. 146, italics his; underlining added).³⁸

Compare that statement with the statement at the beginning of the chapter:

Saving faith is the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died and rose again to pay one's personal penalty for sin and [as] the one [sic] who gives eternal life to all who trust Him and Him alone for it (p. 84, italics his; underlining added).

Those two statements are not saying the same thing. In one someone must believe in Jesus Christ as the One *who gives eternal life* to all who trust Him and Him alone for it. In the other a person must merely believe in Jesus Christ as the only One *who can give him eternal life*.

Does Hixson mean that an individual need not believe that Jesus actually gives eternal life to the one who believes the saving message? Does he mean that the person must merely believe that Jesus *is able to give* ("can give") him that life?

Hixson's theology of the saving message is exceedingly obscure. An unbeliever confronted with Hixson's formulations would have good reason to be confused!

³⁸ See also pp. 370-71 where Hixson somewhat similarly says the following in his definition of gospel: "A term used generally in Scripture to refer to any good news. With reference to salvation, it refers to the good news that one who believes in Jesus Christ alone as the Son of God who died and rose again to pay his personal penalty for sin may have eternal life" (italics added).

E. ONLY A PERFECT EVANGELISTIC PRESENTATION IS ABLE TO SAVE!

Hixson says, “Even the slightest alteration to the Biblical gospel renders it impotent to save” (p. 43). That is an amazing charge for which he gives no Biblical support. He just assumes the reader will accept this as true because he says it is true. Maybe he thinks this is a *self-evident* truth. But it isn’t self-evident to anyone I’ve ever met. I’ve never heard a single person ever make such a claim.

Hixson has an endnote associated with this claim, which reads in part:

Some might object³⁹ to the use of the phrase impotent to save when describing a false gospel. After all, the objection goes, isn’t salvation the sole work of God and can’t God save anyone regardless of the sloppiness or inaccuracy of the gospel presentation? In an absolute sense, this is true. Indeed God is sovereign over all things. Ultimately those whom God has chosen will be saved and those whom He has not will not, and nothing can change this. But this theological reality does not mitigate man’s responsibility to preach a sound gospel. Nor does the objection properly take into account the fact that God’s sovereign plan of salvation includes man’s witness to the gospel... (pp. 71-72 n. 27, italics his).

Hixson says in that endnote that all false gospels are impotent to save. He labels six different messages as false gospels in his book. According to Hixson two of the six false gospels are the message of Lordship Salvation, which he calls *the performance gospel*, and the message of Zane Hodges, me, and GES, which he calls *the promise-only gospel*, *the crossless gospel*, or *the content-less gospel* (p. 152-55 n. 19). Hixson explicitly says that our message is a false gospel (p. 155 n. 19) and thus the conclusion is inescapable that he is saying that our message is impotent to save (pp. 43, 71).

I have written and said, and so has Zane Hodges, that any message which so much as quotes John 3:16 or a similar verse such as John 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:25-27, or even a message that shares the idea that the one

³⁹ I had to laugh when I read “some might object...” This is quite an understatement. It would have been more accurate to say, “Few if any will agree with the use of the phrase *impotent to save* when describing a false gospel...”

who believes in Jesus has everlasting life, no matter how garbled, could result in a person being born again. There is not a single verse in the Bible which says what Hixson trumpets: "Even the slightest alteration to the Biblical gospel renders it impotent to save" (p. 43).⁴⁰ People are able to filter out error. The Spirit can and does help people cut through the clutter. Of course, the more garbled the message, the less likely anyone will be born again when listening to it.

But to say that a garbled message is *impotent to save* is akin to saying that God Himself is impotent to save unless the evangelist shares precisely the correct message. But wait! That is exactly what Hixson said in his endnote: "God's sovereign plan of salvation includes man's witness to the gospel" (p. 72 n. 27). Even the slightest alteration of the Biblical gospel ties God's hands and keeps the listener from being born again unless and until he hears what Hixson calls *the pure gospel*.

So what if Hixson himself is slightly off concerning what the Biblical gospel is? For example, what if the Biblical gospel does not actually contain the word *personal* as in Hixson's claim that one must believe that "Jesus Christ, the Son of God...died and rose again to pay his *personal* penalty for sin" (italics added)?⁴¹ Then the message Hixson proclaims is, by his own admission, *impotent to save*.

⁴⁰ The charge that a person cannot be born again if he fails to understand some gospel truths is actually inconsistent with Hixson's own claim that one need not believe Paul's entire gospel to be born again (pp. 80-81)! Well, if a person can believe an altered version of Paul's gospel and still be born again, then whose gospel do they need to get just right? What is this Biblical gospel of which Hixson speaks that is the only message able to save? Where do we find it in Scripture? If we must believe that precise message to be born again, wouldn't God lay out that message for us somewhere word for word? If He did, then the wise evangelist would merely memorize and quote that text every time he evangelized. He would say not a word more or less since any alteration to the Biblical gospel renders it impotent to save.

⁴¹ After all, it could be argued that the Bible teaches that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world as John 1:29; 3:16; and 1 John 2:2 all state. If that is part of the Biblical gospel, then Hixson has altered, at least slightly, the gospel, and hence his message would be impotent to save according to his own theology.

Or, what if the burial of Jesus is part of the Biblical gospel as Paul says it is in 1 Cor 15:4?⁴² When discussing 1 Cor 15:1-8, Hixson indicates that the burial of Jesus is not part of the Biblical gospel (pp. 80-81).⁴³ But if Jesus' burial is part of the Biblical gospel, then Hixson's message is an altered gospel and is thus *impotent to save* (cf. pp. 43, 80-81).

It is easy to see why people would be afraid to share their faith if they believed what Hixson says about the impotence of any imperfect evangelistic presentation. Anyone proclaiming an imperfect message is proclaiming a false gospel according to Hixson. And Paul makes clear that anyone preaching a false gospel is under the curse of God (Gal 1:8-9). According to Hixson, any alteration, no matter how minor, of the Biblical gospel is impotent to save and is a false gospel. Thus unless you get the message word perfect, you are a fool for trying to lead someone to faith in Christ. You cannot help anyone else unless you say everything just so. And, if you mess up even slightly in what you say, you put yourself under God's curse!

This may be one of Hixson's most radical suggestions. And it is linked with his understanding of election, which is extremely Calvinistic, to say the least. In his discussion of election on pages 71-72 Hixson sounds like a five-point Calvinist.

VI. EXEGETICAL ERRORS

A. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN RECEIVES VERY LITTLE DISCUSSION

In his chapter on the pure gospel (Chapter 3), Hixson does mention John 20:30-31 and he does indicate that it is the purpose statement of the book (pp. 85, 87). He links his discussion of the purpose statement with John 11:25-27 (p. 89).

⁴² One blogger calls the view that Hixson advocates *the groundless gospel*. See Jonathan Perrault, <http://freegracefreespeech.blogspot.com>, s.v. "FGFS Index/The Tragedy of the Groundless Gospel."

⁴³ Hixson does not explicitly say this. However, he says, "Paul does not intend to include all nine of these facts [in 1 Cor 15:1-8] as part of the precise content of saving faith" (p. 80). Since one of those nine facts is Jesus' burial, and since he never lists it as an essential truth, it's clear he doesn't consider it part of what he calls the Biblical gospel.

However, Hixson only devotes about two pages (pp. 86-87 and the top of page 88) to a discussion of the role of the Gospel of John in determining our view of the saving message today. In fact, even before he began this short discussion, on page 85 he placed an endnote (n. 19 which appears on pp. 152-55) which indicates that it is wrong to place too much importance on the Gospel of John in answering this question. Concerning Hodges, me, and others, Hixson says, "Their theological method manifests several errors such as [1] an unbalanced appeal to the priority of the Johannine Gospel" (p. 153 n. 19). What is *a balanced appeal to the priority of the Johannine Gospel*? Hixson appears to have erred here, for in light of all he writes in his book, *no appeal* to the priority of John's Gospel is correct. John's Gospel not only is not to be given priority, it is to be corrected by the epistles since John's Gospel contains a message for a prior age, not for today.

Hixson seems to think the number-one evangelistic error anyone can make is to emphasize the Gospel of John. Evidently he feels it is unbalanced to say that John's Gospel is the only evangelistic book in the Bible. Thus it is illegitimate in his view to suggest that John's Gospel is *the book* to study to determine the saving message! Mark me down as guilty as charged.

Hixson's abandonment of the Gospel of John leads him to conclusions that not only are inconsistent with it, but also with the entire Bible. Once someone abandons the primacy of John's Gospel for evangelism, he is like a driver who throws his GPS out the window. He should not be surprised if he winds up far from his desired destination.

B. WHY DIDN'T JESUS INDICATE THAT HIS MESSAGE WOULD NO LONGER BE SUFFICIENT?

Hixson advocates the view that what one must believe to be born again changed after Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead (pp. 153 n. 19, 157 n. 28). However, this claim is arbitrary and totally unsupported by Scripture. It has not a shred of support from the Lord Jesus Himself, nor from the apostle John who wrote *long after* these imaginary *new requirements* would have become necessary. Hixson's claim here is an egregious theological error.

Did the Lord know about this coming change? If He did, why did He fail to tell the apostles, either before or after His resurrection?

Did the apostles know about this change after it occurred? If so, why didn't they tell us about it either?

This isn't Biblical theology. If it were, we would see it in the teachings of our Lord and of His apostles.

Hixson is obviously aware that John's Gospel was written well after Jesus' death and resurrection. Hixson recognizes that John is writing to people in the church age to tell them what they must believe to be born again (pp. 85, 127, 129, 285). John holds up the faith of Jesus' disciples before the cross as models for how his readers too can be born again (John 1:41, 45, 49; 2:11; 6:69). This contradicts Hixson's unsupportable theology.

It is truly a self-refuting idea that believers today must believe more than the apostles did to be born again. Scripture nowhere says so. The claim that it does is spurious and ignores the foundational role of the apostles for the Christian faith (Eph 2:19-20; Matt 16:15-18).

C. DOES GOD HIDE THE SAVING MESSAGE IN A *SYNTHESIS*?

One of the most repeated expressions in the entire book is "the five-fold standard of the gospel" (22, 146, 195, 205, 306, 307, 309), also called "the (five) core essentials of saving faith" (xxii [2x], 41, 100, 103, 266), and "the five essentials" (p. 102).⁴⁴ The expression *the five-fold standard of the gospel* is quite telling for in this book Hixson evaluates all gospels against this five-fold standard, rather than against Scripture.⁴⁵ Hixson's five-fold standard is really his own creation and not a Scriptural concept at all.

⁴⁴ Some of Hixson's five essentials are not even found in John's Gospel. Nowhere in John is the idea of Jesus paying *one's personal penalty* for sin (Hixson's third essential) mentioned, let alone discussed. And there is not a single place where Jesus or His apostles distinguish between believing in Jesus for eternal life (Hixson's fourth essential) and in believing in Him alone for eternal life (Hixson's fifth essential). The object of saving faith in John is always Jesus and His promise of eternal life to all who simply believe in Him (e.g., John 3:16-18; 4:10-14; 5:24; 6:35, 67; 11:25-27; 20:31).

⁴⁵ For example, leading into his five chapters on false gospels, he writes, "In the following chapters selected versions of the gospel in postmodern American evangelicalism will be examined and critiqued according to the five-fold standard set forth above" (p. 146, italics added; see also p. xxii). He examines the purpose gospel in light of this five-fold standard (pp. 195, 205). Likewise the performance gospel is rejected because according to Hixson it doesn't match the five-fold standard (pp. 306, 307, 309). The Prosperity Gospel doesn't match up to the core essentials either (p. 266).

By my count Hixson details what the five essentials are no less than thirty times.⁴⁶ I do not mean that he mentions the concept thirty times. No. In mantra-like fashion he lists what each of the five essentials are thirty different times.

Here is one of his thirty detailed statements of the five essentials: "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" (p. 100).

One would think that these five essentials are at least a paraphrase of a key passage in the NT. Maybe Paul answered the Philippian jailer's question with the five essentials. Or maybe the Lord Jesus gave the apostles the five essentials.

No. Amazingly, Hixson says there is no such passage! God evidently didn't want to make it easy to find the object of saving faith! Hixson tells us that he got these five essentials⁴⁷ not from any individual passage, but from *a synthesis of various passages of Scripture*:

The establishment of these five core essentials of saving faith...*is a matter of theological synthesis. By linking Scripture*

⁴⁶ See Hixson, pp. 84, 90, 92, 99, 100, 104 (2x), 110, 138, 145, 146, 205, 229, 237, 239, 242, 258, 261, 285, 302, 306, 314, 321-22, 332, 333 (2x), 337, 347, 369, 370.

⁴⁷ Actually, Hixson doesn't specifically say who found these five essentials. He implies that he found them. However, Tom Stegall wrote about a similar five essentials in 2007. Yet Hixson doesn't give Stegall credit for the idea. Maybe they both got their five essentials independently. Stegall says, "In my introductory article [Part 1, the eighth page] *I proposed five essential elements of the gospel*, which included Christ's deity, humanity, death for our sins, resurrection, and salvation by grace through faith alone" (*Grace Family Journal*, Special Edition 2007, "The Tragedy of the Crossless Gospel (Pt. 4)," np, italics added). Surprisingly, Stegall's five essentials are not quite the same as Hixson's. Hixson has nothing about the humanity of Christ. Stegall has nothing about paying the penalty for one's personal sins nor does he say that essential four is trusting in Christ for eternal life and that essential five is trusting in Christ alone for eternal life. In addition, Stegall was merely proposing these five essentials whereas by the time Hixson writes his five essentials are now the standard by which Christians should judge all gospels. Since Stegall endorsed Hixson's book, evidently he agrees that Hixson's five essentials are now our standard. The perceptive reader will see that this claim of five essentials is arbitrary dogmatism.

with Scripture, one can conclude that these five essentials comprise the kernel of salvific truth that must be believed if one is to receive eternal life (pp. 100-101, italics added).

A *synthesis* in the sense Hixson means it is a combining of various elements together into a unified whole. In other words, the object of saving faith is nowhere given in the Bible as a unified statement. The unbeliever, or the believer who wishes to evangelize clearly, must combine the various elements together. This is the ultimate search for the Holy Grail.

Here again we meet the arbitrary dogmatism of Hixson's position. Why should anyone accept his view *without rigorous proof* that it is correct?

Hixson says we reach this synthesis "by linking Scripture with Scripture." If so, which passages do we link? How do we know which passages give us one or more of the essentials? How do we know when we have found all of the passages and all of the essentials? Hixson does not provide a rationale for finding these special passages. Nor does he provide us with a list of which passages contain the essentials.

Why should such shallow argumentation be taken seriously?

D. HIXSON'S RATIONALE FOR HIS SYNTHESIS IS UNCLEAR

How Hixson found the passages that led to his five essentials is never stated. Yet clearly Hixson considers 1 Cor 15:1-11 as a crucial, or maybe *the crucial*, passage (pp. 148-49 n. 6). Of that text he states, "the repeated phrase 'according to the Scriptures' (vv. 3, 4) may well mark out *the core essence of the gospel*" (p. 149 n. 6, italics added).

This is a new expression. What is *the core essence of the gospel*? That sounds like it is the core minimum one must believe. But these two verses say nothing about the deity of Christ or about trusting Christ and Him alone for eternal life. For that matter, those "essentials" are not found anywhere in vv 1-11. Furthermore, the words "may well" signal uncertainty in Hixson's mind.

Amazingly, even within these two verses, Hixson says one need not believe *everything* to be born again. One need not believe in Jesus' burial (or His post-resurrection appearances according to Hixson (p. 149 n. 6). Those items "are mere supporting evidence of His death and resurrection" (p. 149 n. 6). How he divines which truths are essential and which are not is truly a mystery! Paul drew no such distinctions. This way of handling the text shows that *Hixson's* five essentials are *Hixson's* real standard, not the Scriptures themselves.

But one might wonder, using this same reasoning, why the death and resurrection of Christ aren't "supporting evidence" that Jesus indeed fulfills His promise of eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it. In fact, doesn't the Gospel of John actually say that Jesus' death and resurrection is the eighth sign (compare John 2:18-22 with John 20:1-31, esp. v 30 "many *other* signs")? And wasn't the God-given purpose of the signs to lead people to believe in Jesus for eternal life as John 20:30-31 explicitly says?

Throughout the book Hixson cites other passages that evidently are part of his synthesis, including the sermons in Acts, Galatians, Romans, First Corinthians, and even occasionally the Gospel of John. However, Hixson is careful not to make the mistake that Hodges and I make of paying too much attention to the Gospel of John (p. 153 n. 19). All of these texts supposedly provide clues that help us find the Holy Grail of his core essentials.

But Hixson never says how many such passages there are, or how he can identify them when he finds them. Nor does he tell us how to extract the essentials from the non-essentials as he claims to do in 1 Cor 15:1-8. The whole concept is a logical and theological quagmire.

E. CAN WE ALL CONTRIBUTE TO THE SYNTHESIS?

Has Hixson closed the door on other people joining in the synthesis? Or can we all join in?

Hixson does not mention 2 Cor 5:21 as part of the synthesis. It says that Jesus "knew no sin" and that the Father made Him "to be sin for us." Lots of people have this verse in their gospel tracts. Might that verse be part of the synthesis?

If so, wouldn't this increase the number of essentials?

Besides, if someone fails to believe that Jesus "knew no sin," then he believes that Jesus is a sinner. And if someone believes that, then he does not have a Biblical view of the deity of Christ and hence he does not believe one of Hixson's essentials. I bet Hixson's new synthesis will pick up this verse and this essential.⁴⁸ Then we'll have six. But will we be sure even then that we have all of them?

The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communities would surely insist on bringing verses about the virgin birth into the synthesis.

⁴⁸ If not, I can hear his critics now. He will be accused of preaching a sinful-savior gospel.

And, frankly, it is hard to see why we shouldn't bring them in. After all, if the deity of Christ is one of the essentials, and if Jesus couldn't be God unless He were born of a virgin, then wouldn't the virgin birth clearly be another essential?⁴⁹

I'm getting a headache trying to figure out where to stop. I'm confident we could find many more passages for the synthesis if we put our minds to it. But then wouldn't Hixson's core standard become a false gospel? After all, people would evaluate *his gospel* in light of the new and improved core standard. Hixson's theology leads to an endless search towards a truly complete gospel. His stance is hopeless.

F. EXEGESIS TAKES A BACK SEAT TO TRADITION

Hixson's core essentials bring to mind a scene from *The Fiddler on the Roof* in which Tevye is singing about tradition. To an outside observer like me, it looks like Hixson is relying on some tradition to tell him what the essentials are. Then he searches the NT to find passages that talk about those essentials. While he would surely love to find one passage that lists all the essentials from his tradition, since he can't find such a passage, he makes do with a menagerie of texts which he says present the "core essentials." Hixson has found these five essentials hither and yon in the NT and then stitched them together into a salvific quilt. But there are lots of holes in the quilt!

Why didn't Paul answer the Philippian jailer's question (Acts 16:30-31) with the five essential truths?⁵⁰ Surely Hixson would have.

Why didn't the Lord Jesus clue His apostles in on what the five essentials would be? Hixson would have if he'd been there.

Why did John fail in the Fourth Gospel even to mention several of Hixson's five essentials, like Jesus paying for *one's personal sins* or the need to believe not merely in Jesus for eternal life, but to believe in Him *and Him alone* for eternal life?⁵¹ If John was writing to tell unbelievers

⁴⁹ If Hixson doesn't add the virgin birth to his list of essentials, then people might call his view the natural-born-savior view.

⁵⁰ Paul appears to have given the pernicious false gospel: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). He only calls for faith in Jesus, not faith in His works! What is going on here? Maybe the dispensational change occurred after Acts 16 and Paul wasn't aware of it yet.

⁵¹ It is true that Free Grace people often say that one must believe in Jesus alone for eternal life in order to have it. They do this in an effort to clear up

in this age how to be born again, surely he'd want to give them the list of the five essential truths. After all, Hixson gives the entire list thirty times in his book. Why wouldn't John give the list at least once?

That Hixson can't find his theology clearly taught in the Bible is frightening. Moses was a great prophet and man of God who spoke about Jesus (John 5:45-47). Hixson's theology is a mosaic, but it isn't Mosaic (i.e., divinely revealed)!

G. AN EXEGETICAL LEAP—FROM GALATIANS TO ACTS

A basic principle of Biblical exegesis is that one starts with the immediate context to determine the meaning of a term or expression. The next most important context to explore is that of the entire book in which the expression occurs. Only after exploring these two contexts should one go to other uses by the same author, then to other uses in the same testament, and finally to other uses in the entire Bible.

Yet when Hixson discusses the gospel of Gal 1:6-9, we find zero discussion of how Paul defined his gospel within Galatians (pp. 154-55, n. 19)! Instead he goes to Acts 13. This is a serious exegetical error.

Instead of studying Galatians to learn what Paul was teaching in Galatians, Hixson goes to a passage by a different author, Luke, to find out what Paul meant in Galatians! Hixson writes: "Scripture provides a record of the precise gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians during his first missionary journey. That record is contained in Acts 13. There one finds that the gospel Paul preached included quite naturally the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Acts 13:28-30; [*sic*] 38-39)" (p. 155).

But how can Acts 13 be used to support Hixson's essentials? There is no mention in Acts 13 that Christ died *on the cross*, or that He died *for our sins*. We don't learn that Jesus rose *on the third day*, or that *He rose bodily*. We do not find that the object of faith is the Person *and work* of Christ. Instead it is Jesus Himself who is the object of faith (v 39). Nor is

possible confusion. Yet the Lord Jesus never once did that. The word *alone* is not in John 3:16; 5:24; 6:35, 47; 11:25-27 or any other text in John. A person who believes that faith in Christ must be supplemented by something else (obedience, commitment, perseverance, or even faith in other doctrines such as the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, etc.) obviously does not believe that all who believe in Jesus have eternal life. We need not add, as Hixson repeatedly does, the word *alone*.

the deity of Christ even mentioned. In fact, Jesus is called “this man”⁵² by Paul (v 38). That none of this is discussed by Hixson is shocking.

Does this bother Hixson? No. Hixson says “not every gospel presentation in Acts explicitly lists all of the content for saving faith. Sometimes knowledge of one or more components of the object of saving faith on the part of the target audience is presumed” (p. 101). This is special pleading designed to cover the fragility of Hixson’s claims.

There is not a single sermon in Acts that lists all of Hixson’s five essentials. There is not a single passage anywhere in the Bible that does. Remember, Hixson admits this! He says his five essentials are *a synthesis* of many passages, not the product of just one passage (pp. 100-101). It is disingenuous of him to say that “not every gospel presentation in Acts explicitly lists all of the content for saving faith” when he knows that not a single one does. If any one passage did, he wouldn’t need a synthesis.

H. FAILURE TO EXEGETE ACTS 10:43

Hixson cites in support of his view Peter’s words to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:43: “*whoever believes in Him will receive remission [i.e., forgiveness] of sins*” (p. 91, italics his). Yet Hixson does not explain how Peter’s words support his position! Actually Peter *contradicts* Hixson’s position. Peter is giving the dreaded false gospel that all who simply believe in Jesus Christ have eternal life! Why didn’t Peter say *whoever believes the five essentials will receive remission of sins*? Or better, why didn’t Peter say, *whoever believes that Jesus is God, that He died on the cross to pay his personal penalty for sin, that He rose bodily from the dead on the third day, and that all who trust Him and Him alone for eternal life will receive remission of sins*?

Eternal life is seemingly missing in this text. Why? According to Hixson, that is an essential truth. Hixson fails to mention (or notice?) that Cornelius knew in advance that Peter would be telling him “words by which you and your household will be saved” (Acts 11:14). Thus when Cornelius and his household heard that the one believing in Jesus receives the forgiveness of sins, they knew that the forgiveness came *with*

⁵² The NKJV has “this Man,” capital M. However, the Greek of the autographa would have been all capital letters and there would have been no way for the reader to distinguish between *man* and *Man*. In addition, when Paul spoke these words the listener wouldn’t either.

the salvation, with the eternal life. Thus they understood Peter to be saying that all who simply believe in Jesus have eternal salvation.

Hixson missed the bull's-eye. In fact, he missed the target completely.

I. INADEQUATE AND MISLEADING DISCUSSION OF 1 COR 15:1-8

Hixson says that in 1 Cor 15:1-8 there are nine truths, some of which are essential and some of which are not:

Paul lists nine things (underlined) that elaborate on the *good news* he had proclaimed to the Corinthians. It is self-evident when one compares Scripture with Scripture that Paul does not intend to include all nine of these facts as part of the precise content of saving faith, since nowhere are individuals exhorted, for example, to express faith in the fact that Jesus "was seen by Cephas" in order to be saved. Yet this eyewitness account (and others) is part of the *gospel* as articulated in 1 Corinthians 15 (p. 80, italics his).

Well, let's list the nine truths that Hixson underlined when he gave the text of the passage:

1. Christ died for our sins.
2. He was buried.
3. He rose again the third day.
4. He was seen by Cephas.
5. Then [He was seen] by the twelve.
6. He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once.
7. He was seen by James.
8. Then [He was seen] by all the apostles.
9. He was seen by me [Paul] also.⁵³

Now compare that list to Hixson's five essentials:

1. Jesus Christ,
2. the Son of God who died and rose again,
3. to pay one's personal penalty for sin
4. gives eternal life to those who trust Him and
5. Him alone for it.⁵⁴

⁵³ Hixson, p. 80.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Hixson gives the impression that 1 Cor 15:1-8 contains his five essential truths *and adds in four optional truths*. At least, that's the impression I received. Yet items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 all deal with Jesus' burial and post-resurrection appearances, neither of which are part of the core standard according to Hixson! And when we examine the two truths left in vv 1-8—*according to Hixson's own reckoning!*—we find that only two of Hixson's five core essentials are included.

Obviously, Hixson's five essentials are his own artificial creation. Hixson is totally unable to defend them rationally.

VII. CONCLUSION

While there is some valuable material in this book, it is drowned out by the flood of sloppy scholarship, shallow exegesis, and downright theological error. The FGA endorsers either didn't pay close attention to its contents, or they themselves are complicit in this misrepresentation of the Biblical gospel.

Free Grace Theology has been vilified for decades by Reformed Lordship theologians. Now it is being vilified by someone heading a supposedly Free Grace organization. If Hixson is joining with Lordship Salvation in railing against Free Grace Theology, maybe his theology is not really that different. Lordship theologians may stress commitment, obedience, and perseverance whereas he stresses *a long list of doctrines*. But he agrees with Lordship Salvation on this key point: believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life will not save anyone.

In Lordship teaching simple faith in Jesus must be supplemented by submission. For Hixson it must be supplemented by detailed theology. Beware of strange bedfellows.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For those who'd like to share this article, we will send one copy of the Spring Journal at no extra charge for every one-year gift journal subscription at the special price of \$15 (includes S & H). Sign up one or more friends for the journal and they will get three issues for less than the price of two.