

## The Glorious Gospel

Everyone without Christ in his heart is in prison, whether you can see the bars on the cells or not! The Prophet Isaiah said, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). By this, he meant that all of us at one time, were far from God, dead in trespasses and sin, enslaved by the power of the devil, living by the lusts of the flesh. We were the children of wrath (Eph. 2: 1-3).

This dreadful state came upon us because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience (Rom. 5:12), whose sin caused mankind to fall “short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Into this bleak darkness, despair and separation from God, Jesus burst through as God’s glorious light, “the true light which lighteth every man which cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:9), and as a result of His sacrifice, we have been “Justified

freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:25).

God’s grace is a free gift to all men. The Apostle Paul declares that, by the righteousness of one (Christ) the free gift came upon ALL MEN unto justification of life” (Rom. 5:18). This is a vastly different concept than is preached by most churches, who limit the Gospel’s power to only those who obey the rules. Organized religion has taken the free gift of God and diluted it with conditions. Thus, you’ve probably heard many times that if you don’t obey the gospel, you will burn in hell forever. I believe that this distortion of the truth is what has plunged so many into hell on this earth. A lot of folks dread hell when they die, but in fact, it’s a reality for many right now. The hell fire and eternal damnation doctrine, so loved by fundamentalists came out of pagan religions, probably from Babylon or Egypt.

The English word “hell” is a mistranslation of the Greek word “Gehenna,” which refers to the Valley of Hinnom, still located southwest of the Old City of Jerusalem. Originally, it was a place where animal carcasses, refuse, bodies of criminals and other trash were incinerated, a place where the fire was kept burning continuously in order to destroy the toxins in the waste, preventing disease.

Jesus used this Valley of Hinnom to make a point when He said, “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell (Gehenna), where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mk. 9:47-48). His listeners knew what He meant. They had seen this gruesome place, and while it was no doubt frightful, it referred to the here and now, not the after life. Let me be plain. Hell

is good for business, but it is horrible for the soul of man.

Can you love a God and fall on your face in worship of One who will throw you into endless torment if you fail to keep the rules? And who knows what the rules are anyway? In most organizations, you know what the rules are, but in religion, everyone has a different idea of what these rules consist of, and no one agrees. So, does it sound like unconditional love to you, that God would punish someone with endless torment for violating His rules and regs, when no one knows exactly what they are?

Let me be plainer. Even if you knew what the rules were, you couldn't keep them. No one ever could keep the law, except Jesus. The only hope for any of us is the life of Christ within us. The Apostle Paul explained it best when He said that we are crucified with Christ, dead to the carnal nature (sin) (Rom. 8:10), buried with Him

in baptism and risen again to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, by which our old man, our fallen nature, our carnal flesh was crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). When we accept Christ, that old man who got us into so much sin, so much grief, so much heartache, is dead. He is buried with Christ. We are alive in Christ. There is no hope for us if we try to whip our old man into shape; if we try on our own to be good and obey the rules.

When we try to improve ourselves by our own works, we're just putting make up on a dead man. It may look good, but it still stinks! Our hope is the resurrection power of almighty God, and the fact that we (our old miserable self) was crucified with Christ. Now, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith OF the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, KJV).

Under the Law of Moses, God provided a Year of Jubilee, every fifty years, in which people who had lost their freedom, their lands or other property might have it redeemed for them by a close relative (Lev. 25:47-54). Christ is our "kinsman redeemer," our close relative, who paid the ultimate price for our liberty. Yes, all will ultimately be saved, just like all were freed and restored in the Year of Jubilee, but why wait? Why not enjoy freedom now? This is why we tell everyone we meet about the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Him, our year of Jubilee is NOW! (Lev. 25:8-55). ASK Him to come into your heart. CALL upon Him now so that you can begin to live, so that you can be resurrected from your trespasses and sins. "Come unto me," He said, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). The Good Shepherd will restore our souls and brings us from death into life (Ps. 23:1-3).