

THE GOSPEL

By

Curtis Dickinson

Can we understand it?

Since it is necessary to believe the gospel in order to be saved, it should be our desire to clarify the gospel and not complicate it. All indications are that we are now in the age of the great apostasy when believers in Christ shall be put to the supreme test, the climax of which will be the final judgment and destiny of the race.

Considering the importance of one's attitude toward it follows that we ought to know and understand just gospel means in plain terms of reality.

I. THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

The Apostle Paul gives a simple definition of the gospel:

“Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you For I delivered unto you first of all that which I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The Scriptures to which the apostle referred were the Old Testament Scriptures which spoke of the coming of one to bear man's sins and undergo a judgment — death for those sins (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 53, Psalms 22). The Old Testament sacrificial animals which were slain portrayed the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. The Old Testament also held forth the hope of a resurrection from the dead. Abraham received a promise that he and his seed would be given the land forever (Genesis 13:15). This could refer only to a resurrection of Abraham and those who become heirs through the “seed”, which is Christ. Job plainly stated that he expected to rise from the dead. Psalm 16:10 is a prediction of the resurrection of Jesus:

“For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol: neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10).

Paul not only gives us this definition of the gospel, but in his preaching he illustrated the meaning of the gospel by persistently preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus. Almost everyone in churchdom will agree that the gospel involves a belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. But when it is suggested that one explain the meaning of these events, the average person is all at sea. The “faith” of many has come to be a mere recognition of certain words, without any idea as to what these words actually mean. There is serious question as to whether or not this is faith. Faith means to believe

something! If what one is to believe has no possible definition then it seems ridiculous that the Bible writers would have gone to such pains to explain what one is to believe. Many claim that the “gospel” is mysterious, and that we are not supposed to understand it — just believe it. I submit that it is the work of Satan that has confused and distorted the meaning of the death and resurrection and that such confusion has resulted in a loss of faith and lack of Christian Zeal. The death and resurrection are not only to be believed as events, but they are to have meaning and motivating power to the believer who understands what lies beneath the events.

II. THE GOSPEL IS COMPLICATED BY SPIRITUALIZING SCRIPTURE LANGUAGE.

Take a look at Romans 6:23;

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Here death means death, and life means life. But in the popular and traditional explanation of this verse, death is said to mean a continuation of life in a spiritual sense (?) somewhere separated from God. Life is explained to mean spiritual life in God’s presence.

Now if God were wanting to tell us that sin would bring about a change from life as we know it to a miserable spiritual existence in some other world, He could have said so. But He chose here the simplest and most realistic words in language. The issue in Romans 6:23 is not whether we may live in one place or another. Rather the issue is whether or not we shall live at all. It is either the complete and total possession of life, or the complete absence of life. Nowhere in the Bible is there any suggestion that eternal death will be a form of eternal life!

Take a look at John 3:16:

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but eternal life” (John 3:16).

Again the issue is either to “perish” or to have “everlasting (eternal) life”. But tradition has read into the word “perish” the idea of some form of life in a spirit world of the damned. The Greek (original writing) word here is *apollumi*, which means to kill, to destroy, or to utterly destroy. Of course, like most words it has secondary meanings. But why confuse the meaning of the issue with secondary meanings? In Hebrews 1:11 the writer speaks of the heavens and earth perishing and used the same Greek word. Surely we do not think that God will preserve the heavens and earth in some kind of torment.

The question with man is whether he will live or die. Death does not mean to go on living. God holds out no promise to keep rebellious sinners alive forever merely in order that He can torture them. They shall perish. On the other hand, life for the redeemed

doesn't mean only a spiritual existence. "Eternal" is a word that qualifies life as to its changelessness and timelessness. The Christian now has "eternal life" only in promise. The "eternal" quality comes only at the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the change from mortal to immortal. Jesus Himself demonstrated that life after a resurrection was not something totally different and unlike that with which God has endowed man. Jesus was restored by a resurrection to life, as a human being, eternal and immortal.

To change the meaning of the terms "life", "death", "destroy", and "perish", is to so cloud the issue as to make it impossible to explain why Jesus died and arose. The scripture says that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). This Paul says is the basis of the gospel. This is explained as a substitutionary death in many places:

"That by the grace of God He (Christ) should taste of death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9);

"Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21);

"Who His own self bore our sins in His body upon the tree" (2 Peter 2:24).

If, however, the penalty for sin is not death, but a kind of spiritual and eternal torment, then the death of Jesus fails to fit the picture we have been given in the above scriptures. Jesus did not suffer an unending spiritual torture or torment for our sin. Instead He died, poured out His blood, and even "poured out His soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12). Since the gospel is the fact that Christ died for us, it is a confusion of the issue to tell people that they have an eternal soul which will never die and that if they do not accept Christ they will go on living in eternity in some condition of spirit life.

III. CLARIFYING THE TERMS AT ISSUE: LIFE OR DEATH, CLARIFIES THE GOSPEL.

If the wages of sin is death, then Christ met the penalty when He died on Calvary. "He that has died is justified from sin" (Romans 6:7) and "all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3). The news of Christ dying to thus meet our penalty for sin is indeed good news when we see in it this simple and realistic application.

Moreover, all the Old Testament types and sacrifices are easy to understand in the light of this issue. The sacrificial animals were slain, with their blood drained out in a literal death and then burned, clearly indicating the fact that the wages of sin is for the sinner to be put to death, and burned up in the final fire (Gehenna or Hell) that destroys the earth. If the penalty for sin is for one to be tortured forever these animals should have been caged or chained, kept alive and subjected to torture, torture which would burn them but not destroy them. In the case of Abraham and Isaac, the ram should not have been slain on the altar built for Isaac, but instead it should have been kept alive for perpetual torture. The people of Egypt who failed to kill the lamb and put its blood on the door post should

not have suffered the loss of the first born son in death, but rather he should have been given a kind of everlasting quality then punished by torture. But we see that all these events pictured the judgment of God to be always the same: “The soul that sins it shall die.” The wages of sin is death, not a perpetual spiritual existence in some torture pit run by an eternal devil to satisfy an insatiable appetite for vengeance on the part of God. Thus when Christ died, He met head-on and completely the terms of God’s law: sin reaps the reward of death.

The Gospel says that Christ has been raised:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live;” (John 11:25).

Now if every person already has the quality of “eternity” about him, if he already is to live forever, then this claim of Jesus is meaningless” For this reason the gospel falls on deaf ears today. Of what value is it to offer a man the right to live forever if we have already convinced him that he is immortal and eternal and couldn’t die if he wanted to? The plea is regularly made: “where will you spend eternity?” The statement is common from pulpits: “you have an eternal soul”. Then the invitation is issued to accept the offer of eternal life! No wonder the average person is puzzled about the meaning of the death of Christ. No wonder the average church member cannot comply with Peter’s command to “be ready always to give answer to every man that asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). The reason as well as the hope eludes him. But if we understand that death is to lose life completely and eternal life is to possess life completely forever, the gospel message is clear.

IV. CLARIFYING THE TERMS AT ISSUE: LIFE AND DEATH, CLARIFIES THE ATTITUDE OF GOD.

All believers are concerned about their loved ones who never believed the gospel. To think that while the saved ones are enjoying the pleasures of Paradise these loved ones are going to be living in a torture pit throughout eternity to consider this prospect takes the joy out of a believer’s salvation. As a matter of fact many reject the claims of the gospel because they cannot reconcile the idea that “God is love” with the teaching that God will keep people alive for the sole purpose of torturing them forever.

But when we recognize that the disobedient will meet death as the wages of sin, we then see that God is both loving and also just. The scripture states that those who “obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

This punishment, to be destroyed (not to be kept alive and tortured, for then they would never be destroyed), is enough to satisfy the judgment of a righteous God. Why isn’t it enough for man’s sense of justice?

To take the simple meaning of gospel terms, that the wages of sin is death, clarifies the meaning of the Gospel. Either we receive Christ and His sin-offering in death, or else we must meet the penalty of death ourselves in judgment. The thing at stake is LIFE — IMMORTAL LIFE. Immorality is not the inherent right of all men. It is to be ours only on one condition: that we believe the gospel. “And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14). And I ask, “And how shall they hear when the meaning of the words have been changed?”

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. IV. Number 9.
.....