

The Heart of Christianity

The Biblical Gospel and the Future of the Church

2-What is the Gospel? Part 1

January 13, 2019

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,
2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.
3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;
7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;
8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

To the Glory of God

Now we have taken a short "vacation", from our "journey" through **1 Peter**, to begin this New Year, to examine just what the Biblical Gospel really *is* and is *not*. And even though you may think this is a very simple way to start the New Year, let me assure you that we're just getting started. And what you will find out in this Series will probably be very different from what you have heard in the past, and will very much stretch your "spiritual muscles".

But it will be absolutely Biblical and absolutely true. So, just stay tuned and get buckled up, because we're just getting started. Every one of the Sermons in this Series will begin where the previous Sermon left off, so as we get deeper into this we will find out that the Bible will build and build, and our spiritual house will get higher and stronger,

and more true and more precise as we continue to examine the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now what God the Holy Spirit revealed to the Apostle Paul in the Passage that Brother Vern just read to us is one of the *best* summaries of the Gospel that can be found anywhere in the Bible. And this chosen "sent one" (Apostle) begins this Passage with the words:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel...

Now the phrase "**make known**" here comes from a Greek word¹ that means *to inform*, or *to make understandable*, or *to make known*. So, what he says in the next few verses *is* the Biblical Gospel. And then notice that he is "making this known" to a group he calls the "**brethren**", which is the Church, the saved ones, the true saints, the ones who have heard the Biblical Gospel and who believed it.

But also notice that before Paul gets into the definition of what the Gospel *is*, he adds some *qualifying remarks*. He begins by saying that he wanted to make known, to the brethren of the Church of Corinth (back in the 1st Century), just what the Gospel actually is. But then he describes the Gospel that he is talking about. Paul said that the Gospel that he wanted to "make known" to the "brethren" was:

- ✓ **the gospel which I preached to you**
- ✓ [the Gospel] **which also you received**
- ✓ [the Gospel] **in which also you stand**
- ✓ [The Gospel] **by which also you are saved**

... so, the "gospel" that Paul was talking about here was *not* information or "news" they had been taught from either the Greeks or the Gnostics or the Jews. The people, who made up the Church in Corinth had *initially* heard this Gospel from Paul, who was an Apostle. And that holds true for us today as well. We need to hear the Gospel from an Apostle. And since they are all dead, the only way we can hear the Gospel from them is to hear it taught or preached from the *writings* of the Apostles, or in other words, the New Testament.

So, it is fine to discover bits and parts of the Gospel from the Old Testament (because it is there). But to get a full understanding of the

¹ *gnoorizoo*; Strongs #1107

Gospel, we need to hear from the Apostles. And that means that Paul was very busy preaching and teaching this Gospel everywhere he went.

And then notice that the Gospel that Paul was talking about here in **1 Corinthians 15** was the Gospel that these people had “received”, or had “joined oneself to”, or “trusted in” and “believed”². So, we see that the Gospel must first be heard, and then, secondly, it must be “received” or “believed in”.

And then Paul said it was the Gospel in which the people of Corinth “stood”. In other words, this Gospel was their *source* of “spiritual strength” and their “spiritual stamina” and their “spiritual stability”. So, “hearing” and “receiving” and “believing” the Biblical Gospel is what makes us “spiritually strong”. And then Paul said it was the Gospel:

... by which you are saved

... so, hearing and believing and trusting in what the Gospel says is what saves us. So, the Bible teaches that people are saved “through” or “by” the Gospel. And this is an interesting dynamic.

But that means that preaching and teaching the Biblical Gospel is what begins this “process” by which lost people are saved. So, nobody is forgiven or saved until they *hear* the Gospel, *believe* the Gospel, *repent of sin*, and *trust in* what the Gospel says. And this illustrates just how important the Gospel really is.

But then Paul added two very interesting phrases at the end of these four characteristics of the Gospel. He said:

- 1. if you hold fast the word which I preached to you**
- 2. unless you believed in vain**

So, the Gospel that they heard from an Apostle, the Gospel they had received, the Gospel that gave them spiritual strength and stability, and the Gospel that saved them was only true if these same people “held fast” the Word that Paul had preached to them. Now the phrase “hold fast” comes from the Greek word that means: *to possess; to retain; to keep secure*.³ Now what is interesting is that, even though this

² Greek; *paralambanoo*; Strong's #3880; *to take; to join to oneself; to receive with the mind*

³ Gr. *katechoo*; Strong's #2722

phrase is only used this one time in the entire Bible, the *root word* here is where we get our word "Catechism" from. So, the purpose of "*catechizing*" someone, the purpose of people going through a series of Questions and Answers, developed from Scripture and from Scripture alone, is so that those who are catechized may *possess* or "hold fast" the Word of God, so they can become "stable" and "spiritually strong".

Now the way this is worded here gives the impression that people have to "hold fast" to the Gospel, or their Salvation won't last, because Paul then said:

... unless you believed in vain

So, there is a phenomenon called "Vain Believing", or a Belief that is *useless* or *vain* or *unproductive*. And many people get the notion, from verses like this, that a person may initially believe, but because they get weak or because of sin or neglect, or because, for some reason, they don't "hold fast" to the Gospel, their Belief, that at one time saved them, becomes "vain" or "useless", and that individual then *loses* their Salvation. That is exactly what I was taught when I was first saved back in the early 1970's. And it *does* look like Paul is saying that here.

But in reality, what Paul is saying here is just the opposite. Paul is saying that a genuine *belief*, a genuine *faith*, or a genuine *trust* in the real, biblical, Gospel actually *causes* the other characteristics that he talks about here. And so, for example:

- The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that is "heard" only from an Apostle.
- The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that must be "believed", or "possessed", or "trusted in", or "received" by the individual.
- The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that *causes* "spiritual strength" and "stability".
- The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that *produces* this "spiritual retention" and keeps the individual "secure".
- The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that *assures* that our belief is never in vain.

... so, if a person does not have those other characteristics, it is simply because he has been deceived about his Conversion and was never really saved to begin with.

Now, I want to say this again, so there will be no misunderstanding. The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that, *ongoingly*, "causes" the other characteristics to be true and real to the individual. So, for example, there is no such thing as a person genuinely trusting in the Biblical Gospel and being truly saved, and then not having (at least to some extent) the other characteristics that Paul talks about here.

But what kind of "Faith" is classified as being "genuine" or "real"? Now normally, when this kind of question is asked, the first thing that people begin to describe is something they *did*, or some *quality* that they possessed, like the level of *sincerity* or *passion* or the amount of *earnestness* that the individual had, at the moment they supposedly "believed". So, for example, a person, who was very emotional or who was very sincere or who exhibited some form of *earnestness* at the point of his Conversion would be said to have "real" faith or "genuine" faith.

But that is not at all what Paul was talking about. Now, to be sure, it is better for an individual to be *sincere* rather than *insincere*, *especially* about Eternal Matters. But *whatever* level or amount of human emotion or human sincerity that a person may or may not have at the point of his Conversion is almost meaningless.

We have to remember that, God wants us to not merely believe, but to personally *experience* what the Bible talks about. I am *not* in the camp of those who seek to either *discount* or to totally *eliminate* "Personal Experience" from every area of biblical Spirituality. And I am not, first of all, because I don't even think that it is *possible* for a human being to divorce himself from what he has experienced, either good or bad.

But even more than that, I do not seek to cast aside all Personal Experiences, because the Bible doesn't. The Bible is filled with Commands and Promises from God the Father and Jesus Christ that simply *cannot* be obeyed or obtained or possessed by the believer without *experiencing* them. So, for example, a wonderful and godly Promise from the Bible, like:

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

... is *not* merely a Truth to *believe in*. This is a Reality that must be *personally experienced* by the believer, or else it is not real to him. And that means that this Divine Truth must *leave* the realm of the "Objective", and it must enter into the realm of the "Subjective". And that is where a lot of people get very nervous. But, by definition, Promises like this are *useless* unless they are "felt" or "experienced" by the individual.

Now I agree that we are not to be *driven* or *dominated* or led *solely* by our experiences. And we are not, because, while our experiences may be very sincere and very real to us, we are usually not in the best position to analyze or interpret our experiences correctly, *especially* in the short term. And so, we must understand that Sincerity and Passion are great, but they are simply not enough. We must have the Absolute Eternal Divine Truth of Scripture, or we will, very quickly, get off base.

But we must also agree that the Holy Bible speaks to our heart as well as to our mind. And the Bible commands and commends deeds and actions and acts that simply *cannot* be carried out or realized without both our mind and our heart being engaged.

So, the best I can comprehend this Mystery is that Divine Truth must *initially* enter into my mind, by and through the correct and full understanding of the Word of God. So, we must "hear" the Word of God. And while this "hearing" is literally a hearing with our ears and minds, it is a *special kind* of hearing. It is, in every sense, a Mystery and a Miracle where we hear with our ears and minds, but we hear *spiritually* or *supernaturally*. So, God the Holy Spirit takes the Word, as it is preached or taught, and, *somehow*, He makes it to be real to those chosen by God.

And then my *spiritualized* mind, or my *converted* mind, must then "command" or "order" or "govern" my dark heart. And so, what the Bible actually says and what has been made real to me, and what I have believed in and trusted in and received, I then experience *truly* and *personally*. I begin to *love* the God that I *believe in*. I begin to

delight in the God I *read about*. I begin to *enjoy* the God I *receive*. And when done rightly, it is truly a thing of beauty.

But there are dangers to this. Because we are fallen creatures, we are able to “add to” or “take away from” what God has actually said, infallibly in Scripture, even when we are trying our best not to. And the result of this is that we can fall into the ditch on either side. For example, we can “hear” Truth with our mind, but then not allow our converted minds to inform our hearts. And so, we will be filled with Bible Knowledge, and yet never actually *experience* or *possess* what the Bible is saying. And the result is that we will *believe* in God, we will *intellectually ascent* that God is God, but we will not *love* Him. We will *trust* in God, but not *delight* in Him. And we will *receive* God, but not *enjoy* Him.

Or we can by-pass the mind altogether and “hear” *only* with our hearts. And it is from *this* dysfunction where all the “spiritual excesses” and “abuses” that are carried out “in the name of” either the Spirit or Jesus come from. And when that happens, our entire Christian walk with God is about our own individual personal experiences rather than belief and faith and trust (and obedience) to the Word of God.

But please hear me, when I tell you, that it is *just* as wrong to believe and not enjoy, as it is to enjoy but to not believe rightly. It is *just* as dysfunctional to trust in what God has said, and yet never find the fullness of Joy in Jesus Christ. It is terrible to say that we believe that we are to hunger and thirst after Righteousness, but then never actually *experience* that kind of Hunger or Thirst. That is what Paul said was:

“Believing in Vain”

Dear friends, it is completely *irrelevant* to satan which ditch he is successful in getting us to fall into. As long as we are in the ditch, satan wins, and either God is not glorified or our Joy is not made full. And the insidious aspect of this is that the group, who is helplessly mired in the ditch on the left, is thanking God that they haven’t been “deceived” about the ditch on the right, like those “other people”. While the group, stuck in the ditch on the right, *rejoices* that they haven’t fallen into the ditch on the left.

The Apostle Paul says that the genuine, biblical Gospel fixes both of these problems and brings them both together, correctly, so that God is exalted *and* our Joy is made full.

So, as soon as Paul gives us all of this, he goes into the details of what the biblical Gospel actually is. He said:

1 Corinthians 15:3&4

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, 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,

Now I'm not going to finish this today, but this is one of the *best* and most *concise* summary statements of the "Biblical Gospel" in the entire Bible. And it contains five separate parts, all of which are of vital importance:

1. Christ died for our sins
2. He was buried
3. He was raised on the third day
4. This is all according to the Scriptures
5. It is of "first importance"

... so, let's examine each part.

1. Christ died for our sins

1 Corinthians 15:3a

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins...

Now when Joseph was pondering how his fiancé, that he knew was a godly woman, could have become "with child" when he had never been intimate with her, his mind must have been reeling. And the most prevailing thought in his mind had to be that, *obviously*, Mary had been "unfaithful" to him and had engaged in sexual relations with another man.

And if Mary had sinned, her sin would have been “Fornication” rather than “Adultery”⁴. Her story, that she kept repeating, that an angel from Heaven had appeared to her and told her:

Luke 1:35b

... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

... was just too much for Joseph to believe. So, because he was a “righteous man”, he saw Mary now as a “sinner”, and Joseph was trying to figure out how he was going to *end* the Engagement, because he could not be “unequally yoked together” with an unbeliever.

But back in the 1st Century, being “engaged” was a much more *formal* process than it is today. For example, it was common then for the engaged woman to actually live with her future Husband’s family, to learn their ways and customs, because she was “leaving her father and mother” to become a part of his family.⁵ Also, a couple couldn’t simply “call off ” the Engagement. Marriages were mostly “arranged” back then and, many times, a “dowry” had been paid. So, there was a lot invested in the Marriage. And so, there was a very “formal” and “official” method by which an Engagement was ended. And it was very similar to a “Divorce”. So, the Apostle Levi wrote:

Matthew 1:18b&19

... when His [Jesus’] mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

Now this inspired Narrative by Levi (Matthew) is the only place where we get an insight into what was going on in the mind of Joseph during this time. And that is because Matthew’s Gospel Account was written primarily to the Jews. So, it reflects certain customs that were very important to the Jews, but which would mean nothing to Gentiles.

⁴ The fact that, if Mary had sinned- her sin would have been Fornication and not Adultery- has very serious implications with the so-called, “Exception Clause” that Jesus gave as to how people can supposedly divorce and then re-marry. For further information about this- please read Pastor’s Blair’s Teaching on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage.

⁵ Please consult with Alfred Edersheim’s collection of Jewish life back in the 1st Century.

So, Matthew says that Joseph was Mary's "**husband**", even though he is careful to also say that Mary had been "**betrothed**" to Joseph, and that Mary was found to be "with child":

before they came together

... showing us that the term "**husband**" here illustrated what was *going to be*, and was *not* a present-day reality. And then Matthew says that because Joseph was a "righteous man", he was in a terrible situation and:

... not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

Now, for many years, I thought the phrase "**send her away**"⁶ was referring to stoning Mary to death for, obviously, committing a sexual sin, because that was the penalty under the Law for committing sins of a sexual nature. But, in reality, this phrase has to do with a "Divorce". So, even though they had not yet married, they had to go through a formal *procedure* to call off the Marriage. And that formal procedure was very similar to a Divorce. And so, because he loved her, Joseph did not want to divorce Mary *publicly*, but he wanted to do it *secretly*.

And there is only one reason why Joseph didn't follow through on his inclination to end the Engagement. That night, as he slept, an angel came to him in a dream and said:

Matthew 1:20b

... Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

... which was *exactly* what Mary had been telling him. So, by the angel using the very same terminology that Mary had been using, Joseph believed that God was actually doing something here that was unheard of. But then the angel went on to say:

Matthew 1:21a

She will bear a Son...

⁶ The King James Version renders this as, "**put her away**"

So, here, the angel is *guaranteeing* Joseph that Mary will have a *boy* baby, which would be Joseph's "first-born". And all first-born males were very significant to the Jews. But then the angel told him something very disturbing:

Matthew 1:21b

... and you shall call His name Jesus...

Now having a "first-born" son was not only significant *spiritually* for a Jewish man, but it was also a source of great, personal pride. And, many times, they would name the boy after one of the father's ancestors to keep the name "in the family". But here, the "war-angel" Gabriel commands Joseph to break with protocol and name his son:

Jesus

... which in the literal Hebrew, was Yeshua⁷, which means, "Yahweh saves", or "Yahweh is my Salvation". And then, the angel told Joseph *why* God wanted him to give his son this name:

... for He will save His people from their sins.

And this is the *first* Characteristic of the Biblical Gospel, and one of the most important ones. **Jesus came to save us from our sins.** And that means that the Biblical Gospel is *not* mainly about God healing our sick bodies. The Biblical Gospel is *not* mainly about prospering us financially or materially. The Biblical Gospel is *not* mainly about correcting "income inequality", or adjudicating the "plight of the poor", or to make sure that everyone has Health Insurance or "affordable housing", or to improve "access to the Judicial System". The Biblical Gospel is *mainly* about God "saving" us, or "rescuing" us, or "delivering" us, or "healing" us *from our sins!*

Now God is Good. And God is Kind and Merciful. And He *always* has been. And, many times, God *does* bless His people and He *does* heal them and *does* all sorts of wonderful things *for* them and *to* them

⁷ *Yeshua* is a shortened version of "Yehoshua" (Joshua), which literally means, "Yahweh saves". When the Hebrew was translated into Greek, this Name became, "*Iesous*". When the Greek was translated into Latin, it became "*Jesu*"; and when the Latin was translated into English, it became "*Jesus*". So, "Jesus" is an English translation of a Latin translation of a Greek translation of a Hebrew Name.

and *in* them. But this has more to do with God's Own Nature and Character than it does the elements of the Gospel. So, it would be *incorrect* then, to assume that once a person believes the Gospel and is saved, that he is then *entitled* to all sorts of things, and that these "other things" are the *best* demonstration of God's Love to His children.

No, the *best* demonstration of the Love of God to His children is found in graciously *rescuing* them from their sins and from the Wrath of God that is *against* those sins, and then by so radically changing them that these wicked rebels actually find the fullness of their own Joy in Him!

And this tells us that our Sins and being "saved" *from* them are a real big Problem. Our sins are the *main* Problem, the *most important* Problem, and the *most significant* Problem. In fact, if we corrected all of the other Problems on this earth and yet we were not "saved" from our sins, we would all be cleaner and nicer and more prosperous and more healthy people, screaming in everlasting torment in hell.

Now I *do* believe that, as people *who have already been saved* we *should* all work very hard to correct *some*, if not *all*, of these other problems. For example, the Bible teaches, *repeatedly*, that we are to tend to widows and orphans. And God said if we do not help the poor, then He is angry with us. Truly one of the best measurements that we have to determine whether we are at odds with God is in what our disposition is to those who are the weakest and the most helpless people who cannot offer us anything.

God hates Injustice, no matter who does it or where it is found. And genuine believers simply *cannot* knowingly engage in, or be a part of, any system or activity that is *purposefully* unjust or destructive to other human beings. So, I am in no way trying to *minimize* or *ignore* those Issues.

But all of those Issues are discussed and they are carried out (in various forms⁸) *as a result of already being saved*. The elimination of some or even all of these Issues will not, *individually or collectively*, forgive a single sin or save a single soul. And that means that they are *not* part of the Biblical Gospel. The Biblical Gospel, very *narrowly*, deals with God saving us,

⁸ How individuals or groups or even nations decide to work on these Issues may differ greatly. And even the lost may work toward a more "just" world.

... from our sins

... and *anything* added to that, for *whatever* reason, does not help that particular Issue, *everlastingly*. But, adding other Issues to the Gospel absolutely does *minimize* (or in some cases, eliminates) the *effectiveness* of the *main* Purpose for which God gave us the Gospel in the first place, and that is to save God's people from their sins. And when the main Purpose of the Biblical Gospel is *lost* or even *minimized*, eternal Suffering *always* results.

And that means that the so-called "Social Gospel", that became popular early in the 20th Century⁹, is *not* the true, biblical Gospel. And, while *some* of its stated goals and objectives are noble and very attractive to me, adding these other social Issues to the "Gospel" only *dilutes* the main Purpose of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And *nobody* is helped when that is done.

It is simply *impossible* to discuss Sin and its devastating effects on us too much. It is *the* single most important Issue we can deal with. How we plan on standing before an all-Righteous God, and how we plan on successfully passing through His very thorough Examination of all that we have ever thought, said, or done, and enter into Heaven is the seminal Issue of all time. Nothing else even comes close. Because the Screams of the incarnate God on the Cross along with the screams of those who are burning in hell right now are the loudest possible testimonies that: Sin is infinitely offensive to God, and that the Damnation by a holy God against unrepentant sinners is infinitely Just.

And these things are hard to even *think* about, but they are the great Realities that allow the Gospel to shine the best, and they are what makes the Grace of God absolutely magnificent! So, right off the bat, the reason that the "Good News" of the Gospel is "Good" is because there is some real "Bad News" that comes before, or *precedes*, the Good News. And the Bad News is that we are sinners and God is angry with us.

So, the reason that there is so much in the Bible about our sins is because we don't easily believe it. *Instinctively*, we believe that we are "Good". And even though we will acknowledge that we, periodically, may do "bad things", deep down, somewhere in our hearts, we

⁹ The "Social Gospel" *primarily* came from a *perversion* of an Eschatological view called, "Post-Millennialism" which was dominant with the Reformers and Puritans.

constantly testify that we are "Good". But we are wrong about that. And so, one of our biggest problems is that we don't really know who we are. We are basically *confused* about who we are. And so, we need the Bible to tell us who we are. And the Bible tells us that we are "sinners". The Bible says we are not "Good", but that we are "fallen" and "wicked" and "*totally* depraved".

Now when the "Great Debate" rose up a few years ago, concerning the "normalization" of Homosexuality¹⁰, one of the cries from those seeking to normalize *all* sexual perversions was, "*Jesus never said anything about homosexuality*". And what they meant by that was that "sexual perversity" wasn't really a big deal, and that, *evidently*, Jesus was okay with us engaging in sexual sins, because He never said anything about it.

Now you need to know that Jesus actually *did* say that *all* expressions of "human sexuality" was sin, other than the *one, single* expression of "Intimacy between one, naturally-born Man and one naturally-born Woman, within the Covenant of Holy Matrimony, until death ends it", when He discussed "sin" by using the catch-all word for all sexual sins in **Matthew 19:9**.¹¹

But we also need to know that Jesus never said anything about Slavery either. He never condemned "child rape" or "kidnapping" or "political shenanigans" or the "brutality that the Roman army was using against the Jews" either. But there is a reason why Jesus didn't mention those things.

We need to remember that as Jesus walked down the streets and roads of 1st Century Israel, He saw horrific sights. What Jesus looked at every single day would cause many of us to have nightmares. Jesus saw human beings, laying on both sides of the road, literally starving to death. He heard lepers begging for food, while dogs licked their open sores. Over here was a child, who had been raped by a Roman soldier, all night long, and over there was the dead body of a man, who had suffered his entire life with a horrible disease.

¹⁰ The initial effort to normalize homosexuality in the Nation was, primarily, an issue of "fairness" or equality". But the "Great Debate", in the Church, was about whether homosexuality was a sin. And that led to an even larger discussion about how the Church is to determine what is and is not sin. And that led to an even larger discussion about whether the 66 Books of the Holy Bible are, in fact, the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God, or the product of Man.

¹¹ The word is "*porneia*" and has to do with all sexual sins as outlined in **Leviticus 18**. This verse is commonly used to justify "Adultery" as a Cause for a Christian to divorce and remarry. In actuality, Jesus was talking about breaking off a Jewish Engagement and was not addressing Marriage. Jesus' Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage is found in **Mark 10:11&12**; and **Luke 16:18**.

Terrible pain and suffering all around Him like we cannot even imagine. Horrific Injustice, on every side. And yet, not a Word from the Savior. And, as the Omniscient God, Jesus *knew* that many of the struggles and diseases that these people were agonizing with would one day be almost *entirely* alleviated through the raising up of the Church and the constant outpouring of Common Grace.

But the reason Jesus never said anything about all of these horrible and evil things is *not* because He thought they were fine, or because He didn't care, but simply because He was very *narrowly* focused on the *main* Issue that His Father had sent Him to fix:

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost

And so, from that standpoint, it is actually *irrelevant* to God which sins you are engaged in and which sins you refrain from. Ultimately, Sin is sin. And, we are all guilty of something. Because, all sin is evil, and all sin dishonors God. And all sin will cause us to be eternally damned by God.

So, even if you don't engage in the "dirty and ugly" sins, and your sins are the "clean and nice" ones, you will burn with the others if you do not repent. If the larger Society around us has deemed some sins to be "acceptable" while renouncing other sins, we need to remember that Society is not the arbiter of what is and what is not acceptable to God. Only God can do that. And He has done precisely that, through His Word.

So, whether you are a liar or a homosexual, whether you like to steal or covet, whether you obtain joy through murder or accumulating more of this world's goods, whether you engage in violence or you simply walk in unforgiveness or bitterness, the Apostle Paul said:

Romans 14:23b

... whatever is not from faith is sin.

Whatever is done in this life that is *not* done in complete *submission* to the Divine Leadership of God the Holy Spirit and in total *dependence* on His Empowerment, and *whatever* is *not* carried out in accord with the Divine Will of God the Father, and *whatever* is not done

to the *exaltation* of the Lord Jesus Christ, is sin. And all sin offends God. And we are all guilty.

And because God is deadly serious about damning all unrepentant sinners, we don't need more information. We don't need more rules. We don't need more laws. We need a Savior! And we need a Savior, because we need Mercy! And we need Forgiveness!

And we need Mercy and Forgiveness and a Savior because we are guilty! We are guilty! Dear friends, we are guilty! *Nobody* can say that they haven't sinned. *No human* can boast about *not* transgressing *many* of God's Laws. No human can lay claim to a "good heart", or that they are a "good person". No, we are sinful, and we are fallen, and we are guilty!

So, if I can't boast in my own personal "Goodness", what do I "say"? What do I "do" if *all* that I "do" is sin? What work can I perform? What deed can be done? What penalty can be paid? What amount of energy can be expended if all my efforts are inherently sinful?

And I cannot simply say, "*Oh, well!*", and just walk away like I didn't know the answer to some game show question. There is great harm to me if I am sinful. Because, if I am sinful, then I am doomed. If I am sinful, then God is angry with me. If I am sinful, then I am bound for hell.

This is the *weightiness* of the Gospel. Sin, and the knowledge that my sin has *eternally* doomed me before an all-righteous God, is the *soberness* of the Gospel. This is what makes the Gospel *infinitely* more serious than the silly little slogan, "*God loves you and has a Plan for your life*". The deadliness, the finality, the absolute certainty that a lake of fire burning with brimstone is my portion as a sinner, is the single most important aspect of the Biblical Gospel.

Without that knowledge removing all smiles and wiping away all clever responses. Without the impact that I am doomed, because I am a sinner hitting home, nothing else that is spoken about the Gospel will have any impact.

But God has determined that only He can make the seriousness of our sins real to us. Only God can bring true, genuine, "Holy Spirit Conviction" to a human being. Clever phrases simply will not do it. Reading every verse in the Bible will not do it. The Fall of Adam was so *pervasive*, so *deadly*, so *all-encompassing*, that unless and until God sovereignly opens the eyes and unstops the ears and gives us a heart of

flesh, we *will not* see, we *will not* comprehend, we *will not* be convicted, we *will not* repent, and we *will not* trust in Jesus, and we *will not* be saved. And we “will-not” repent and believe because we don’t “want to”. And we don’t “want to” because we “can’t”. And all of this is the results of our sin. All of this “Bad News” is because we are fallen and sinful and guilty. But *this* is what Jesus came to save us *from*.

And that amazing Act of Sovereignty whereby God begins to deal with lost sinners, that *effectual* Calling to those who are “spiritually dead”, that *powerful* Opening of the eyes that sin closed, that *overwhelming* Unstopping of ears that could not hear the Truth, that *irresistible* removal of a stony heart that would not believe, and the replacement of a heart that can believe, is called “Grace”.

Grace, Grace
God’s Grace
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within
Grace, Grace
God’s Grace
Grace that is greater than all my sin¹²

But it is my contention that, after the Church being on the earth for 2,000 years, the people of the modern church understand Grace *less* now than any generation of believers in history. We comprehend things like Damnation and Judgment and Punishment and Justice very well. But Grace alludes us. Grace is a mystery to us. And it is a Mystery because it does not function according to the logic of the human mind.

And so, we must understand that, even though many in the modern church have tried to make it so, Grace is *not* some flighty, dainty, gentle, “Whisper” or “Invitation”. Grace is *not* a “Begging” or even an “Asking”. Grace is the strongest, the most powerful Force known to Man. It literally *captures* the imagination of the most vile sinner. It unmistakably *inserts* itself, *imposes* itself, into the lives of God’s elect. Grace, unapologetically *interrupts* all of our plans, and it *demand*s attention, it *requires* a response, and God’s Grace gets what it is after, every time.

When dispatched by God, Grace is utterly *irresistible*. It *cannot* be defeated, it *will not* be thwarted, and it *shall not* fail. Grace is the

¹² *Grace Greater Than Our Sin*; Julia Johnston; 1910

unmerited "Favor of an Almighty God" toward patently guilty sinners. It is the unearned "Love of an utterly Effectual God" to wicked rebels. And Grace is the undeserved "Special Treatment by an absolutely sovereign God" for those engaged in celestial High Treason.

Guilty human beings cannot "earn" Grace by *anything*, or any act, or any effort that we "do". And that includes any "religious act" as well. Lost souls simply *cannot* pray hard enough, we cannot take Communion enough, we cannot be baptized enough, we cannot attend the Church Services enough to *deserve* Grace. And *any* effort at earning or deserving Grace completely cancels it out.

By definition, Grace *must* be "freely given" by God, without *any* restraint or any sense of Duty or Obligation on His Part. And this is really where the rub comes in. In my travels, most every person I meet will agree with me, until I say this. But, for Grace to be "Grace", and not a "Wage" or a "Payment" or a "Response" for something that we do first, it *has* to be distributed according to God's Own Personal Divine *Prerogative*. And that means that we can't do anything or become something that will make ourselves attractive to God.

But that also means that Grace is *not* given to everyone. And even to those to whom it is given, God's Grace is *not* given in "equal amounts". Grace is given according to God's Choice, period. And that means that Grace is distributed throughout the world *unequally*.

If God was *obligated* to give Grace to *everyone*, in equal amounts, then two things would be true:

1. Everyone would be saved
2. God would not be Sovereign

... and whatever problem you think would be fixed for everyone to have equal access to Grace would be more than overwhelmed by the fact that God would no longer be Sovereign.

Now there is much more that could be said about this. But suffice it to say that it is our Sin that makes Grace necessary. And it is the *depth* of our sin, the *pervasiveness* of our sin, the fact that it is *impossible* for us to quit sinning that makes Grace so wonderful. And that is why Law and Rules and Commands *cannot* save a single soul. All that God's Law does is convince us that we are, in fact, sinful. All that trying hard to stop sinning, or working to improve ourselves by

what we do for ourselves, all that the many "self-help books" accomplish is bring us into total desperation.

For over 6,000 years people have been trying to lose weight and write books and make more money and improve our own condition by utilizing things like Education and Medicine and Technology and Government. Because we really don't know what is wrong with us, we flounder around trying every new and innovative thing we can think of to make us to "be a better me".

There is an entire Discipline called Psychology or Psychiatry that exists for no other reason other than to try to figure out "why people do what they do", and then try to find ways to "fix them". But because they don't know what is wrong with Mankind, they are doomed to find a solution.

The Bible says that what is wrong with us is Sin. But sin goes way beyond what we "do". Jesus said that we don't merely "do" dark things, but that we:

John 3:19

... loved the darkness rather than the Light...

... so, we engage in sin, because we *want* our sin, we *enjoy* our sin, and because we *love* our sin. The Bible says that as lost people, we are "slaves to sin". And so, in that sense, we *cannot* stop sinning. But, in every case, we sin because we *want to*, because we voluntarily *choose* to sin, and because we have bought into the lie that sinning will make us *more* happy and fill us with *more* joy and provide for us *more* satisfaction than what God will give us.

And so, in "saving us from our sins", Jesus miraculously *changes* our "loves" and our "wants" and our "desires". And He does that by radically changing our natures. And this radical transformation of the human nature is called "Regeneration" or being "Born Again".

But we have to understand that God does not command us to stop "*wanting*". He does *not* expect us to cease from having "*enjoyment*". And it is *not* God's Will to put an end to "love". No, what Jesus does, in saving us from our sins, is that He radically and supernaturally and miraculously gives us infinitely *superior* loves, infinitely *more satisfying* joys, and infinitely *more rewarding* desires.

If anything is true, our desire to be happy and satisfied and filled with contentment is much greater *after* Salvation than it was before. Because, when we are saved, we find the fullness of our Joy not in things that dishonor God, but in God Himself! Salvation causes us to receive an infinitely *greater* Contentment precisely because we are not seeking for it in things that are passing away, but in the eternal Owner and Creator of the Universe!

So, in saving us from our sins, Jesus gives us Himself! And in giving us Himself, we will not only be forgiven and made Righteous, but we will experience unimaginable Delight, forever. And that is *why* King David said:

Psalms 16:11

In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.