

Contradictions Exposed

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

This morning I want to do something a little different from the expository-type sermons I typically deliver from selected passage of scripture. As some of you know, a little over a month ago, I was invited to speak at another church's Sunday morning men's breakfast meeting. Specifically, they asked me to come and talk with them about the book I authored, "To My Friends, Strait Talk About Eternity." Well, I knew enough about the doctrine of this particular denomination to know that most, if not all of them, would be unfamiliar with the Gospel message set forth in that book – the very Gospel we enjoy hearing at our church week in and week out. Not wanting to blindside anyone, I proceeded to tell them that I could not talk about the book without talking about its contents – disclosing to them that if I accepted their invitation, I would likely be challenging the very doctrine and tenets of their church and its denomination. So assuming they would not want to hear doctrine contrary to their own, I initially resisted accepting their invitation on that basis. But even with that full disclosure they continued to insist that they were open-minded and would welcome such a challenge. While I remained reluctant, I then felt obligated in light of God's command to be ready to give an answer to everyone that asks you of the reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15b). They asked so I relented and proceeded to put together my thoughts on how (in the brief time I was allotted) – how I might best encourage their consideration of the vital basics of the Gospel with which I knew most, if not all of them, would be totally unfamiliar.

So this morning I want to share with you what I told this group. And while many of you here have heard these things before, many others outside of our church also hear our messages through our media ministry. And for the vast majority of so-called "Christianity" these vital Gospel issues are as unfamiliar to them as it was to that men's breakfast group.

I could tell by the looks on the faces in the audience that morning that most of those men had never heard anything like this and it bears repeating because the same is true of most who profess to be of the Christian faith in our day. But for those of you who have been blessed to hear and believe God's Gospel of grace, while this will all be very familiar to you, it may be helpful and stimulate your own thoughts as to how you might introduce the Gospel to your friends and family. I think we should all prepare ahead of time so as to be ready if (and when) we're given an opportunity – ready to give an answer of our hope for eternal life to everyone that asks.

Well here's what I related to this group:

As the book title, "To My Friends, Strait Talk About Eternity," suggests, I've written of things I've concluded to be vital – things concerning our eternal destiny – in other words, the good news of the Gospel of God's grace – the gospel which for years I thought I believed, but later discovered it to be altogether different than I had presumed. And I know that most professing "Christians" today believe many of the things I now believe to have been mistaken about. So to explain how the book came about, let me share a little background with you. My brothers and I were raised as Southern Baptists by great parents and we were drug to church just about every time the doors were opened.

And as a result, I was taught a lot of true things – things which I expect many of you were likewise taught and on which we agree – and that's always a good place to start. I was taught a lot truth from scripture about Jesus Christ and His work of salvation. I was taught of Him as the Redeemer – that He redeemed those He saves through His death – buying them with His shed blood. I was taught that the remission (or payment) of sins was through Him, His death.

I was taught that it was through Him and His finished work that the sins of all who are saved were forgiven. I was taught that Christ paid in full the debt due unto all the sins, for which He died on the cross. And I suspect many of you agree with those things.

And I'm grateful for that upbringing; however, I'm eternally grateful that years later, someone came along and challenged me which eventually led me to conclude that some of the essential tenets of my former faith were contradictory to some of those true things I just mentioned – contradictions to which I was totally oblivious for many years. (As an aside, you will note I titled today's review of this talk, "Contradictions Exposed" in keeping with this, the approach I decided to take before this group. So I went on to say...)

So since I can't know for sure exactly what each of you believe, I'll talk about how my own former beliefs were full of contradictions as I can speak firsthand to that. I was taught and believed, as do many professing "Christians," that Jesus Christ lived and died for everyone who ever lived, without exception. And I suspect most of you believe that as well. But here's one of the first questions that started me to seek. Someone simply asked, "If Christ died for everyone, why doesn't everyone go to heaven?" The Bible is clear that most people will not go to heaven but shall perish. The book title is taken from the words of Christ saying, "**...*strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***" (Matthew 7:14).

Now I know that even the suggestion that Christ didn't die for everyone brings to mind scriptures like John 3:16 and others that I too once interpreted to mean God loves every individual in the world and sent Christ to die for them all. And I address that and other similar scriptures in my book extensively because I had to reconcile those things as should you. So given our limited time, I will defer you to my book for that, but here's the question to ponder: If the debt for the sins of everyone was fully paid by Christ's death for them, how can God justly hold any of them responsible and punish them eternally if Christ has already bore the punishment due unto all their sins?

Well, my initial response to that was the most common one you'll hear, "Oh, but you must believe." In my book I quote an old 17th century theologian named John Owen who responded to that saying, "Well, then Christ must not have died for the sin of unbelief." Mull over that. Now we're getting to where the rubber meets the road.

The Bible is clear, “...**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved...**”(Acts 16:31). But what specifically are we to believe and in Whom?

For years I thought I believed on the Lord Jesus Christ only to later discover that for many of those years my faith wasn't actually in or on Christ (although I sincerely believed it was), but rather my faith was in my faith. Let me illustrate it this way. (Draw 2 circles). Imagine I draw a circle and within this circle are all those who are saved, who shall enjoy eternal life in heaven's glory. And then below that I draw another circle. And it's a larger circle because within this circle are those who shall be eternally lost, who shall perish in hell.

Now I want you to think with me. Whatever you think makes the difference between these 2 groups – whatever will cause you to be included in this top circle and keep you out of this bottom circle, that's where you're really placing your trust, that is your savior. I would have claimed that Christ was my Savior, that He was the one outside these 2 circles making the difference. Consider this 3rd circle off to the side here being the Savior, the difference maker – the One who saved these in the top circle (Draw a line from that circle to the top circle showing a connection to them that does not exist with the bottom circle). But wait, I believed that Jesus died for all (Draw another line from the “savior” circle to the bottom circle representing those who perish). So, while I thought I was trusting in Jesus, I really need to move Him outside the “difference maker” block.

Now I kept in close as I called Him Savior and would talk about how He made it all possible, but consider that in believing that Christ died for all who ever lived, by default I had to be trusting in something I did to make the real difference in my own salvation – and not Christ alone. And although I called it grace, I now know that at that time I actually believed in salvation by works.

Grace is salvation based upon no merit found in the one being saved. So consider the contradictions. I would say by His death on the cross He redeemed or bought those who are saved but I thought He died for this group who would perish as well. By His shed blood (presumably for all of them) He redeemed them? He forgave their sins by the remission (the payment) of His blood but they perished anyway for forgiven sins?

So I began to challenge my own past beliefs. I couldn't reconcile that if Christ did no more for these (point to upper circle) than He did for these others in the lower circle, then what was it I was really relying on to make the real difference? Again, like most, I would've said, Oh, but you must believe and that was really the real difference maker for me at that time. I had to consider myself a little better than those other folks because I'd do my part and believe and they wouldn't. I now look back at that time and marvel that 2 of my favorite Bible verses (which remain 2 of my favorite verses) should have exposed this to me, Ephesians 2:8-9. Those verses read, ***"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast."*** It's not of works. Faith is not something you do to get yourself into this group (point to top circle) and keep yourself out of this group (point to bottom circle). It's the gift of God purchased by the blood of Christ but I supposed He shed His blood so as to purchase faith for these who perish as well? If faith is the cause of your salvation then salvation would be of works and whether you openly brag about it or not, by that way of thinking you would have a basis to boast, figuring you belong in this top circle because of what you did, because you were a little better – you were willing to believe. No – faith is the gift of God. So my hope and confidence (my faith) wasn't actually on Christ but in my own supposed free-will decision. My faith was in my faith, not Christ at that time.

Another point of agreement I suspect we have is this: that those who are saved do believe on Christ. But consider this: Are those who are saved, saved because they believe or do they believe because they are saved? I used to believe the former. I'm now convinced of the latter. And there's a world of difference between those two thoughts.

We must believe on Christ but in accordance with His Person and work as it is revealed in God's Gospel – which brings me to another point I suspect we all agree upon. You're probably familiar with the Great Commission given to the disciples. As recorded in Mark 16, Christ told them to go into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature and that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.

So we know that the saved are those who believe the Gospel and those who ultimately perish are those who don't." Now also think how often in the Epistles professing Christians are warned against believing "another gospel" or a "false gospel." So how is God's true Gospel (that's believed by all who are saved in this upper circle) distinguished from all the counterfeits? Well Paul answers that in Romans 1:16-17 when he wrote that he was not ashamed of the gospel saying it was the power of God unto salvation to all who believe it.

And in verse 17 he tells us of this distinguishing mark when he says that the Gospel is that power of God unto salvation "for therein is the righteousness of God revealed." Now for a few more years than not, I had no idea what that righteousness really was about.

So that means it had not been revealed to me in the gospel I had heard and believed. But it's important if it is what makes the gospel the power of God unto salvation, if it's ultimately revealed according to Paul to all the folks who believe the true Gospel – these folks in the circle which end up in heaven. That makes this important. I don't recall but if pressed, I probably would have assumed Paul to be referring to God's attribute of righteousness as in God is righteous. He's holy and just and does right. But in this context, that's not the righteousness Paul declares to be revealed in the Gospel. It's as Paul wrote in Romans 10 saying "Christ is the end (the finishing or the fulfillment) of the law for righteousness."

The Bible teaches that this righteousness revealed in the gospel is the merit of what Christ accomplished in His life and death in perfect satisfaction to the Father's justice. Christ satisfied the law's demands – that is, the entire revealed will of God both in precept (by His perfect, sinless obedience) and He also satisfied its penal demands by paying the debt due to God's justice for lawbreakers – for all the sins of all He saves. And when I began to seriously look into this I started reading and hearing of an "imputed righteousness" – something else I had never heard about. If you go back 100 years or more and read theologians from the past you'll find many of them stress this, but in our day we hear very little about imputation.

And if this is as foreign to you as it was to me, it may seem to be some deep theological subject that's not worth looking into. But in a moment I'll share an illustration that makes this so clear even a child can understand. But before I do, let me give you a reason why I hope you won't dismiss this out of hand by showing just how important it is. In Acts 17, Paul concludes his message on Mars Hill by declaring to us the standard by which God ultimately will judge us all. And guess what it is?

He said God will judge the world in righteousness and he further makes it clear that it is the very perfect righteousness of Christ by which we will be judged, the proof being that Christ was raised from the dead. The righteousness He established demanded He live, just as sin demands death – the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23).

Now that means that all who will live with Him eternally must possess a righteousness equal to that of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. Well I can't deliver that and you can't either. We're born sinners with Adam's fallen nature & therefore we all sin. So that that made me ask, "Well how can any be saved if God requires such perfection?"

In 2 Cor. 5:21 we're told that it is by God making Christ's very righteousness to belong to those who are saved by His imputing (or putting it to their account) the merit of Christ's sinless perfection in the same way that He imputed (or charged) the demerit of their sins to Christ so that He might pay the debt due unto God's justice for them. What an exchange! He died for sins He had no part in producing that those for whom He died would have a righteousness they had not part in producing!

Let me close with this illustration (and some of you will recognize this as an illustration I unashamedly borrowed from Pastor Bill Parker): Let's say you were a high rolling developer that got caught when the real estate bubble burst down on the Florida coast and you found yourself on the verge of bankruptcy. Let's say you owed the bank \$10 million and you have no way to pay it back.

But you go to meet with your banker to throw yourself at his mercy (although you know it won't do any good) but in hopes they'll give you more time or make some concessions to you. And when you get there, he says Mr. Smith, let's first pull up your account and look at the details. And he does and then he says, Mr. Smith, you might not realize this, but someone came in last week and said, "Put that debt on my account" and he paid the full \$10 million you owed.

You are debt free. What relief! That makes Mr. Smith a happy fellow who wants to go out and find out who this kind person was so he could thank him. But as he gets up to leave, the banker says, "Wait just a second, that's not all Mr. Smith. Not only did he pay off your \$10Mil, but he also deposited another \$10Mil into your savings account." Wow! Now think of that debt of gratitude that Mr. Smith would feel toward his benefactor.

Well, that's akin to the great news of the Gospel. Christ said, "Put their sins on my account" as He willingly took on the sin debt of everyone for whom He lived and died and paid it in full by His own shed blood. God the Father had graciously imputed or charged their sins to Christ so that He could pay for them. And not only were their debts forgiven by His blood payment, but they have a double cure. God also imputed or credited to their accounts the merit of Christ's perfect obedience, His righteousness.

That's how the Bible can refer to an otherwise, guilty, hell-deserving sinner such as me, as is said of all His saved church, they are **"...holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable in His sight"** (Col. 1:21-22) – a sinner like me? No – not in my own character and conduct but in the eyes of God's justice, that's how He sees me. I have a perfect righteousness that I had no part in producing – the very imputed righteousness of God in Christ, my Substitute and Savior. And here is how real imputation is – Christ shed real blood, died a real death for imputed sin.

And with that I thanked them for the breakfast and their attention and expressed my hope that something I had said would prompt them to look into the scriptures and seek the truth concerning this most important subject.

Today, to believers of like-minded faith, I pray that this message will encourage you to be thoughtfully ready and able to communicate (in your own way) the distinctions of our faith with others if and when that opportunity arises.

And I also pray that if any who hear this still adhere to the doctrinal positions of salvation by works that I once held, that God might be pleased to use this to challenge your thoughts and lead you by faith to see how those beliefs stand in stark contradiction and opposition to God's true Gospel of grace where we see salvation is truly conditioned on the Savior, Jesus Christ and Him alone. May the Lord use this to inspire further consideration of His Gospel wherein His righteousness is revealed. As you seek God, pray that God will expose to you any and all thoughts that stand in contradiction to God's Gospel and His glory. Amen.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.

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