

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Why The Good News Is Treated Like Bad News

The word *gospel* in our Bibles translates a Greek word that means "good news." What better name for the message about Jesus could there be? The gospel is the story of how Jesus died in our place to save us from the worst thing that could possibly happen to us: experiencing the wrath of God because of our sin. Jesus took the punishment that was due to us, and because of His sacrifice on our behalf we are spared the awful consequences of our wrongs. What a wonderful gift! What a blessing! It is the best news that man has ever heard.

But many people do not think that the gospel is good news at all. The gospel is treated as something to be avoided in polite conversation, something that offends and creates fights. In many circles it is considered rude to bring up the subject of the gospel to one's acquaintances, family, or co-workers, and it is considered offensive to suggest that the gospel is the only truth and that all must obey it. The good news is treated like bad news.

How did the good news become bad news? The answer is easy: because the good news begins with the fact that all are sinners and stand condemned before God (Rom. 1-3). The first thing the gospel tells us is that we are wrong, that we have not lived in the right way and that we need salvation from our sin. Most people do not like to hear that. People

would prefer to hear that they are good and that they are living right (even when they admit they are not perfect). We do not like to be rebuked. It hurts the conscience and the heart. So rather than listen to the gospel's initial rebuke, many people turn away from it.

One of the craftiest plans Satan ever developed was to present people with a false gospel that strips away all the unpleasant parts. That's the kind of gospel people will hear. The world has become flooded with false gospels that have virtually eliminated the concept of sin from its doctrines. To many people the gospel is like an invitation to join a club. No guilt, no sacrifice, no hardship, no loss of respect. Just join the church and have a good time. In such groups the gospel is not about salvation from sin's consequences or the cleansing of the conscience of the load of guilt sin brings. It is a gospel without condemnation.

Any gospel that does not begin by telling us that we are sinners has two fatal faults. First, it is not the gospel taught in the New Testament. The gospel preached by the apostles began with rebuke and warning. No "gospel" that downplays or ignores this feature has the right to call itself the gospel. Second, in what sense can we say that the gospel is good news if it does not portray the problem of our sin as enormous? If our sin is no big deal (as the false gospels portray it), then what is so good about the gospel? If God accepts me just as I am, if I have little or nothing to change, then the good news is just a fix of a minor problem.

We must beware of any "gospel" that minimizes sin. Only when we truly understand the nature of our sin, what it does to us and what it does to God, will we be able to appreciate fully what is so good about the gospel. The gospel is presented as the answer, the solution, to the worst problem in the world. The gospel's glory will never be seen for what it is if we depreciate sin.

Not only must we beware of any gospel that minimizes sin, we must not succumb to the temptation to decrease the Biblical message about sin to make the gospel easier for others to accept. We all know many people

that we want to see saved. In our love for them and our zeal to preach the gospel there is a temptation that we will try to relax the message so that it is not so harsh, so that it will be a "friendlier" gospel. But our love for the lost has no authority over God. We may not relax God's standards because we think they are too tough. God is the one who created us, and God is the only one who has the right to say what the way to fellowship with Him will be. If we are not content to preach God's message just as He gave it, then woe to us, for we have become judges of God.

God sets the conditions for salvation. Preaching or obeying a watered-down gospel does not change or solve anything. If people find the gospel offensive, ugly, and a turn-off, so be it. Let us preach without apologies or embarrassment. Let us say with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (Rom 1:16).

- David McClister

Review of John 10:28

Some time back I was asked to discuss the following question: "Does John 10:28, where Jesus says 'and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand,' not teach that a child of God can never be lost?"

In dealing with this question, let us notice the context of the verse upon which the question under consideration is asked. The verse quoted above is 28. The one just before it in the passage says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:" (v. 27). Then after the verse in question we read, "My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (v. 29).

Is the phrase "and they shall never perish," contained in verse 28, conditional or unconditional? Please read the context again. Notice that Jesus said that they hear His voice and follow Him. The eternal life promised is based on the conditions given. The inference by some is that sheep cannot be led astray or caught. If this be true, why is there need for a shepherd? Paul said, "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29). Will such drawn away disciples be lost? Obviously so, or else Paul would not have been so concerned. Hence, the sheep must continue to hear His voice, and continue to follow Him in order to receive the reward.

Does the statement "No one shall snatch them out of my hand" mean that man cannot separate himself from the salvation that is in Christ? Jesus does not say this. He says, "no one shall snatch them out of my hand." There is a big difference.

Another favorite proof text of those who teach the impossibility of apostasy is Romans 8:35. This passage asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Paul continues and says, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is quite clear, therefore, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. His love, and the love of God (John 3:16), was shown before, and apart from, any response of our own. Hence, His love toward us is not dependent on our action in any sense. But will man be saved solely through the love of God and Christ? If so, there will be universal salvation, because God's love is for all men. If anyone is lost, he will be one whom God loves, for He loves all the world.

From these passages it is seen that nothing can separate us from the love of God and Christ, and that no one can snatch us from the hand of God. But does this teach unconditional salvation and the impossibility of apostasy? It does not. Read the following scripture: "Behold Jehovah's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1,2). Now hear the New Testament writer James: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13,15). Notice the order: (1) drawn away by own lust; (2) lust bringeth forth sin; (3) sin bringeth forth death. Our own sin and iniquity can separate us from God and Christ, and bring forth death.

But one may respond by saying, "I thought we were kept by the mercy and loving-kindness of Jehovah." Yes, but such is to those who "fear him," and "such as keep his covenant" and "remember his precepts to do them" (Ps. 103:17, 18). Again, another objection goes something like this: "What about the power of God? Are we not kept by His power?" Surely, but the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), and the gospel must be obeyed (2 Thess. 1:8). Also, one may turn from "the gospel" unto a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). When such is done the benefits of the gospel are forfeited.

Many claim that man cannot fall, that there is no danger; but in trying to prove it they always quote passages about the promises of God, every one of which are based upon the condition that one hear the voice of the Shepherd, obey Him, and abide in His teaching. Such is the case with the passage in John 10:28.

- O. C. Birdwell

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- > “Maturity has more to do with what types of experiences you've had and what you've learned from them and less to do with how many birthdays you've celebrated.”
 - > “No matter how good a friend is, they're going to hurt you every once in a while and you must forgive them for that.”
 - > “Our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we are responsible for who we become.”
 - > “It takes years to build up trust, and only seconds to destroy it.”
 - > “You can do something in an instant that will give you heartache for life.”
 - > “No thought is worth thinking that is not the thought of God. No sight is worth seeing unless it is seen through his eyes. No breath is worth breathing without thanks to the One whose very breath it is.”
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THIS WEEK’S LESSONS: Sunday morning: “*Fighting Christians!*” (text: 2 Tim. 2:1-5); Sunday evening: “*SONG OF SOLOMON: A Song of Love!*”

SCHEDULE: Our Gospel Meeting will be July 28 – Aug. 2, Sun. regularly scheduled times, M-F at 7:00 p.m., with Tanner Campbell, of Piggott, AR.