

The background of the entire image is a photograph of a vast, rugged landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling hills covered in low-lying, brownish-green vegetation. In the mid-ground and background, there are large, steep mountains with significant snow cover. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds, creating a moody and atmospheric scene. The overall color palette is muted, with greys, browns, and whites dominating the scene.

HOW TO TEST YOUR GOSPEL

In search of the biblical gospel

DANIEL KLASSEN

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YOUR GOSPEL

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PREFACE

What is the gospel? —that is a complex question. A new believer is able to grasp it with their limited knowledge of Scripture, and biblical scholars write volumes upon volumes explaining and exploring it, so the gospel is both easy and difficult to explain.

Fundamentally, the gospel is about salvation, redemption, rebirth, justification, righteousness, and holiness, all wrapped up in the historical person and work of Jesus Christ. It tells us that since we fall incredibly short of God's perfect standard, we deserve eternal judgement. It tells us that God made a covenant with Abraham, that through him, the world would be blessed. It tells us that Christ is the promised Messiah: born of a virgin, obedient in every respect to God's law, put to death on the cross, and resurrected three days later. It promises us that these historical realities will save us from sin when we believe in Christ. The gospel is the grace and mercy of God toward us, giving us salvation from eternal judgement.

To find this gospel in Scripture, look to the promises of God in His covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Look at the

offices of Christ in the prophets, priests, and kings. Hear the promises through the prophets. Read of Christ's life and ministry from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Understand Him through His apostles. The gospel is found from the beginning to the end of Scripture, centred on Jesus Christ, and full of blessing and promise.

The gospel message declares Christ to the world. It calls sinners to turn to Christ and away from their sin; it calls them to be born again; it calls them to believe in Christ, to trust in Christ, to depend on Christ, to submit to Christ. This gospel is good news.

INTRODUCTION

The Need for a Gospel Test

It does not take an avid Church historian to observe that every generation of Christians since the birth of the Church have contended for the true gospel. Today, we face many variations of the gospel that are no gospel at all, and at times it may seem that everyone possesses their own version of God, the Bible, and the gospel. Because of this, even the gospel to which we hold must be scrutinized. We must test our gospel, and be certain our tests are reliable.

Perhaps you are among those who wish for the ease that comes from escaping gospel testing. Ease certainly comes from avoiding confrontation, debate, change, and possibly slanderous insults which follow. But ease deteriorates your gospel. It may allow your gospel to become the one that most people accept, but the popular gospel is rarely the true gospel. Ease also causes your gospel to remain untested when the storms of life—be it suffering or persecution—separate you from the pack of popularity and force you to fight alone. Ease is fools gold. It is, therefore, in your best interest as a Christian to test your gospel and make certain it is firmly rooted in Scripture.

As we begin to test our gospel, we find many nuanced routes

Christians walk concerning the gospel. Naturally, tradition, history, upbringing, and culture each play a role in the way the gospel is proclaimed and understood, yet without necessarily changing the Scriptural truth—this is nuance. However, nuance can intertwine worldly and fleshly ideas into the gospel. If popularity is the objective, nuance tends to include popular cultural sentiments or other religious notions. The only way nuance remains faithful to Scripture is if faithfulness to Scripture governs it.

The Scriptures unabashedly claim there can be no other gospel than what was handed down by the apostles (Galatians 1:6-9). This is birthed out of the exclusive claims Christ made of Himself (John 14:6). Such claims inevitably mean there is a certain standard to which our gospel must meet if we wish to honestly claim our gospel to be the true gospel among the countless gospels in the world today. In the following chapters, you will discover, through a series of tests, what kind of gospel you have: Does it comply with the whole of Scripture? Is Christ central? Does it account for eternal judgement? Is it a gospel for everyone?

My prayer is that this short booklet encourages and strengthens your gospel in biblical faithfulness.

Daniel Klassen
December 2019

TEST ONE

The Doctrine of Election

It seems every person who speaks or writes about the subject of predestination and election is immediately at a disadvantage from the beginning. By seeking to appear modest, many disregard the doctrine altogether, or at least attempt to soften the hard lines the doctrine takes (see Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 9:6-29). Regardless of our opinions, however, the doctrine of elections tests our gospel in its form and content. You may be someone who does not believe or agree with this doctrine, or someone who has never heard of it, or someone who believes it wholeheartedly—regardless, this doctrine will test your gospel. This doctrine will ask your gospel to present everything it believes about the gospel all at once. It is a test in the sense of a ruler testing the length or width of an object regardless of its size. You do not have to believe this doctrine for it to test your gospel.

To further prove this, the doctrine of election is not usually included in the gospel message because it is unnecessary to believe it in order to be saved from sin. Many Christians live their entire lives without believing—even rejecting—the

doctrine of election all the while remaining believers in Christ. The point of this test is for the doctrine itself to bring every aspect of your gospel to the surface to be inspected and help make it more biblically faithful.

In its basic confessional form, election is God's eternal and gracious purpose save sinners through Christ (Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9). The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith concisely states, "God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto" (Chapter 3, Section 5). These elect, though fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ and, "are effectually called unto faith in Christ, by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation" (Chapter 3, Section 6). Election is the biblical affirmation that God has a secret council from eternity past to save sinners, to be carried out in time through Christ's death and resurrection, and applied in the hearts of these individuals by the Holy Spirit. It takes into account God's infinite wisdom, grace, and loving-kindness in choosing sinners for salvation, and it displays the Trinity at work in salvation. God does not leave the elect to their own devices but makes them holy, set-apart, and righteous in His sight, saving them from sin, and eternally restoring them through the atonement of Christ on the cross.

To those who are unacquainted with this doctrine, the presentation and explanation can be confusing. A barrage of questions usually follow, not necessarily about election itself, but about the way election works with every other gospel doctrine. Usually, the unacquainted party leaves the conversation greatly confused. This, however, is the exact moment the test of their gospel begins. Before we look at

the way in which this doctrine tests our gospel, we must first understand the basic tenets of the gospel.

1. **God's holiness requires righteousness.** God's holiness is the cause of our need for salvation (Romans 3:23). All of humanity fell short of that holiness in Adam's fall, lacking even a hint of the required righteousness acceptable to God. The fundamental reason for the gospel is our failure to glorify God, so it necessarily follows that we must see God as God for a biblical gospel.
2. **Our natural inability to be righteous.** As we look into the mirror of God's law, all we see is our failure (Romans 3:9-20; Ephesians 2:1-2; Galatians 3:23-24). Our sin deludes our minds into believing our actions are good enough for God, but rest assured, our good works do not fool Him. Our natural inability means God must act in, through, and for us if we are to be saved.
3. **The wrath of God as our just punishment.** When Paul uses the term "wages" in regards to the punishment of our sin (Romans 6:23), he indicates that it does not matter the size of our sin, our sin is neither neutral nor unpunishable. Rather, it immediately incurs a massive debt. Because of the righteous standard set for us by God and our miserable shortcoming, His eternal judgement is just and right. Hell is not too hot for the wages of sin.
4. **God sovereignly rules and reigns over all things, including salvation.** From the commencement of the first verse of Scripture, any reader clearly perceives God to reign over His creation—that is the Creator's right over His creation. An infinite gulf separates our characteristics and power from the nature and attributes of God, and over and over Scripture attests to this truth. In God's sovereignty, He orders all things that are, so that there is not one atom outside of His plan. In salvation particularly, it is God's grace and mercy, not our desire, nor will, nor effort, which brings Christ to die for us, or the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts (John 1:12; Romans 9:16).

5. **God governs the universe in wisdom and power.** God never acts arbitrarily. Every action, choice, decree, and plan are born in His infinite wisdom and carried out in time with meticulous care. Because our finite minds cannot comprehend the immense nature of infinite knowledge, wisdom, and power, we often judge God according to our abilities. Thus we are prone to wrongly think of Him (regarding the ways He works) in disparaging terms.
6. **God gives faith through the preaching of His word.** In concluding that those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved, Paul works his way back through each of the necessary steps to find the origin of salvation. During this process, he comes across preaching (caused by God sending a preacher) as one of those necessary steps. He concludes, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). This faith apprehends Christ in the gospel, uniting the sinner with Him.
7. **Grace and mercy cannot be demanded, bought, or earned.** Although grace and mercy are related in their benevolence, they possess different properties. Grace is the disposition out of which mercy is shown, while mercy is the gracious pity of one party to help or pardon another party. These definitions make clear one thing: both grace and mercy cannot be demanded or earned; they are strictly at the disposal of the giver. In terms of eternal salvation, God holds both grace and mercy at His disposal, and He gives them to whomever He will.
8. **Christ is God's display of love.** From the beginning, Christ was promised to save God's people from sin and death. Every promise found their eternal fulfilment in the person and work of the Messiah. Then, when Christ hung on the cross, God's hatred against sin was the black backdrop behind His bright display of precious love to the world. Nowhere can we see or experience God's love towards us more than in Christ.

- 9. Faith in Christ is our only means of escaping the wrath of God.** God gives us His grace and mercy through nothing else but Christ. By gifting faith to us, God causes us to receive Christ; by receiving Christ, we escape the wrath to come. There is neither a backdoor, nor secret entry, nor any other way into eternal life. Christ is the only door.
- 10. The Holy Spirit is the only power to apply the gospel to our hearts.** The Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead who works most intimately with us. He opens our eyes to the Word in the Scriptures; He causes us to see the Bible as God's Word; He applies the blood of Christ to our hearts; He seals our salvation; He brings our prayers to the Father; He is the active power of God the Father and Jesus Christ in the believer.

THE GOSPEL SYSTEM

For those who deny the doctrine of election or believe in some form of the doctrine other than its basic confessional definition, they see each of these key aspects differently. Without the confessional definition of election, they are prone to lessen the extent of sin's reach on the soul, elevate the will of man, or accentuate the grace, mercy, and love of God to unbiblical proportions. Christ is still the only way to God for them, but the way in which a sinner receives Christ does not come fully by the work of the Holy Spirit, but by the help of the individual's choice. This fundamentally changes the picture of sin, grace, mercy, and the atoning work of Christ.

Primarily, the doctrine of election magnifies the grace and mercy of God. It tells us that God did not consult our good works, for He loved us before we could ever perform them. This doctrine, then, also tells us of the magnitude of our sin—that we are eternally lost without God's mercy and grace. Yet, even those who believe this doctrine are not impervious

to placing more importance on certain aspects of the gospel. The key aspects of the gospel also work the other way; how you think about these points determines how you think about election. If you agree with them, it is quite easy to accept God's election of sinners for salvation. The point is that the doctrine of election shows you what you believe about everything else in the gospel. It acts as a mirror to your gospel so you can see just what it is that you believe about the gospel.

Essentially, the doctrine of election brings everything you believe about the gospel to the surface. If all the aspects of your gospel are suddenly brought to light at the same time to be inspected, you are in a prime position to observe the biblical fidelity of your entire gospel. You are able to see which parts are in agreement with Scripture and which parts are not. More importantly, you can observe whether you have a compartmentalized gospel or a systematized gospel.

A compartmentalized gospel is a gospel where each part is stored separately from the other parts. As such, it is a gospel where only one part can be displayed at a time. This often leads to confusion (more so for those who hear it) when the parts don't work together smoothly. Consequently, it is difficult to pinpoint which compartment houses the problem in your gospel. A biblically systematized gospel, on the other hand, aligns every part of the gospel with each other, allowing all the parts to be seen in connection with one another, thus making it easy to see where you go wrong with your gospel. Naturally, we compartmentalize; systematizing takes intentional (and often intense) effort. The doctrine of election forces the compartmentalized gospel to show itself as a system.

The reason we must make every effort to believe in a biblically systematized gospel is that the gospel is connected from the beginning of the Old Testament through to the end

of the New Testament. It is not found solely in the four Gospels, nor only in the New Testament. From Genesis 3:15 onward, the Scripture speaks of Christ. The Bible models a systematized gospel because it is a connected story of redemption, not a compartmentalized book of disconnected stories.

God's election of sinners will test your gospel. It will ask your gospel to produce its ideas about God, man, grace, Christ's atoning death, and the importance of faith all at once. Perhaps, this is the reason many do not like the doctrine of election—even to the point of hatred. However, it is a biblical doctrine, and it is helpful in revealing the fundamental aspects of our gospel. The whole of your gospel will benefit from the study of the doctrine of election.

Now, to the most fundamental aspect of the gospel we turn.

TEST TWO

A Lonely Christ

Have you ever noticed how the emphasis of good news in the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—looks noticeably different than the good news of the epistles? The difference is this: in the four gospels, the declaration of the kingdom of God consumes the bearers of good news, while in the epistles, the person of Jesus Christ is the focus.

One might think the gospels and the epistles are at odds, but when we see the full picture, we instead find harmony. Christ came proclaiming the kingdom of God as the prince, heir to the throne. He came announcing the arrival of this kingdom, and, indeed, it had arrived. Humanity, however, could only access it after His death. Through His obedience in His life, atonement in His death, and victory over death in His resurrection, Christ became the door to the kingdom. Unless God declared us righteous, meaning the sinful rags we wore were exchanged for Christ's clean, righteous robe, we could not enter in. This means the epistles do not change the story, but rather magnify the only way into the kingdom.

This is why the good news of the gospel lies in one simple word: imputation.

Paul gives us a basic working definition for imputation: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Imputation is the transfer of Christ's righteousness to us and the transfer of our sin to Christ. When we believe in Christ, trusting only in Him, our sin is credited to Him while the righteousness He obtained by perfectly obeying the law is credited to us. In a spiritual sense, Christ takes the gunny sack garments we wear, all dirty and tattered, and gives us His perfect and spotless white garment. He takes our slate and wipes it clean, but does not leave it for us to make the same mess. Instead, He fills it with His perfection.

When the Puritan preacher John Bunyan (1628-1688) understood that Christ was his righteousness, his whole life changed. Of this moment, he recalled: “I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand: there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, He wants my righteousness; for that was just before Him. I also saw moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself.”*

This is the glorious news of the gospel. It sets itself as the priority in our gospel, for without the transfer of righteousness to us, we remain forever lost in our sinfulness. In this, the second test of our gospel is seen, namely the content of the gospel. What are we presenting to the world as good news?

*Bunyan, John, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* 1.229

For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

If Paul wished to present a gospel pleasing to the cultures of his day, he would proclaim his ability to perform miracles to the Jews, and present a new philosophy to the Greeks. He did neither because Christ crucified is the only gospel with the power to save.

What can truly save us? Why do we need saving? We must answer these questions honestly if we are to see our need for Christ to take up the entire content of our gospel. If it is not Christ, it is no gospel, for there is no other power under heaven to save us from our sin. Assuredly, Christ as the centre of our gospel will cause many to turn away from us for lack of excitement or worldly wisdom, but Christ as the centre of our gospel is the only hope for sinners. Both emotional excitement and worldly wisdom are broken wells—always hungry for more; Christ, raised from the dead, will not fail us.

This test of our gospel extends far past the message we proclaim to the unbelieving world; it extends to the message we preach to ourselves and to fellow believers. It is in the context of believers that our gospel is truly put to the test, for it is here that we see the extent to which we value Christ.

I have found an attitude reaching across many Christian denominational lines that teaches that once there is a belief in Jesus as saviour, the believer is ready to progress to bigger and better things than the gospel. A few things are meant by this. They might mean that spiritual growth ought to be most important in a Christian's priorities. How to live a better life, how to grow, or how to reach your God-given potential

become important topics to study. Or perhaps, as is also the case, the focus simply becomes the affections for God. The motivation for these affections can come from anywhere, so long as they are produced. Growth in holiness and affections for God are certainly important, integral parts of the Christian life, but they are only results. When Christ is crowded out, it is easy to forget from where the motivation and power for the Christian life comes. And when we forget, we soon find ourselves relying on something foreign to the Christian gospel.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

"Abide" is the word that ties this teaching of Christ together. Unless we abide, we cannot bear the fruit of growth in holiness, nor will our affections for God be great. To abide, of course, means to stay put, neither moving on to something else nor entertaining some new idea.

There is one other reason to abide, and it ties back to where we started. If it is true that Christ's righteousness is our only hope, why would we seek to move on to 'bigger and better' things? There are no such things. Christ is the greatest good of the good news, and He is not simply for the unbeliever but is for the weakest and strongest believer alike. No Christian ever graduates from needing Christ's righteousness to appear acceptable before God. We never move on from Christ, for He is our salvation. Paul tells us Christ is our "wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). In another place, he says that all spiritual blessings are found in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Christ is our daily bread, and so we must depend upon Him daily, and such dependence must constitute the whole of the Christian life. Why, then, would we move on from

Him to something else?

The question, it seems, that sums up this whole matter is this: How lonely is Christ in your gospel?

TEST THREE

The Deathbed

The distinguishing mark of the Christian gospel is the revelatory nature of it. The gospel is the revelation of what has been done for us, not a list of commands we must do nor conditions we must meet. This truly sets it apart from every other gospel, making it the greatest good news in the world.

For this aspect of the gospel to be tested to its limit in the life of the believer, the deathbed serves as the best testing ground. From a human vantage point, the deathbed is one of the saddest places to be in this life. Hope for the future has vanished, and the ticking clock on the wall only amplifies the reality. There is absolutely nothing that can be done except wait for that final breath. What news, if any, would bring hope to this situation?

For this news to bring hope, it must include three aspects:

(1) This news must deal faithfully with reality. It must meet the reality of death and sin head-on without wincing. The deathbed is the greatest earthly manifestation of these

realities, so if your gospel is faulty, here is where it becomes most evident. Here, most aspects of your gospel will be tested, but perhaps the greatest foundational test comes in the realm of sin. Many ‘gospels’ see sin as a defeasible foe. They will tell you to work harder or have more faith or learn some sort of secret code or some other ridiculous notion, but the common denominator they share is the belief that sin can (and will) be defeated by human effort. The true gospel does not shy from sin nor attempt to destroy it by human effort because it rightly understands Christ’s cross. When we look to Christ, hanging on the cross, not only do we see a man dying, but we see God bearing the weight of sin in our place. At that intersection of love and wrath, we observe how great an enemy sin is, and how futile our efforts to overcome that enemy are in this present world. Dying is certain, and sin is indeed evil. The Christian gospel is not afraid of these regardless of how large they grow in our experience, because sin and death never outgrow the grace of God in Christ (Romans 5:20).

(2) This news must be about the gift of merit. If a group of people are told they need to earn their way to heaven, the older the person is in that group, the worse the news becomes to them. The young have energy and life, so to them, this kind of gospel seems achievable. To the old, however, much of their energy is gone, and their days are short. This gospel is bad news to them. Then, take it to the deathbed and see how you fare. What can a dying person do with that kind of gospel? They cannot get up from their bed to perform the necessary tasks, nor do they have enough time to produce enough works to merit heaven.

Merit is required before the judgement seat of heaven since we cannot enter heaven without righteousness. But since we are born in sin, sin is of our nature, and we only merit death (Romans 6:23).

It is at this point we see our need for the most important aspect of the gospel, which we covered in the last chapter. We need the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Christ's merit is given to us apart from works, and to a dying person, this news is glorious. It means they do not have to get up from their deathbed to work in any capacity to merit heaven, but simply by trusting Christ, His merit is credited to them. They don't need to get up from their bed—they don't even have to move a muscle—and this merit is freely given.

(3) This news must include assurance for the soul. Although salvation does not require the recipient to be assured of it in order for it to be real, yet assurance is a blessing, an accompanying grace of our salvation, and an integral part of the gospel. The reason for this is that the gospel is not only a historical reality, but a promise that the reality of Christ's death and resurrection truly saves us. For those on their deathbed, atonement for sin and the transfer of righteousness must be certain.

In Christ, the sinner has ample evidence to be assured of their salvation. Where works are required, the question always remains: Have I done enough? With faith, however, everything is already done, and assurance inevitably resides.

There are many examples of Christians who lay on their deathbed fully assured of Christ. As Archibald Alexander, one of Princeton's first professors, lay on his deathbed, he said, "All my theology is reduced to this narrow compass, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Likewise, Martin Luther's last words narrowed the scope of his theology into a simple Christian phrase, "We are beggars, this is true." J. Gresham Machen, a stalwart against modern liberalism, said with his dying breath, "I am so thankful for the active obedience of Christ—no hope without it." Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth-

century, was certain of heaven. Having lost his ability to speak in his final days, he wrote his final words to his family on a napkin, “Do not pray for healing. Do not hold me back from the glory.” These men serve as examples of Christians who fully believed the biblical gospel to their dying breath. They fully understood, as we ought to today, that we are not saved by some fantasy, nor by our own merits, nor without the means for assurance. We are saved through faith in Christ, and *that* is a deathbed gospel.

TEST FOUR

Final Judgement

Hell-fire and brimstone are most associated in our time with a type of preaching that died sometime in the 1980s. It died because it lost its value in Western Culture. One would have to ask, “What could the culture ever have found attractive in such a message in the first place?” The simple answer: a lot more substance than can be found in modern preaching.

In a sense, the amount of hell-fire and brimstone—or we can say, final judgement—that influences our gospel determines how faithful our gospel is to Scripture. One only has to glance at the many gospels in vogue today to see that the lack of final judgement causes both lasciviousness and an unhealthy preoccupation with immediate justice. In turn, these gospels begin to look more like political platforms, particularly for criminal justice, than a proclamation of Christ bearing the justice of God for sinners.

The final judgement of God is a test for our gospel. It tests both the content of our gospel and the practical outworking of it in our daily lives.

(1) God's final judgement shows us the inherent sinfulness of man. Our sinfulness is not determined by societal standards. It is not because we are victims of circumstance or oppression that cause us to sin, nor are we sinful because we identify with oppressors or the privileged. We are sinful regardless of where we find ourselves in society, and the place we occupy, whether oppressed or oppressor, does not mitigate, nor exaggerate our sinfulness. God's judgement is for all, and it is good.

We know our sinfulness when we see the perfection of God's judgement. God's law shows His holiness and our unholiness, displaying that all are condemned to death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Our end, apart from Christ, is the hell-fire and brimstone few are willing to hear about, and if we do not have a healthy understanding of this judgement, we will soon lose sight of our need for a saviour.

(2) God's final justice drives us to focus on His justice at Calvary. Final judgement forces us to look for a way of escape, and Christ on the cross is where our searching eyes come to rest. When Christ hung on that tree with our sin on His shoulders, the judgement meted out to Him was infinite. Being truly God and truly man, He alone was able to bear it in order to bring salvation to those who believe in Him. If that judgement is placed on us, it is placed on us for eternity.

Further, the courts of earth pale in comparison to the court of heaven. Our judgement here is only temporary, while the judgement of heaven is eternal. Our judgement can be clouded by bias; God's judgement is clear and sure. Our judgement doesn't always have every evidence for perfect justice, the omniscient God of the universe judges with perfect knowledge. Criminals may escape earthly courts, but sinners will never escape the heavenly court. Therefore, when we turn to the judgement of God on Christ, we turn to a perfect judgement measured out in our place.

(3) God’s final judgement gives us patience in trials. We are confident that, although injustice happens to us on this earth, perfect justice prevails in eternity. In reiterating the Sermon on the Mount, Paul adds this same confidence, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

If we face trials, we understand they will not cause eternal harm, but eternal good. If we face tribulation, we wait expectantly for heaven’s joys. If we face persecution, we understand that no harm can come to us that would take God away from us. We also understand in those moments that God will ultimately judge those who corruptly punish us without a lawful cause. This understanding must translate into our hearts and cause patient endurance through the harshest circumstances.

(4) God’s final judgement helps us love our enemies. Without a final judgement, we have no motivation to love those who do us harm or oppose us in every way. We would resort to meting out judgement on them ourselves. Who is there to do it properly? However, because there is a final judgement, and Christ bore that judgement in our place, we are compelled to love our enemies so they would escape that final judgement. Judgement for our enemies is up to God, not us—we are called to love. And true love, we conclude, is to bring our enemies to experience the judgement of the cross before they reach the judgement seat of God. Whether they are judged on the cross or on Judgement Day, we are called to love them.

From this, we know that a gospel that includes a final judgement is a gospel with depth. It carries weight. It is devoid of fluff. The final judgement of God matures our gospel so that we are not so easily tossed to and fro by it.

Does your gospel account for the judgement of God? Or, lacking judgement, does your gospel make you the arbiter of justice? If you long for a biblical gospel, test your gospel with the final judgement of God.

CONCLUSION

The Test Results

I have spoken with numerous people who, in their younger years of maturity in the faith, sat under the teaching of preachers who did not preach a biblical gospel. I have also witnessed people realize their preacher preaching an unbiblical gospel. Their stories are much the same. They wonder how in the world they endured listening to that kind of preaching for that long, and how they did not catch it sooner. John MacArthur, a pastor of the same flock for over 50 years, diagnoses the problem in these churches,

“The Bible is regularly treated superficially and routinely taken out of context, resulting in a generation that has no expectation that the preacher would handle the Word of God accurately. Rather, people are trained to treat the Bible like a book they are free to manipulate for their own ends, which ultimately both exposes and perpetuates their low view of Scripture.”*

This is how the gospel becomes distorted to meet our requirements while failing to meet God’s. Perhaps, then, the

*MacArthur, John, *Final Word* [Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2019] 42

greatest test of the gospel has more to do with the treatment of Scripture rather than the content of the gospel. Whether you believe the doctrine of election (and every doctrine it touches), or have a lonely Christ (without your works), who saves from the final judgement, your gospel ultimately depends on how you treat Scripture.

For those who realized their pastors preached gospel-less sermons and simply left them with morality and sentimentality, each one was placed in an uncertain and uncomfortable spot. On the one hand, their newfound zeal for the gospel gave them an itch to get everyone on the same page. On the other hand, they felt an increasing need to find a different church. Most end up looking for a different church.

Often, the reason for their decision is their church's reaction to their newfound zeal. It is sort of a reckless zeal, which, to the leaders (and members) of that church, looks more like a terrorizing zeal threatening to uproot the entire foundation of that body of believers. And it probably would (because most cannot handle quick changes). So, to protect their church, they snuff out the zeal of this believer without ever considering their arguments. When this is the case, I continue to counsel such people to remain in their church for a time. Opposition to the true gospel clarifies the gospel in the mind of the believer. It also settles the believer in the gospel where they can control their zeal in a useful and meaningful way. Those who immediately jump ship miss out on the benefits of opposition and our natural human proneness to complacency in the gospel is greater for them.

The apostle Peter had a complacency experience as well. Among the first-century Christians, the trouble, or point of contention was the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. The Jews, because of conscience, still held much of the Old Testament traditional laws while believing

Christ alone by faith alone. The Gentiles were not bound by conscience to those laws, so comparatively, they experienced a sort of freedom in Christ. Contentions arose because different means of evangelism were needed to reach these diverse peoples and because certain people began to teach the Gentiles to become like the Jews (in keeping traditional laws) to be saved. So, a council led by the apostles convened in Jerusalem. After much discussion, Peter delivered the concluding argument:

Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (Acts 15:7b-11)

Not long after this council, Peter acted hypocritically (Galatians 2:11-13). As he fellowshiped with Gentile believers, Jewish believers came to him, and fearing them, he separated himself from the Gentiles. His actions evidently caused some of the Gentiles to act as though they needed the traditional law of the Jews to remain in Christ. This being the case, Paul rebuked and corrected Peter by reminding him of the gospel he had preached at the Jerusalem council (Galatians 2:14-21).

Peter’s experience shows us that testing our gospel is not a one-time event. We are prone to complacency and sinful inclinations which cause us to drift from the true gospel. But, just as one who receives the diagnosis of their cancer tests does all they can to remove the cancerous tumour and

receive a clean bill of health, so too, testing our gospel must drive us to do all we can to hold to a biblical gospel.

Wherever we find lack, we must submit to the biblical gospel and reform our gospel accordingly. It does us no good only to test our gospel, nor to test our gospel once. May we persevere in holding to the true gospel, to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3).