

## What is the Primary Difference Between the Saving Message<sup>1</sup> of GES and that of the FGA?

By Dr. Roger Fankhauser, [now former] president, Free Grace Alliance, 9/22/2014

The question continues to arise, “What is the primary difference between the GES doctrinal position and that of the FGA?” This brief statement summarizes that key difference. It does not attempt to fully develop, defend, or critique either position. Although both organizations believe the difference is significant, the leadership of neither organization holds any animosity toward the other. Leaders from both organizations have read this statement and agree it captures the basic point of each position.<sup>2</sup>

**Areas of agreement:** The two organizations share the vast majority of common evangelical beliefs. Related to salvation, they both agree that salvation (justification) is by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Both agree that Jesus is the object of saving faith. Both agree that the death, burial, and resurrection are historical events. Both agree in the theological necessity of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as the basis of our salvation.

**Area of disagreement:** The primary difference between the two organizations is how they define the saving message, that is, whether it *necessarily* includes the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

**The GES Position:** The sole requirement for receiving eternal life is belief in Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to be convinced that He guarantees everlasting life to all who simply believe in Him for it (John 4:14; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; 1 Tim 1:16).<sup>4</sup> John, for example, does not say that one must believe in the finished work of Jesus to have eternal life. The “Him” in John 3:16 and related passages that one must believe in is the Jesus who gives eternal life. GES believes that “since the disciples were born again before they believed in Jesus’ resurrection (cf. John 2:11; 3:16), and since John’s Gospel was written after the resurrection to tell people how they could have eternal life (20:31), belief in Jesus’ resurrection is not a condition of eternal life.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, GES holds that His work on the cross is a theological necessity, that those presenting the saving message do include the cross and resurrection, but knowledge of and belief in the cross and resurrection *are not necessary* to receive eternal life, at least theoretically.

**The FGA Position:** The FGA believes the “Him” in John 3:16 and related passages is fully defined by the end of the book not only as the one who performed the signs John records but also as the one who died on the cross and was raised from the dead. In the progress of revelation, explicit belief in the death and resurrection was not a requirement prior to those events which occurred before the cross (i.e., in John 1-18) because the individual would not comprehend the requirement, just as the disciples did not comprehend (John 20:3-9). By the time John wrote John 20:31, belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, included His saving work. The content of the saving message after the cross includes the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:17, 18, 15:3-8, that content here marked out by the words “according to the Scriptures”). The FGA holds that knowledge of and belief in the cross and resurrection *are necessary* to receive eternal life (*in Jesus who died and was raised*).<sup>6</sup>

**Conclusion:** Both organizations wish to keep the saving message clear and correct. They differ, however, in what one *must* know about the Jesus who promises eternal life.

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<sup>1</sup> Some see the “gospel message” and the “saving message” as different messages. Thus, the phrase “saving message” (what one must believe to receive eternal life) is used here instead of “gospel” for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication, Dr. Bob Wilkin to Dr. Roger Fankhauser, Feb. 19, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Some would include the necessity of believing in the deity of Christ as another key difference. GES does not believe it is necessary; some within the FGA do believe it is necessary. However different views do exist within the FGA. The FGA covenant says a person receives eternal life by faith in the *Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God*; the GES belief statement says by faith alone in the *Lord Jesus Christ* (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.faithalone.org/about/beliefs.html>

<sup>5</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, “The Gospel According to John”, in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 372.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.freegracealliance.com/covenant.htm>