

THE SIMPLE GOSPEL STORY

As one considers the current state of “Christendom” he may be bewildered by the thousands of separate groups which claim to be true followers of God. Each group has members who are honest, sincere, and totally convinced that they are right. But are the teachings of Jesus and the apostles so confusing that there is no way to arrive at truth? Is everyone free to believe anything he wants to believe---whether or not it conforms to the scriptures---and still be pleasing to God? Does God really *care* what a person believes?

Some have argued that it really does not matter what one believes as long as he is *sincere*. If this is true, it does not matter whether a teaching is true or false. God does not really mind so long as a person *really* believes it. What does the Bible say about this? Consider the following:

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” (II Timothy 4:3-4)

Consider also: *“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”* (I Timothy 4:16)

These passages make it clear that it is *important* what one believes. Anyone who seeks to please God must do his best to *find out for himself* what the scriptures teach and be loyal to those teachings---*regardless* of whatever friends and family members may disapprove.

The truth is that every person must some day stand before the Lord to give an account of how he has lived. Does it not make sense that one concerned with his eternal destiny would want to make *sure* that he has done his best to receive the Lord’s approval on that day?

What will it be like at the judgment? Consider these very sobering words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 7:21-23: *“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers’”*.

Why will these people be rejected? How can we avoid their fate? Consider this important passage: *“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day”*. (John 12:48)

The key word in this passage is WORD. Jesus said that judgment will be based on the words spoken by Jesus---NOT the teachings which have led to a host of doctrines, practices, church official hierarchies, ceremonies, and human names so common in our age, things which bear little resemblance to what is found in the WORD---the Bible.

As I write these words I think of a number of friends. Some are Baptists; some are Mormons; some are Catholic. I think of a dear friend who is a member of the Armenian church; another is in the Ethiopian Coptic church; still another is a member of the Egyptian Coptic church. As I consider these religions I see *so* much in them which is totally unlike anything found in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. But they are *sincere!* In virtually every case they have embraced a religion passed along to them by perhaps generations of family, friends, and associates. Their beliefs have become a part of who they are! It probably never occurs to them that they need to take a close look at the scriptures to be SURE that they are following closely the teachings of Jesus---the WORD from which we will all be judged on that last (Judgment) day.

THAT IS WHY I AM WRITING THIS---to urge the reader to look closely at the scriptures to be very sure that his beliefs and actions are based on a solid scriptural foundation. Now in my eightieth year, I have had to do the very thing which I am urging others to do. In my lifetime of Bible study I have had to correct a number of teachings which were passed on to me in my youth. Those who taught me were sincere---but not always right, according to the scriptures. It is MY obligation to check out the scriptures for myself.

As indicated by the title, the gospel message *is* simple. Following are some simple---but *essential*---elements in that message. They ALL come directly from the WORD of God, (the same word upon the judgment of the Lord will be based).

1. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). One must believe in God and in Jesus, his son. One must believe that Jesus came to offer eternal life through forgiveness of sins which he made possible through his crucifixion and resurrection.

2. Jesus made it clear that one must repent of his sins. (See Luke 13:3)
Repent means to turn one's life around, to stop living for sinful pleasures and start living according to God's will.

(How are you doing so far? Have you done these things? If so, GOOD!)

3. So how does one become saved? How does he receive forgiveness of his sins; how does he have his sins "washed away", a symbol of forgiveness?

Amazingly, the simple instructions of Jesus have been distorted and ignored by millions of people and countless religious groups. So what did

Jesus really say? “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...”

(Mark 16:16). Is that confusing or complicated? The apostle Peter was

among those who heard Jesus say this. How did he understand it?

In Acts 2 Peter gave the first sermon after Jesus returned to heaven.

He addressed a large crowd of people, many of whom had, only a few

days earlier insisted that Jesus be crucified. In verse 38 he told the crowd,

“...Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ,

for the forgiveness of your sins...”. Exactly what Jesus had taught!

(Is this what *you* did to have your sins forgiven? Or did you listen to those who teach something different? There are those---millions, in fact---who teach that baptism has *nothing* to do with being saved or receiving forgiveness of sins. Some say “only believe” or “pray for God to save you”, even though no one in the Bible was *ever* given these instructions! Remember the earlier warnings about false teachings.)

Which Church?

Much of the confusion about which church one should join can be cleared up by considering a few *simple* Bible teachings:

1. Jesus said he would build his church (Matthew 16:18). He only built one, and he never gave it a name! (Church names are inventions of men.)

2. No one is ever told to “join” a church. When one becomes saved God *adds* that person to his church automatically (Acts 2: 41 and 47).

3. The Lord’s church consists of all persons who have been saved. All saved persons are *in* God’s church. No man has any right to make special requirements for entering “their” church.

4. The need for fellowship with other Christians requires a person to seek out a group where God’s word is honored. In order to find such a group one must check out what a group believes and teaches.

The Christian life is a life of continual learning and growing. One must keep studying God's message and stay in touch with God through prayer. But it must begin with humble openness to God's message...and firm

determination to heed the warnings against false teachings!

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