

What Is The Real Gospel?

What is the “gospel”? Why can’t churches agree on what it is? If they all preach the “gospel,” why are their messages different? Is the “gospel of the Kingdom of God” different from the “gospel ... by which also you are saved”? It’s time you knew the truth about the real gospel!

My wife and I were grocery shopping many years ago with our three sons, aged 2, 3 and 5 at the time. One friendly lady patted the boys on their heads and commented about how nice they looked and asked their names.

Pointing out each one, I replied, “Mark, David and Matthew!”

“Oh, how nice!” she said. “Such good *gospel* names!”

We chatted briefly and she went her way. I couldn’t help but think about her statement. Any “Bible” name was a “gospel” name to her.

But just what is the gospel?

“Gospel” is not a modern English word but quite an old one. It was carried over from the Old English word *godspel* (meaning “good news”) and preserved in the King James translation of the Bible. The Greek word *evangelizo* means “to announce *good news*; to declare, bring (show) glad tidings, or to preach the gospel.” The Greek word *evangelion* comes from the same root and means “a good message,” or “the gospel.” *Evangelistes* is the Greek word translated “evangelist,” and means one who is a preacher of the gospel.

So “gospel” means glad tidings, good news. But good news about what? Let’s allow God to give us the answer, directly from His Word.

Before Jesus’ birth, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, “Joseph, you son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary, your wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

“And she shall bring forth a son and you shall call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20, 21).

In this first announcement to Joseph, there is emphasis on His saving work;

that He would be the Savior; to save people from (not “in”) their sins. No mention is made here of proclaiming a message to the people. However, only a few chapters later, after a brief summary of the ministry of John the Baptist and an account of Jesus’ temptation by Satan in the wilderness, the Bible says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the *gospel of the kingdom*, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

Only a few verses later, in chapter 5, we see the whole basis for all that Jesus taught them:

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him;

“And He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:1-3).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught how to live. He taught the “beatitudes,” as they are called—the beautiful Christian attitudes of humility, meekness, mercy, peacemaking, gentleness, goodness, willingness to receive persecution, and the need to love even our enemies, to “turn the other cheek” and to not judge one another.

Practically the whole meaning of Christianity itself is summed up in those fabulously moving, beautiful, powerful words of Matthew 5 through 7.

These principles are *what He taught*. Technically they are part of the gospel, for they speak of the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God. And yet they are directed more toward man’s relationship with God, with friends and even with enemies, rather than the specifics of the Kingdom contained in the “Kingdom parables” of Matthew and Luke.

Notice an important part of the commission Jesus gave to His servants:

“Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:

and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world [consummation of the age]. Amen” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Making Disciples of All Nations

The gospel Jesus commissioned His servants to preach is a vast subject, It has many facts and facets, contains many teachings, analogies, similes, parables, examples and commandments for us.

Jesus commissioned His disciples to do several things. First, He said His disciples must go. They were to have a pioneering attitude guided by a spirit of impermanence, of willingness to leave cherished places of abode with the comfortable good life of things and personal possessions. Paul spoke of being “buffeted” and having “no certain dwelling place” (1 Corinthians 4:11) when he traveled throughout the Mediterranean world preaching the gospel.

Next, Jesus said His disciples were to teach all nations. The Greek word used here is *mathetuo*, which means “to become a pupil; to disciple; to enroll a scholar, or disciple; to instruct, or teach.” This is a different word from the one Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount. There He used *didasko*, referring to those who “do and teach” the commandments.

Jesus is clearly instructing His followers to go and to make disciples of all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

When one comes to a decision to be baptized, he does not do so lightly. This decision is reached as a result of repenting and believing the gospel. When one repents, he needs to know what to repent of; what sin is (1 John 3:4). He needs to realize that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). He needs to understand that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but that after confession of sins Jesus Christ the Savior is faithful and just to forgive (1 John 1:9).

He needs to count the cost (Luke 14:25-32) concerning his new life. The newly repentant Christian must understand the great *choice* he is making and know that he fully intends following through with it.

Baptism, defined in detail in Romans 6, is the symbol of the death, burial and

resurrection of Christ. It is also the symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of the one being baptized—the death of the “old man.” He becomes “dead to the law” and buried “by baptism with Him *unto death*,” to rise from a watery “grave” to “walk in newness of life”; receiving the precious gifts of forgiveness from sin and God’s Holy Spirit.

Such a major decision in life should be made with both the intellect and the “heart” (emotions). It is a more important decision than deciding who and when to marry and whether to have children. It is more important than starting a business, buying a home, buying an automobile, moving from one country to another, or any other decision in life.

Surely Jesus meant, then, that the message must reach the conscious minds of those who hear the gospel . He is telling His disciples to make disciples of all peoples—to teach them by explaining, expounding, preaching, counseling, answering questions and satisfying the hunger for knowledge.

Notice further that Jesus said His disciples were to teach others “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded YOU.”

All of Jesus’ instructions in the Sermon on the Mount must be included. Therefore, Jesus’ message of love toward God, love toward fellowman and love toward one’s enemies must be included in the gospel message which is taught to all nations.

It is impossible to “make disciples” and to “baptize” without reaching the conscious minds and hearts of people with the beauty of Christ’s calling, His perfection, what He taught, why He came and how He died, as well as the truth about His resurrection and that He is alive today.

Prior to Christ’s ascension into heaven, the disciples wondered when He would set up the Kingdom. Notice what Jesus emphasized:

“When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

“And, He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His power.

“But, you shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you:

and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).

Notice He said “witnesses unto Me.” He told His disciples they would not only share the message He brought but would also share the truth about the Messenger.

Christ and Him Crucified

Peter, preaching on Pentecost, first explained how the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 had been fulfilled (Acts 2:16-20), then Peter said, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (verse 21). Can this be left out of the gospel message?

Peter began showing how Jesus had been made “Lord” by the resurrection:

“You have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

“Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that He should be held of it” (Acts 2:23, 24).

Peter continued:

“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

“Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would *raise up Christ* to sit on His throne;

“He seeing this before spoke of the *resurrection* of Christ, that His soul [Greek: “body”] was not left in hell [Greek: “the grave”], neither His flesh did see corruption.

“This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:29-32).

Notice that Peter spoke both of Jesus’ resurrection and that He was to sit on David’s throne in the future. He was a witness to the fact of the resurrection. But he was also giving testimony to a future happening—the hope of our own resurrection and of the Kingdom of God.

Later Peter said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The importance of Jesus’ death for each repentant sinner was paramount in the teaching of the early apostles. These men were believed because they believed. They spoke powerfully and with conviction because of what they had seen. They spoke continually of His death, burial and resurrection (Acts 3:15, 26; 4:2, 10, 12).

Read the first few chapters of Acts. Read the inspiring events of thousands of baptisms, many hearings, how the early apostles were jailed and beaten and rejoiced for the sake of Christ. You will read of the apostles’ sparkling zeal for and conviction of Christ’s resurrection.

You will read of their deep awe and respect for His name and the great miracles accomplished through faith in His name (see Acts 2:1-6). You will read how it was with great power that the apostles gave “witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Christ was the central theme of their teaching and preaching. The whole story of salvation came pouring out of their innermost beings. They gave powerful witness of “all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” as Jesus had said.

Yes, they spoke about “the Kingdom of God.” But that message never ignored the preaching of “Christ and Him crucified.”

What was the focal point of Peter’s sermon before the house of Cornelius?

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that was oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.

“And we are witnesses of all things which He did in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

“Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly;

“Not to all the people but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.

“And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick [the living] and dead.

“To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sin” (Acts 10:38-43).

On this occasion, before these Gentiles, Peter concentrated on personal salvation. The message was not one of coming rulership over the nations, of eternal reign with Christ, or of rulership over towns, cities or countries. That was to come later. Rather, He taught forgiveness through Jesus Christ and His resurrection. The Kingdom of God was later expounded, but, in the early euphoria following the miracles on Pentecost after the Holy Spirit was given, these inspired apostles were concentrating on the personality of Christ—His life, what He taught, how He lived. They stressed why He came and what He accomplished, that salvation was possible through Him, and through Him *only!*

Very shortly following his ordination, Paul was preaching in Antioch and Thessalonica. Read his inspiring sermon found in Acts 13:16-41. And the conclusion? “Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38).

The early apostles emphasized repeatedly the risen Christ and that this Jesus was willing and eager to forgive sins. They preached salvation to the people, the hope of the resurrection. They preached a dynamic, personal message. It was a message that got right down to the roots of the deeper questions of each individual: “What about me; what should *I do?*”

Notice another example. When Paul was in Thessalonica, he went to a synagogue of the Jews:

“And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

“Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:2, 3).

Here is a perfect example of the fulfillment of Jesus' commission to His disciples. Paul was preaching to Jews and Greeks alike. He was "teaching all nations" and making disciples of them. "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:4).

Notice how Paul stayed in Corinth "...a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

This was not a quick trip to give a short lecture, rather a continuous teaching of the people. And what was the theme? Jesus Christ and Him crucified and resurrected. He preached the good news that all men can be forgiven.

Acts 18:24-26 tells of Apollos, an eloquent Jew from Alexandria who came to Ephesus to "speak and teach diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John [the Baptist]."

Priscilla and Aquila then "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." And what was the summary of his message after this additional teaching? He was already "mighty in the scriptures" and had been "instructed in the way of the Lord" and was speaking boldly in the synagogues.

"For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:28).

Notice how Paul, in his defense before both Festus and Agrippa, emphasized the resurrection. "Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day" (Acts 24:21).

"But [the Jews] had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts 25:19).

Before Agrippa, Paul asked, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8).

At the conclusion of this powerful defense, he said:

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets

and Moses did say should come:

“That Christ should suffer, and that He should be *the first* that should *rise from the dead*, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22, 23).

When Paul was under “house arrest,” notice what he taught. “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him, into his lodging: to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

He labored, expounding, explaining, reading, teaching all day long, going through the scriptures of the Old Testament and painstakingly teaching just as Jesus had commanded.

The book of Acts concludes:

“And Paul dwelled two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him.

“Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30, 31).

Paul, in his introduction to Romans, says, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle ... separated unto the gospel of God ... concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord ... declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:1-4).

Here the gospel is called “the gospel of God.” But once again it is the good news “concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,” and showing He is “very Christ” by His resurrection.

Paul and the early apostles preached Christ—all that His life, ministry, message, death and resurrection meant. Remember Paul’s statement to the Corinthians, “For I was determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The gospel is a vast subject. It includes the whole meaning and purpose of Christ’s coming; His life, example, purpose, and teachings; the message He brought to deliver to His disciples; His place in the very Godhead even prior to

His human birth; His great purpose concerning mankind; how He overcame the temptations of Satan, disqualifying him as world ruler; how He qualified to become our King; how and why He died and was buried and was raised again according to the Scripture; what He has been doing since that time; and the fact of His soon coming return to this earth to rule for 1,000 years.

The gospel is called the “gospel of God,” the “gospel of Christ,” the “gospel of the Kingdom,” the “gospel of the Kingdom of God,” “the gospel..... Christ’s gospel,” “the gospel which I preached” and by other similar terms. It encompasses ultimately the whole message of the Bible. God’s servants must preach it all. People in India, Japan, Africa, Europe and Southeast Asia are not going to repent and believe on Jesus Christ and become His disciples unless they hear the whole gospel, the real gospel, and unless God chooses to call them into repentance and knowledge of His truth.

The Kingdom Parables

Jesus described what His Kingdom was like by parable after parable. He showed His disciples the universality of His coming Kingdom, showed how it would finally fill the whole earth, just like the figurative stone mentioned in Daniel 2:34, 35.

He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened” (Matthew 13:33). That the Kingdom permeates the whole “lump” in this parable shows the global nature of God’s coming Kingdom.

In showing the priceless value of the way into the Kingdom, Jesus said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).

In the parable that follows, Jesus mentioned the “pearl of great price,” which again illustrates the value of the Kingdom.

To show that there is judgment coming; that a separation will occur between “the children of the Kingdom” and the ones that are to be “cast into outer darkness,” He said:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

“which, when it was full, they threw it ashore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

“So shall it be at the end of the world [Greek: “consummation of the age”]: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

“And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:47-50).

The Parable of the Sower also shows a division will be made between the “children of the wicked one” and the “children of the Kingdom.” When His disciples came to Him privately, following His delivery of this lengthy parable, they asked:

“Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

“He answered and said unto them, He that sows the good seed is the Son of man;

“The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.

“The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

“As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

“The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all the things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

“And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:36-42).

From the joy of first receiving the knowledge of the Kingdom (as in the treasure in the field or the pearl of great price), Jesus progresses through the fact of rejection by some, of separation in the judgment and of punishment for those who will not repent and “enter into the joy” of their Lord.

Jesus' message was a mixture of "good news and bad news," in a sense. He very strongly warned of the penalties for rejection, as well as spoke of the joys, happiness and rewards for acceptance of His message.

Because Jesus knew many people supposed He would immediately set up His Kingdom, he spoke the Parable of the Nobleman who "...went into a far country to receive for himself the kingdom, and to return."

In this lengthy parable (Luke 19:12-27), Jesus showed the rewards for overcoming. Ten men were given one pound (a unit of money) apiece. Only three of the 10 ever return; one gained tenfold, another fivefold, and the third kept his pound wrapped in a napkin.

The first one received from his master "authority over ten cities." The second received "authority over five cities." And the pound was stripped away from the third because he did nothing with it. It was given to the one with 10.

No mention is made of the other seven. Are they included in the statement, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27)?

In this parable Jesus shows how entrance into the Kingdom and receiving the rewards over and above salvation (for both the first and the second man enter into the kingdom, but with different responsibilities) is a lifelong process. As in the Parable of the Talents (another denomination of money), Jesus shows people being rewarded according to what they do with what they have. Each is given a reward proportionate to the degree of his overcoming, his increase. God judges us according to our "own several abilities." Thus, one who does not have as much natural talent or ability is not required to produce as much. One who has much natural talent and ability is required to produce more. Each one begins equal in the amount of money given, but different people overcome in different degrees and are rewarded accordingly.

In these and other parables, Jesus is illustrating the governmental aspects of His Kingdom. He was showing it is to be global in effect; it has to do with rulership; and when His Kingdom is finally set up there will be judgment against those who have rejected it.

Many scriptures emphasize the universality of God's coming world rule and

the potential of humankind to inherit that Kingdom (see Revelation 2:26, 3:21). But these scriptures do not cancel out the many scriptures already cited (and there are dozens more) concerning the message about our Lord and Savior *Jesus Christ*.

“These Ought You to Have Done”

What we do with the knowledge we have is very, very important.

Remember, a vital part of the commission is to teach all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:19, 20).

In order to trap Jesus in His talk, a pompous Pharisee invited Him into his home for dinner (Luke 11:37-54). As they began to eat, the Pharisee began exclaiming how Jesus and His disciples had not “washed before dinner” (verse 38). In a stinging rebuke, Jesus showed the Pharisee what was really important:

“You fools, did not He that made that which is without make that which is within also?

“But, rather give alms of such things as you have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.

“But woe unto you, Pharisees! for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought you to have done, and not leave the other undone” (verses 40-42).

The Pharisees were careful to tithe, but they left out the judgment and the love of God.

Notice one of the most powerful of all the predictions about the coming of the Kingdom. It is found in Matthew 25:31-46:

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory:

“And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats:

“And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

“Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (verses 31-34).

Why? What did they do? What was their way of life?

“For I was an hungred, and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and you took Me in:

“Naked, and you clothed Me: I was sick, and you visited Me: I was in prison, and you came unto Me” (verses 35, 36).

These, the “righteous” of whom the parable speaks, are astonished. They ask:

“Lord, when saw we You an hungred, and fed You? Or thirsty, and gave You drink?

“When saw we You a stranger, and took You in? or naked, and clothed You?

“Or when saw we You sick, or in prison, and came unto You?

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me” (Matthew 25:37-40).

These “righteous” people gave food, drink and clothing to others. They visited the sick and those in jail. Their lives were lives of service. They opened their arms to the world around them in outgoing love and concern. They were involved. They were not exclusivists, cloistered and remote from their fellowman. They were working, sharing, giving, serving, visiting, laying down their lives (for life consists of time and goods) for the sake of their fellowman.

These are vital, hardworking, giving, sharing people—quick to help in trouble; ready to give clothing, food and drink when fire, flood or windstorm wipes out those around them; eager to spend their time to encourage those who are sick in bed or who are in prison. This is the attitude, the way of life Jesus urges upon every Christian.

And what about the wicked? “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,” and then he repeats the list of deeds he says the children of the devil did not accomplish (verses 41-44).

Paul said, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [giving, outgoing, serving love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

He said, “Charity [love] suffers long, and is kind; charity envies not: charity vaunts not itself, is not puffed up.

“Does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil,

“Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

“Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Jesus also warns:

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied [preached, spoken] in Your name? And, in Your name have cast out devils? And in Your name done many wonderful works?

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22, 23).

In this scripture, toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of judging the fruits:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

“You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

“Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

“Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

“Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.

“Not everyone who says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:15-21).

But what is the will of the Father toward men?

Jesus expressed it in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. And John summarizes it beautifully when he says:

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

“But whoso has this world’s good, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18).

John was that “disciple Jesus loved.” Though He loved them all, even Judas, He and John had a special camaraderie—a special, warm, deep, masculine relationship. Because of this, John was specially qualified to write about the love of God.

To “lay down your life” for the brethren means not only willingness to be martyred, but it also means to give of your time, your substance, your thoughts, your concern and your prayers.

These beautiful scriptures show an outgoing concern toward the world, toward fellowman. They show those who are in the body of Christ and performing the work of God must be involved in whether the people hearing that message are believing it and acting on it or not.

For too long some people have tried to absolve themselves of responsibility

in the preaching of the gospel. The following example will help illustrate the attitude.

If all that constitutes the gospel is contained in one book and you have the book in your hand, it is like approaching a group of people you call out to and say, "Hey! I've got *the gospel* to give to you!" With that you toss it over to these astonished people and let it plop down at their feet. Then, turning to leave, you say, "Well, don't say I didn't warn you. There it is. I gave it to you. It's yours now. And what you do with it is your business. I couldn't care one way or the other."

Not that anyone ever consciously does this, but the attitude of being "uninvolved" with people, whether they actually choose to believe the truth or not, could occur.

How? By overemphasizing one part of an important scripture and ignoring or under emphasizing another. Notice the statement made twice in John 6:

"No man can come unto Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

And, "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father" (verses 44 and 65).

If read this way, "NO MAN CAN COME TO ME (except the Father which has sent Me draw him)," then the emphasis is placed on the statement that no man can come to Christ. But what if the Father *does* draw all men unto Himself?

It is true that none could come to Jesus then and none can come even now unless or except the Spirit of the Father draw such a person. But is God calling only a tiny handful? What about the 144,000? What about the vast, innumerable multitude of Revelation 7? Where do they come from?

The Holy Spirit was not yet available to all repentant sinners when Jesus preached. Most rejected His message then. Even His own disciples fled and had to be convinced by many miraculous signs before they would believe. When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them on the Day of Pentecost, they became converted. They were begotten of God. Suddenly, beginning that very day, it became possible for all mankind to have access to the Father through Christ the Son, whose death and resurrection made it possible for the Holy Spirit to be

poured out upon all flesh. (See Acts 2:16-21.)

God works through His church and His ministers in sending out that call. As in the Parable of the Sower, they have the seed to scatter abroad. Some may fall on the stony ground, and some in shallow soil, and some among thorns, and some on the good soil, but all receive the seed.

Notice what Jesus said:

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

“And I, if I be lifted up [crucified] from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me” (John 12:31, 32).

Jesus has not set any limits on how many people can be called. He has not placed any limits on how many must hear the gospel, nor how many may be converted. If He had, why would the apostles have spoken of laboring so hard, being “brought on their way by the prayers” of people? Why would Paul have asked that they pray that he might “open his mouth boldly” in preaching the gospel?

Why would he speak of Satan hindering them, and ask the brethren to pray that Satan not get an advantage over them. Why the urgency of striving to preach the gospel in more and more places?

Because it makes a difference!

Because they cared what people did with the information they had to give; because a feeling of zeal and urgency and necessity was laid upon them. Paul said, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The New Message—Jesus!

Perhaps it is difficult for us today to understand the reason for the great emphasis the apostles placed on “Christ and Him crucified.”

Remember, most of them were eyewitnesses to His death and His

resurrection. Consider Peter. Having been one of those who had been with Jesus from the very beginning, Peter had continually expected Jesus to make some move to bring about an immediate revolution. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, His disciples watched and waited expectantly, hoping Jesus would stand up during the Feast when tens of thousands would be in Jerusalem and would perform some sensational sign or miracle to announce himself as King.

Several times they thought He was doing it. Think of the triumphant entry back into Jerusalem that final Passover. The thousands were laying palm fronds in a path of His never before-ridden colt, shouting and chanting at the top of their voices, "HOSANNA!" The religious leaders were beside themselves with rage. Jesus' retort to their demand that the people stop this chant was, "Even the rocks would cry out if these should hold their peace."

Peter and the others were elated. When He entered the temple the second time to throw out the money changers and cattle, they were sure of it. But later, when He was again shamefully driven from the temple amid a storm of pelting stones, their spirits sagged. Peter, staunch and loyal from the earliest moments of Christ's ministry, had a serious weakness Jesus understood.

When Christ asked him three times, using a more intense form of the word each time, "Peter, do you love me?", Peter's mind was stricken with embarrassment. A few hours later his affirmations of love turned to gall in his heart when he cursed and said he didn't know who Jesus was.

All the disciples forsook Jesus and fled. But later, after the many miraculous appearances, they were convinced. They had seen Him following His resurrection, eaten with Him, talked to Him, handled His flesh. Thomas (Didymus), the "doubter," actually placed his hand inside Jesus' wounds. Then, on the Day of Pentecost, the great miracle occurred and the Holy Spirit of God came into their minds. Suddenly they were not only convinced, not only persuaded, not only did they believe, now they were convicted. Now they knew.

The greatest miracle in history had occurred. Jesus had been resurrected. Not that they hadn't known about Lazarus (who had been dead even longer), or about the widow's son at Nain, or Jarius' daughter, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

But this was different.

Jesus was not raised from the dead as a human being to live out the remainder of a natural life span; He was resurrected to eternal life, to be accepted of His Father in heaven and to come back as very God.

Following the heart-quickenning, mind-boggling events of the past few weeks, the apostles were all assembled together as Jesus had commanded, waiting to be imbued with “power from on high.” When they were filled with the Holy Spirit they were overcome by the spiritual conviction that came only through Christ’s very indwelling presence. They knew now that they were under the saving grace of Jesus’ own blood, that they had been forgiven all, that they were saved spiritually. They were begotten of God’s Holy Spirit, empowered to preach His truth. They spoke boldly about “the wonderful works of God,” the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The focus of their message through the whole first century was “Christ and Him crucified.” The central theme of the gospel they preached was Jesus. He was the One who brought them the message. He was the Son of Man, and Son of God. He was the One who had qualified to be the future world ruler by overcoming Satan’s temptations and ordering Satan away from Him. He was the One who was God, changed into flesh, born of the virgin by a great miracle. He was the One who had set them the example of how to live. He was the One who had taught them all the guidelines and principles of life. He was the One who had to offer Himself for the sins of the world. He was the One the Scripture said “must needs suffer.” He was the One killed, buried and resurrected. As the coming King, as the gentle Shepherd, as the Firstborn among many brethren, as Melchisedec, as Savior, as Judge, as Head of the Church, He had the “preeminence” in all things.

Their message fairly rung with conviction. They were believed because *they believed*. They convicted their listeners because *they were convicted*. Remember, never before had anyone come “in the name of Jesus Christ” to perform miracles or to preach the gospel. This was all new—a *new message*. Years later the Romans were to write of “one Crispus” who they claim some said had been “raised from the dead.” But consider the contrast with today. Today millions in the Western world have heard the name “Jesus” from earliest recollection. Millions belong to one or another of the hundreds of churches which “believe in His name.”

So today it seems almost redundant, almost superfluous, to teach and preach

about “Christ and Him crucified.”

Which “Jesus”?

But wait! Which Christ?

Could it be that the name of “Jesus Christ,” so commonly believed and spoken, brings to millions of minds a personality different from the real Jesus of the Bible?

Paul spoke of those who came preaching ‘another Jesus,” a *different* gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4), and warned, “I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but, there would be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-8).

From the close of the first century until now, deception has crept into the confessing-Christian religions until the name “Jesus Christ” may not even bring to mind a part of the actual personality, or the life and teachings, or the real gospel of Jesus Christ.

Think of the picture that comes into your own mind. You probably think of the little babe in the manger, overshadowed by his mother, the angels, the shepherds, the wise men and the others. You may think of a youngish, brown-haired (long, flowing locks spilling loosely over his shoulders), aquiline-nosed, rather effeminate-looking man wearing a white robe, with a halo around his head, perhaps with clasped hands, staring off into space or standing with a lamb in his arms.

You may think of a pained, twisted figure on a cross, with a crown of thorns and one unsightly drop of blood visible on his temple, with a loosely draped portion of an undergarment around his waist and hips.

Do you? What comes into your mind when the name “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” is mentioned? If the real Jesus, the One who really lived back then and who is alive today, actually comes into your mind, then perhaps the assumption that we don’t need to preach much about the person of Christ is true.

But do you know the answers to the following questions about Jesus?

When was He born? How was He begotten—how did very God become man? Why did He come? What race was He from? What did He look like? What was His personal “life-style”?

What did He teach? What did He accomplish? How did He overcome and resist Satan? How did He qualify to become world ruler? How did He choose His disciples?

Why did He have to die? Or did He die, or was He off somewhere else “preaching to the spirits in prison”? How did He die? Did He die of a “broken heart,” or through loss of blood? When did He die? When was He buried? How long did He remain in the tomb?

When was He resurrected? What was He composed of after His resurrection? Did He really ascend into heaven? Or was His body “stolen away” by His disciples or by the Romans, or by the Jews? Or was He not really dead, but in a coma, and His entire death, burial and resurrection only a “plot”?

Is He alive today? If He is alive, what has He been doing these past 1,950 years? Is He going to come again? If so, approximately when?

Now, that is a lot *not to know* about someone.

Much information is available in the Old and New Testaments alike. The life story of Jesus is there, albeit it is sketchy concerning His childhood and early youth. But His whole ministry is there in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And what He prophesied to *do* is there, in Matthew 24, Luke 21, Mark 13 and the book of Revelation.

Yet millions remain ignorant of the real Jesus and depend upon so-called “professionals” to inform them concerning Him.

No, it is even more essential today to preach “Christ and Him crucified” than it was in the first years following Jesus’ actual death, burial and resurrection. Think. If, by the time of the A.D. 50s Jude and Paul both had to warn of apostasy, of a falling away from original truth, of a substitute Jesus and another gospel, and had to warn about getting “back to the truth once delivered,” then how far away from it is this world today, almost 2,000 years later?

The truth is we just can’t go wrong if you stick to the *Scriptures*.

The life, personality, teachings and message of Jesus must all be taught without leaving out anything. He is central to the gospel, central to the whole Bible, central to your life.

If Jesus' modern disciples are to fulfill His commission, making disciples of all nations" and "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever" Jesus taught His disciples, the combination of broadcast media, the printing press, education, counseling, explaining, expounding, satisfying the thirst for people's personal quest for knowledge is all required.

When Jesus is pictured as saying, "Come, you blessed of my Father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), He meant much more than only giving of the material goods to suffering people.

"For I was an hungred, and you gave Me meat."

The Bible, the Word of God, is called meat (Hebrews 5:14), and Jesus even characterized the job He had to accomplish as "My meat."

Feeding the hungry can also apply to preaching the gospel, teaching through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ, nourishing the starving people in this world through feeding them with the knowledge of salvation.

"I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink."

To the Samaritan woman, Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says unto you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

He said, "But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

Paul wrote that Christ would sanctify the church and cleanse it with a washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:26), thus referring both to the thirst-quenching properties of the Word of God, satisfying the thirsty soul, and indirectly referring to baptism, being immersed in water as a sign of burial of the "old self" to rise in newness of life.

Those who give the thirsty to drink are those doing the whole work of God: fulfilling Jesus' commission, a vast task having many facets. It requires a labor of love on the part of the whole church working together in every way to accomplish that task together.

“I was a stranger and you took Me in.”

Peter had to learn at Cornelius' house that God intended calling “strangers” (Gentiles) into the knowledge of the truth. Once such a person is called and converted, Paul said, “Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, in the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Jesus showed here that feelings of group instincts, tribalism, chauvinism, racism and exclusivism do not belong in the hearts of those who are willing to see a “stranger” and invite him in. This also applies toward all who are “in the world.”

God tells His servants to come out of the world (1 John 2:15, James 4:4, Revelation 18:4), and says they are not of the world—meaning the habits, customs, sins, the society of this world. Yet He said, “Go unto all the world.”

He said, “God so loved the world,” and, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

When the Church of God makes people in the world welcome to come in and hear the precious Word of God, it is inviting them to come out of the world and making them welcome in the church. Remember that Jesus never ate a meal during His early ministry with a converted human being. His constant contact with the carnal minds of His own disciples, His own family and the people of the world did not “taint” His spiritual condition. Jesus said:

“I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil.

“They are not of the world [civilization, society], even as I am not of the world.

“Sanctify them through your truth: Your Word is truth.

“As You have sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:15-18).

Jesus was called the “friend of harlots, publicans and sinners.” He wore the label humbly. No one is going to be instrumental in winning over sin-sick people by shunning them, by repelling them, by keeping them out.

There is nothing wrong with saying to the world they are “welcome” to come into God’s church. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son” (John 3:16). And “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Jesus said, “Come unto me,” to those who were “weary, and heavy-laden,” and promised rest unto their souls. His conversation with a Gentile woman in Samaria has the same significance. He showed love toward strangers. In the same way, God’s servants must never hide their lights, never pretend the gospel is a narrow message sent only to a few exclusive people. His people must realize it is a vast message sent unto all flesh.

“Naked, and you clothed Me.”

Spiritual nakedness is mentioned (Revelation 3:17) as the attitude of being lukewarm, of lacking in zeal and enthusiasm for God’s work. One can be “rich and increased with goods,” pridefully boasting of great possessions, income and accomplishment—and yet be “spiritually naked.”

In feeding and giving drink to the spiritual poor of the world, Christ includes clothing them with proper garments just as those who are invited to the Great Wedding Supper of the Lamb must have the proper garments.

Paul spoke of immortality (salvation and entry into the Kingdom) as clothing:

“If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

“For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality must be swallowed up of life” (2 Corinthians 5:3, 4).

Clothing the naked is not only literal as in giving clothing to those in desperate need, but also giving the gospel to those whose spiritual nakedness desperately needs clothing.

“I was sick, and you visited Me.”

And spiritual “sickness” is a condition of heart, soul and mind that must be healed through God’s Holy Spirit. He also said:

“. . . They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31, 32).

National sins are called “sickness” (Hosea 5:13), and, in the analogy of the body in Isaiah, God says, “. . . The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, for the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it: but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isaiah 1:5, 6).

“I was in prison, and you came unto Me.”

And the Bible says, “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19). Being in sin is being “under the law,” and is the opposite of being “free from the law of sin and death” and “standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free” (Galatians 5:1).

Speaking of the second coming of Christ, Jeremiah wrote:

“For it shall come to pass in that day, says the Eternal of Hosts, that I will break his yoke [see Isaiah 47] from off your neck, and will burst your bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him,

“But they shall serve the Eternal their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them” (Jeremiah 30:8, 9).

Notice that the work of Christ is predicted in Isaiah 42. “I the Eternal have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, and will keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles [nations];

“To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isaiah 42:6, 7).

Sin is prison. Being virtually enslaved and captured by human nature in its physical appetites, the millions are pictured as in prison to their own desires.

Of Christ, in prophecy, Isaiah wrote:

“The Eternal is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake; He will magnify the law, and make it honorable.

“But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivers” (Isaiah 42:21, 22).

In the commission He gave, Jesus Christ meant much more than only doing what any Christian would do, in sharing of this world’s goods with the poor, the thirsty and the naked.

The real gospel of Jesus Christ is a vast message.

It will fulfill the very life’s work of Ezekiel, who never reached the leaders his prophecies named, but who wrote for our time. It will fulfill the life’s work of Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the other prophets. It is doing the very work of Elijah (see Malachi 4:5, 6) and of John the Baptist—preparing the way for the coming of Christ.

It means preaching all the truth, showing people why they need to repent, and being earnestly involved in whether they will or not.

It is the message of the whole Bible, the good news of personal salvation from eternal death and a Gehenna fire. It is the good news of a way of escape (Luke 21:36) for those who God says are found worthy—of the strength to endure to the end, even when faced with martyrdom (i.e., Revelation 11, the Two Witnesses) for the sake of Christ.

It is the message of the beautiful personality of Jesus Christ, His person, and the wonderful message He brought. It consists of how He taught as well as what He taught. It must include the signs He performed, His compassion on the people in the hearings He performed. It is the message about Jesus Christ as a human being, born of a virgin, tried in the flesh, crucified and resurrected to eternal life.

It includes the prophecies that He will come again—and the great call to repent and believe the gospel.

It is a vast message, an international message, *to all flesh*.

Remember, then, Jesus said if He were “lifted up” (crucified), He would draw all men unto Him!

He said we must lift up our eyes and see that the fields are white with harvest.” He told Peter, “Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men.” Paul said he became all things to all men that he might by all means save some.

Christ wants all to be saved. He yearns for more human beings to receive His saving blood and to repent before God, calling on His name so they can be saved.

Jesus warned those who are ashamed of Him that He will be ashamed of them when He comes. Can you say with Paul, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes”?

This is the real gospel. Not a secular gospel of saying “education is salvation,” or claiming the gospel is an “announcement.” But it is the whole gospel of Scripture, the gospel Jesus delivered to His disciples, the gospel Paul preached to the Gentiles, the advance good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God in all its splendor, glory and magnificence, and with its shining hope for all mankind.

It is a beautiful message, a message of tender love and concern for people. And those who have a part in preaching it are actually fulfilling the deepest requirements of Jesus, who will say, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth.”

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The activities of the Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association are paid for by tithes, offerings and donations freely given by Christians and co-workers who are dedicated to preaching the gospel according to Jesus Christ.