

The Gospel - What Is It?

James Haldane

(1768-1851)

The Gospel is the good news of pardon to the guilty; and it enters into no calculations, in regard to the different degrees of guilt in those whom it addresses. It reveals an atonement sufficient for all; and every sinner of the human race is commanded to receive it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners. The Gospel does not teach us how to lay a foundation for ourselves, but informs us of the sure foundation which God has laid in Zion, upon which all are equally invited and commanded to build their hopes, without any apprehensions of being upbraided for their past conduct by their gracious Creator.

The Gospel is very generally misunderstood by those who profess to believe. They view it as a scheme for making up their deficiencies through the merits of Christ; but this is "another gospel." The Gospel of Christ is addressed to those who are far from righteousness; who are poor and blind, and naked; who have no money to purchase salvation, no merit to recommend them to the favor of God. Christ came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. If we are not sinners we have nothing to do with the Gospel; and if we are sinners, let us not reject the counsel of God against ourselves, by vainly supposing that anything about us gives us a peculiar claim to his favor, or by imagining that our sins are too great to be forgiven. The righteousness of God is altogether irrespective of our obedience. The thief upon the cross was saved by faith in Jesus, and none shall enter heaven in any other way.

Let us not then suppose, that we either have, or shall hereafter obtain, something which may entitle us to the favor of God. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." Let us therefore come to God with the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner"; and let us look for this mercy through the atonement of Christ.

Although the Scriptures are so clear and express on this subject, it is a stumbling-block and foolishness to the great body of those who hear the Gospel. It offends their pride to be put upon a level with the outcasts of society; surely, they think, some difference will be made; but they err, not knowing the Scriptures; not understanding the malignity of sin nor the grace of God. They view it as a kind of bargain which God proposes to make with his creatures, that on certain conditions he will accept them—while in fact it is the message of reconciliation, equally addressed to all mankind, declaring that a full atonement for sin has been made upon the cross, and inviting every sinner of Adam's race instantly to approach God as his Friend and Father through Christ.

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, it was a remedy equally adapted for all who had been bitten. Whether the bite had just been received, or whether the poison had infected the blood, by looking to the serpent, the

patient was healed; and in reference to this emblem, Christ, indiscriminately addressing all mankind, says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else—a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me" (Isa 45:21,22).

In announcing the publication of the gospel, the Lord declared by his prophet: "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa 2:11).

While the Gospel is a proclamation of pardon addressed to sinners without exception, an unlimited invitation to the guilty to take shelter in the blood of atonement, it is the power of God unto salvation, only to those who believe. But it is vain to talk of being justified by Christ's righteousness, unless our hearts are purified by faith.

We may profess faith in Christ while we are the slaves of sin; we may deceive ourselves, and affirm that we are trusting in his righteousness while we are living after the flesh; but every branch in the vine that beareth not fruit shall be cast into the fire. We cannot impose on God; and if with the Scriptures in our hands, we impose on ourselves, we are inexcusable.

If we believe Christ's Gospel, it will effectually work in our hearts (1 Thess 2:13), and teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; and if what we believe does not produce this effect, it is not the true grace of God in which we stand. Every doctrine, the belief of which does not produce this effect, is a delusion, and the comfort which we derive from it is merely sporting ourselves "with our own deceivings." They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts.

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