

To whom is the Gospel Addressed?

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There is, and long has been, much controversy between legalists and the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only as to what the gospel is, but also in regard to whom it is or should be addressed. If all the parties engaged in the controversy could understand the scriptural signification of the word, those who are now zealously contending for a universal application of it to all mankind indiscriminately, would desire rather to restrict than to extend its application, as they have ever exerted themselves to suppress its publication. What they call gospel differs very widely from what Christ and the holy apostles proclaimed in the primitive days of the gospel church. Our Redeemer encountered the same class of zealous fanatics, who compassed sea and land to disseminate their false gospel, but a perversion of the gospel of Christ; and exposing and denouncing their hypocrisy charged them with teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men. The voluntary religious institutions originated and enjoined by men without any divine authority from God are now very widely taught and greedily received by graceless men, and such teaching is by them dignified with the name of gospel. Their preachers may entertain conflicting opinions in regard to what is contained in the Scriptures, for the doctrine of the Bible and the laws and institutions of Christ are regarded by them as minor points, while opposite sects can freely unite in opposing the doctrine of Christ, and in the propagation of any or all of the inventions of men. They can and do, with much seeming cordiality, take each other by the hand, and with wonderful reciprocity compliment each other as "truly evangelical," while in truth there are but two points in which they are really agreed among themselves; the one is that salvation is attainable by works, and the other is in denouncing the true followers of the Lamb. As to precisely what works will secure salvation, and by what mode of warfare they should fight the saints, they may differ widely without interruption of fellowship. What they call gospel may be obtained in any quantity from the schools of men, in which every man is engaged in teaching his brother and neighbour, saying, "Know the Lord." From Infant and Sabbath Schools, and Bible Classes, as well as from Theological Seminaries; from books and tracts, and various other sources, they can procure all of that kind of delusion which they call gospel in indefinite quantities. We would by no means misrepresent them; but we have failed to understand their language, if what they call gospel is not with them an article of commerce. Do they not propose to send it to the heathen; to Burma, Hindustan, and to all the distant islands where they can find a profitable market? They gravely tell us, in a business way, what amount of capital must be invested, what number of men and amount of money, how many ships and seamen must be employed, and how long it will take to supply the world.

To make their false gospel salable, they must, of course, adapt it to the taste of all. Those who have no ears to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches, have no difficulty in hearing the doctrines of men; hence there is a great cry about preaching to sinners. Their doctrine is precisely what unconverted sinners can feast upon; for instead of being told that they are condemned already and the wrath of God abideth on them, they are told that they are probationers, free agents, and have ability to move by their prayers the power that moves the world. Instead of being told that "no man can come to the Father but by Christ," and that "no man can come to Christ except the Father draw him," they are told that they can do a great deal for the Lord. And this is profanely called preaching the gospel to

sinner; while with an air of affected superiority, they charge those who proclaim salvation by Grace in Christ, that they do not preach the gospel to sinners, while they themselves do not preach a word of gospel to saints or sinners. It is not gospel to utter falsehood in the name of the Lord; there is no gospel in telling men what they can and must do, or be damned. To call on dead sinners to repent and believe the gospel implies ability in them to do so, whereas the gospel proclaims that Christ is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. It is as exclusively the work of our exalted Saviour to give repentance as it is to forgive sins, and the dead sinner can no more do the one than the other. True repentance which is unto life and needeth not to be repented of, must proceed from life. If the repentance be spiritual, it proceeds from a spiritual source, and must be preceded by the quickening Spirit of God. The sorrow of the world worketh death; but godly sorrow worketh repentance unto life; and to be godly, in distinction from the sorrow of the world, it must come from God, it must be given by the exalted Prince and Saviour. Faith is also the gift of God, Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of it, if it be genuine; for it is not the faith of the creature, but it is the faith of the Son of God, and without it no man can please God. Paul says, it is "not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." To preach the opposite to what the inspired Scriptures teach, is not preaching the gospel to saints, nor to sinners.

But we propose to show how the Scriptures define the word gospel. Compare Isaiah 61:1, with Luke 4:18, and you will see that what is by the prophet called good tidings, is by our Lord rendered gospel, and to prevent any caviling, the good tidings in the prophecy, and the gospel in its fulfillment, are defined to mean, good tidings to the meek - "to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Observe who these meek, poor, broken hearted, prisoners are, and what gospel is preached to them. The Spirit of the Lord God qualifies those on whom it is poured, to follow the blessed Saviour in preaching good tidings, or gospel, to the meek; not to the proud, haughty, and self-righteous. It proclaims liberty, not to free agents who were never in bondage, who have all the religion they live for, and could have as much more if they pleased to work for it. The poor broken hearted, helpless prisoner hails with joy the tidings that proclaims his release from prison. But how could the same tidings be joyful, or gospel, to those who are not poor, nor captive, nor broken hearted, nor meek? When Jesus said to the poor dying thief, "this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," we cannot doubt it was good tidings to him. But would the same words, if spoken to his murderers who were reviling him, been appreciated as gospel tidings? The gospel is discriminating; it finds out the "humbled sinner in whose breast a thousand thoughts revolve." You who complain that we do not preach the gospel to sinners, would you have us, if we meet a band of robbers, pirates or murderers, say to them, in gospel terms, "fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom?" Or to a company of Atheists, "let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Jesus?" If this is not what they mean by preaching the gospel to sinners, how far short of this do they come, when they address the most blessed and sacred assurances which Christ gave to the meek, the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the peace makers, and the persecuted saints, to unconverted sinners, as an inducement to them to "get religion," saying to them, "Seek, and ye shall find; Knock, and it shall be opened unto you; Ask, and it shall be given to you?" Not one of these gracious promises were ever addressed by our Lord or any minister of his to any but to quickened subjects of his saving grace. Instead then of preaching the gospel to saints or sinners, they pervert the gospel, in attempting to give the children's bread unto dogs, in direct defiance of the special command of Jesus Christ, who positively forbid that that which is holy should be given to the dogs. By their artful misapplication of the Scriptures, they are charged by an

apostle with "turning the truth of God into a lie," by making the Scriptures seem to say what they do not say; and so by handling the word of God deceitfully, they not only lead the blind into the ditch, but frequently perplex and worry many of the unsuspecting honest-hearted enquirers after truth.

We will correct a misapprehension of the position and practice of the ministers of our order. While we believe and preach the gospel, as Christ and his apostles did, wherever a door is open for that purpose, openly addressing our preaching to everyone within the sound of our voice, the gospel which we preach discriminates between the living and the dead. It is a savor of life unto life, to those who are quickened by the Holy Ghost, and a savor of death unto death, to them that perish. It is "to the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." And if our preaching is not a savor of death unto death to the ungodly, and a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks, and if it be not a savor of life to the quickened, and if it be not to them that are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, then it is not apostolic preaching. Who ever knew a true minister of Christ to refuse to preach the gospel to any but saints? We cannot search the hearts or try the reins of those to whom we preach; but the word which we preach makes the discrimination; for it is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. {Heb.4:12,13} The gospel which we preach is good tidings to the meek; but if any part of our audience are not meek, it is not gospel, or good tidings to them. All who have an ear to hear, are more than welcome to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. But if any have not hearing ears, the preachers cannot supply them; for the hearing ear and understanding heart are of the Lord. The Son of God alone has power to cause the dead to hear his voice and live; for the words which he speaks to them, they are spirit, and they are life. Therefore his sheep hear his voice, and he knows them, and they follow him; for he gives to them eternal life, and they shall never perish. He, and he alone, has power over all flesh that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him. All this we preach to every creature; but we do not give the children's bread to any but the children, nor do we give what belongs to the dogs to the children.

But let us examine the parable of the marriage of the king's son. {Mt.22:1-14} Unto whom, and for what purpose was it spoken by our Lord, and why spoken in parable? The context will show that it was addressed to the Jews, including the Pharisees, who were so much enraged on hearing it, that they went and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. {See verse 15} As whatsoever God speaks is certain to secure the object for which it is spoken. {Is.55:11} What was accomplished by this parable shows conclusively for what purpose it was spoken. And the reason why he spake to all but his saints in parables is given in his own words to his disciples in Luke 8:10. "And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?" Alluding to the parable of a sower, "and he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." We must reject Christ's own explanation of his reason for using parables, or admit that this parable was spoken expressly to discriminate between his disciples to whom was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and all others from whom that gift was withheld, and by the inscrutable purpose of God all but the disciples, in seeing should not see, and hearing should not understand. Instead of his parables being used to elucidate, illustrate, and make the mysteries of the kingdom of God clear and plain to the understanding of the ungodly, they were designed to make them the more obscure, that they might be a stumbling block to the Jews, and folly to the Greeks. "Therefore Jesus rejoiced in spirit, when he said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it

seemeth good in thy sight." Neither this nor any other parable, correctly understood, will sustain the position taken, that the address of the ministers of Christ should be indiscriminate. The same gospel preaching which elucidates the mysteries to the saints on whom the heavenly gift is bestowed, involves them in parabolic obscurity to all but such. Still the question may return, what does the parable mean? We have already shown that it was intended like all the parables to baffle the wisdom of the Scribes, Pharisees and work mongers of that and of all subsequent ages, and bring down their lofty imagination, humble the pride of man, and cause that none should glory, only in the Lord. It was nevertheless full of wholesome instruction to those to whom it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. The kingdom of God, which in this parable or similitude is compared to a king who made a marriage for his son, embraces Christ and his people in both the legal and then prospective dispensations. The marriage of the king's son represents the public espousal, and marriage of Christ and his bride, the church, which was then about to be consummated, according to prophecy. The oxen and fatlings, representing all the sacrifices under the law, had been killed, and the Bridegroom had come to redeem his bride from under the law, that she might be identified with him in his resurrection from the dead. The marriage festivities, or feast, was now about to be spread, in the opening of the gospel dispensation. The Jews, as a nation or people, had been notified and bidden to the marriage by the prophets, and they had professed to be anxiously awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom and announcement of the feast. "The law and the prophets were until John." John the Baptist had announced the advent of Christ as the Bridegroom, saying, "He that hath the bride, is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom rejoiceth because of the Bridegroom's voice; thus my joy is fulfilled." John's mission was to make ready a people prepared of the Lord. Seventy servants had been sent to announce to the commonwealth of Israel that the feast was prepared; but they were not ready to leave Judaism, nor had they any disposition to embrace Christianity. These servants had been forbidden to go with this proclamation to any but those Jews which had been bidden by the prophets. "Go ye not in the way of the Gentiles," nor into any city, even of the Samaritans were they not to enter, but to go exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. "But they made light of it." He came to his own, and his own received him not. He grew up among them as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form, nor comeliness; and when they saw him there was no beauty or attraction for them to desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; "he was despised, and we esteemed him not." {Is.53:1-3} Again other servants, the apostles, were sent out, with the same charge to go only to the Jews which were bidden; but they made no serious matter of it; and they slew the servants. This was literally true of the disciples and apostles which were sent with this message to the Jews; they not only rejected their message, but put the messengers to death. All this preceded the wrath which was brought upon the Jewish nation, when nationally they were destroyed, and Jerusalem and other cities were terribly destroyed.

Then said the king to his servants, or ministers; the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden, the carnal Israelites, were not worthy. The law could make nothing perfect. Their legal self-righteousness was but filthy rags, and would not answer for a wedding garment. They with all their filthy rags, or legal works, were now utterly rejected, and the decree of the king is published, that none of them which were bidden, or to whom the prophets had been sent, should taste of the supper, the gospel feast. And now the servants are sent forth to the Gentiles, who had not been bidden to the feast as were the Jews. Comparing the version of Luke 16 of this same parable with that of Matthew, we perceive that when those who were 'whole' had declined the feast, the servants were instructed to gather from the streets and lanes of Jerusalem, or Israel, "the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind;" quite a different description of guests; yet the very description to whom the gospel is good tidings; and of this description there were gathered by the apostles from the secluded lanes and streets of Israel all the original constituent

members of the gospel organization. And the apostles reported to their Lord, saying, "It is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." Poor, helpless, halt and blind sinners who felt their poverty, and had no works or merits of their own to plead, were gathered to the gospel feast; but those of that character called from the Jews did not exhaust the provisions of grace, and the gospel proclamation is by divine command extended to the high-way and hedges of the Gentile world. "Go ye," the ministers of the everlasting gospel, who had received a "Go ye" from their King, "and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage." Certainly not as many of the self-righteous work-mongers, but as many as they should find of the character already gathered into the marriage, of the poor, lame, broken hearted, helpless and guilt-stricken; bid them welcome, in the name of the King to the marriage. But none others should partake of the feast, as we see how he fared who came in not having on the wedding garment. The broad phylacteries of self-righteous Pharisees would not do; the guest must be clothed with garments of salvation, as sinners saved by grace alone, and covered with the robe of Christ's own righteousness, that is the wedding dress; and a profession of religion without it will avail nothing. All who come in without God's grace will be thrust out without his favor. Again, permit us to ask, What is there in this parable that can be justly construed to favor an indiscriminate address of the gospel ministry to all mankind?

The work of the gospel ministry is very clearly and fully stated in the words of our risen Saviour to the apostles immediately before he ascended to heaven. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This is a most vitally important introduction to their commission. If there are any sinners who have power to resist his will, or to secure their own salvation, or to prevent their own salvation, then all power in earth is not in him. If ministers have power to save souls, to quicken dead sinners, or to prevent their quickening and salvation, then there is power besides what is vested in him. Or if Theological Schools have power to prepare men for the gospel ministry, or Mission Boards have power to commission men to preach, then that power is not exclusively found in him. The fact is not only in itself important, but it is also important that all who are called by him to the work should know it; for it is upon this very 'therefore' that they are commanded to go. Go ye therefore, or from this consideration. It does not allow the alternative to them to tarry at home, and send somebody else. "Go ye therefore." And what? "Teach all nations." He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, having all power in both worlds, has a right to send them over every state, territory, and division of the universe; and no king, potentate or ruler of the earth has any legitimate right to forbid, or throw impediments in their way. All nations. The command of Christ is no longer restricted to the Jews; now the middle wall of partition is taken down, and the messengers of Christ are commanded to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. For God has a people in every tribe and nation, and his gospel shall search and find them out, and call them out; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. That is as was understood and practiced by the apostles, baptizing all who gladly receive the word, and who believe with all their heart on the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus by baptism adding them manifestively to the apostles, and to the apostolic church. "Teaching them." They need instruction, and Christ has by his supreme authority authorized this manner of instruction, by and through the diversified gifts which he has received for and given to them. But what are they to teach them? Not the arts and sciences of this world; for in the knowledge of them the ministers of Christ are generally quite limited themselves. But the orders of the King are very plain and definite. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." No new lessons that Jesus has not commanded the apostles. No progression beyond the commands of Christ. Nothing that he has commanded may be omitted. Nothing that he has not commanded may be added. If any man shall add to the words of the book of this prophecy, or instruction, God shall add to him the plagues written in this book; and if any man shall take from the words of his instructions, he shall be expelled from the church of God, the

communion of the saints, and from the privileges of the Holy City, New Jerusalem. But, "Blessed and happy are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs."

We have been the more particular in showing what the gospel is, by whom, and to whom Christ has commanded it be preached, that but all who read may see that very much of what passes currently for gospel at our day, is but the teaching for doctrines the commandments and institutions of men, instead of the all things whatsoever Christ commanded his apostles to teach. In conclusion of this extended article we wish to add a few words in regard to the object and utility of the gospel ministry. The apostle, who is commanded to teach us, defines it thus: "Feed the flock of God, which he has purchased with his own blood." Jesus commanded Peter, saying, "Feed my sheep," and "feed my lambs." None but the flock of God can feed upon the gospel; none but they can live on every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The beloved disciple and inspired apostle John says, "ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." {I Jn.4:4-6} Finally, as the sun in the heavens can only be seen in its own light, so the light and glory of the everlasting gospel can only be discerned in its own divine radiance. Until God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines in our hearts, we cannot comprehend the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.