

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Boat Analogy

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Table of Contents

Introduction	iii
Chapter 1 - Slavery	1
Chapter 2 - Jesus' Gospel	2
The First Disciples	4
Terms and Conditions	7
Jesus Rejects Some	10
Chapter 3 - God Saves	14
Justification By Faith	15
Conversion May Take Some Time	18
Chapter 4 - Judgment Day	22

Introduction

This book was written at the encouragement of my congregation following a two month series taught from the beloved North Christian Church pulpit on the crucial topic of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At the outset, it was apparent that God the Holy Spirit desired to revisit the Gospel in the presence of various perversions of it, some of which continue to wander dangerously away from the Person of the Gospel, our Lord and Savior. Contemporary Christianity has been pummeled by perverted, organized philosophies such as the so-called "Emerging Church", which is really Satan's work. The gap between those printing "COEXIST" bumper stickers and modern Christianity is narrowing. It is pure violence. Those of us who remain true to the faith are suffering as we stand firm. So be it. This book flies in the face of what could possibly be the majority of Christianity. I am a believer; however, by today's commonly accepted definition of Christianity, I'm not sure that title fits anymore.

Syncretism (*Wikipedia.com*): is the combining of different, often contradictory beliefs, while blending practices of various schools of thought. Syncretism involves the merger and analogizing of several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, thus asserting an underlying unity and allowing for an inclusive approach to other faiths.

Today's "Christian gospel" is no longer the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At best, it resembles it, or has bits and pieces of it commingled with doctrines of demons. It is a counterfeit. Today's "gospel" isn't really good news at all...it's really, really bad news...but most professing Christians aren't interested in the facts of the Bible. Most professing Christians prefer a convenient or accommodating gospel that expounds, "Say this here little prayer and you're saved - congratulations, let's celebrate!" ...or, "Believe these facts about Jesus and you, too, can go to Heaven!" In essence, today's "gospel" propagates the thought that being saved equals going to Heaven. While it's true a saved person does go to Heaven, the issue is sin, not

Heaven. The average “gospel” being peddled today hardly tends to the sin problem as the primary issue. Why? Those peddling it fear that they might offend others. Jesus *never* had a problem offending others with truth. His Church was never meant to abide in political correctness, either (who cares about what some politician has to say about Christ and His doctrines). The contemporary “remedy” administered by the average church has been to remove Jesus’ own posture on the Gospel after His name, relegating salvation to a mere issue of mental assent, an emotional response, a spurious proclamation of faith, and/or church membership.

Today’s “gospel” has become something other than that which is contained in the inspired Word of God. The name remains (something Satan enjoys immensely, I’m sure) but the contents behind it have been either watered down or obliterated completely. It’s no wonder the average lost soul perceives Christianity as schizophrenic.

A believer’s job is to get the Gospel right. Present it. Live it. Love it.

Chapter 1 – Slavery

According to *Wikipedia.com* at the time of this writing:

Voluntary slavery (or self-sale) is the condition of slavery entered into at a point of voluntary consent. In ancient times, this was a common way for impoverished people to provide subsistence for themselves or their family and provision was made for this in law. For example, the code of Hammurabi stated that "besides being able to borrow on personal security, an individual might sell himself or a family member into slavery." In medieval Russia, self-sale was the main source of slaves.

In ancient times, one of the most direct ways to become a Roman or Greek citizen was by means of a self-sale contract. The laws surrounding Roman and Greek manumission made it quite possible for such erstwhile slaves to then become citizens or near-citizens themselves.

Imagine yourself being in such a depraved condition that you had to contemplate the sale of the one thing that is truly yours - yourself! Imagine having to trade your life for a place on the ship of a slave-owning sea captain. Consider the humility that is required in that moment. What if you were totally convinced that you had no other choice, otherwise you'd surely perish?

Slavery implies the complete submission to the will of a master (aka lord). Neither the master nor the slave in the scenario above would be willing to sign a contract without both parties being privy to the details of it. Otherwise, one party would be attempting to swindle the other, in which case, the contract would be breeched and certain penalties imposed.

You are a slave. The good news (the Gospel) is that you have a choice.

Chapter 2 - Jesus' Gospel

What *is* the Gospel? The term arises from the Greek word that means “the good news”. One must contemplate what might be considered “good news”, at which time opinions seem to vary a bit. Some consider the entire canon of scripture the “good news” concerning God’s Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But that definition is too broad and too much to expect an unbeliever to digest prior to being saved. So in reality, when most people use the phrase, “the Gospel”, they are referring to that which must be presented to unbelievers such that God the Holy Spirit, in His special ministry to the lost, has the material to convict them. In this way, the Gospel and the Spirit must fulfill the godly obligation prior to a final judgment being cast upon a person.

Back to the question then: What *is* the Gospel? In this booklet, the Gospel is summarized as:

Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, humbled Himself to die on our behalf. Thus He became the sinless sacrifice to pay the penalty of our guilt. He rose from the dead to declare with power that He is Lord over all, and He offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith.

Is that it? Do believers simply imprint the above on a silvery little coin, have it mass-produced and then dump it from airplanes above vast areas of unbelievers? Of course not, that’d be remiss of what the Bible states about the delivery of the Gospel. The Gospel comes from hearing the “*word of Christ*”, which implies scripture, itself (at least the heart of it). Scripture like the following:

But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART” — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
(Romans 10:8-17)

It's that last statement that weighs so heavily into the Gospel presentation. It implies that an unbeliever must "hear" the "word of Christ". That's how faith is imparted to human beings. Granted, the mode of hearing is entirely under the sovereignty of God (e.g.: how does a deaf person hear?), so one mustn't overanalyze what scripture is saying. It is simply stating that it is the Word of God that convicts unbelievers of the Gospel truth.

But then again, there's that question that needs answering: What is the Gospel? Some will argue that short passages of scripture encapsulate the Gospel, such as, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**). That can't be all of it for the simple fact that an unbeliever doesn't know anything about the "Son" by just hearing this one Bible verse. There must be more to it than just this one verse - and there surely is.

Some argue that **1 Corinthians 15:3-5** is the Gospel, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." But how could this one passage be the entire "good news" if it includes nothing about salvation? It cannot be, therefore, it isn't the Gospel (though it does contain details of it). Mere facts about the life of Jesus cannot be construed as the Gospel. An unbeliever can believe the facts about Jesus are true, but that never implies that they are saved.

One of the most prominent failed attempts at achieving a succinct Gospel comes from the forensic (judicial) details such scripture provides regarding the moment of salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Such a wonderfully powerful passage of scripture, indeed. However, it, too, falls short of the Gospel due to the simple fact that it says nothing about Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the "Gospel of Jesus Christ" not the "gospel of justification by faith". The Gospel cannot be whittled down to the forensic aspects of salvation, even though they are understood increasingly so as a certain part of a believer's assurance after salvation.

The best place to look for the Gospel is in the words of the Person who the entire Bible is about, namely Jesus Christ. If a person desires to find out exactly why General Motors used a certain alloy for their latest engine blocks, they don't ask the local mechanic, they go directly to the engineers at GM. Likewise, if a person wants to know the absolute truth about the Gospel, it is best to go to the source of it, "*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (**Hebrews 12:2**). Most Bibles are printed with red letters (the words of Jesus). Those letters appear in the first four books of the New Testament, namely the "Gospels". There's a reason why these books bear that title. The best place to begin looking to answer the question, "What is the Gospel?", is in those books, where Jesus reveals the good news about Himself.

"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

(John 7:37-38)

The First Disciples

The Lord God said, "*I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me*" (**Proverbs 8:17**).

Before man is even called, God must see a heart that seeks to *be* called. The only heart that ever seeks after God is the humble heart.

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

(Luke 18:9-14)

God discerns the heart. “[For] with the heart a person believes resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” (**Romans 10:10**). Jesus said, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; **for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart**” (**Luke 6:45**). A person who calls out to God with a humble heart is the one who receives His saving faith by grace (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). The good news is that grace continues to be poured out upon the humble, “*But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE”*” (**James 4:6**).

At the outset of Jesus’ public ministry, He began calling disciples unto Himself, eleven of which were true, one of which was to betray Him with a kiss (**Luke 22:48**). As previously explained, His true disciples were believers in Him, counted among the “called” (**Ephesians 4:1**) and the saved. Judas, the arch-apostate, fulfilled a different prophecy and stands to this day as a “necessary evil”. In any case, the Gospel invitation begins with a simple concept, a consideration that can only be described as something affecting the heart so deeply that the details of it can only be truly discerned by God, Himself. The word most often used is *repent*.

*From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He *said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.*

(Matthew 4:17-20)

Some may struggle with the concept of repentance being a part of the “good news”, but that struggle is a fleshly one. The flesh has a propensity for doing “good” aside from God’s grace - it is its base desire. It also believes in its own ability to deliver itself by means of its own human power. Lastly, it counts a resignation of that power as a loss. Therefore, to the fleshly person, repentance is an offense that resonates in their heart. That same person might argue that giving up the self-life isn’t “good news” at all, given all that they may have invested in it. However, to the humble person, the “good news” is that they *don’t* have to try being righteous on their own. The humble have learned through experience that righteousness is unattainable without help from God. The arrogant reject that conclusion and wager that God will somehow accept their “hard work” as righteousness. Cain disproved that theory a long time ago.

The Gospel begins the way Jesus intended it to, with repentance (**Matthew 4:17**). This is *very* good news to the humble person who has resigned to the fact that God is holy and they are not. This is *very* good news to the person who may have tried on the yoke of self-righteousness for a time and been weighed down by it. This is *very* good news to the person who may have been lied to by religious folks like those in Jesus' day, "But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers" (**Luke 11:46**). To those with humble hearts, repentance means relief! "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (**Matthew 11:30**).

There's much to learn while observing the simplicity of the early disciples in the church, especially the apostles whom Jesus chose. They were an eclectic group, mostly uneducated by contemporary standards, but humble (less Judas, of course). Jesus mandated this humility without reservation; for without humility, a person cannot be saved.

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

(Luke 14:25-35)

The Gospel begins with repentance, for it takes a person with a humble heart whose cup is empty in order to receive God's grace. Arrogance frustrates God's salvation plan. The human heart must be humble regarding the terms and conditions of the Gospel truth. Jesus was very clear on this, especially with His disciples. That is what we glean from the first four books of the New Testament, namely "The Gospels".

Terms and Conditions

It is fair to liken the so-called “terms and conditions” of the Gospel to boarding a boat. There are multiple implications. Fundamentally, a person can’t get into the boat without leaving whatever is outside the boat behind. That is the intended visual here.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

(Matthew 16:24-26)

If a person chooses to get into the boat, it doesn’t mean that they magically have omniscience about all things spiritual; rather, it means that they are agreeable to the Gospel. Jesus isn’t interested in fooling anyone about what it means to get into the boat, for it is *the* most important decision a person will ever make. Furthermore, His Father’s integrity doesn’t allow for any shenanigans on the topic. As receivers of the “Great Commission”, it is imperative that believers don’t modify the Gospel. A believer’s job is to understand it and present it clearly, allowing God the Holy Spirit to convict a person.

Suppose you and I are neighbors. You watch me build a boat in my backyard. You can see it from your rear deck when you’re barbecuing and such. You’ve seen how diligently I’ve worked on the boat and the boat seems to be coming along nicely. I finish the boat one day and you offer your congratulations. The very next day, there’s a newsbreak of a surprise tsunami. I invite you to get into my boat and be saved from drowning. You look at the boat, then back into my eyes, then back to the boat...and this continues for a few more iterations. All the while I can see the machinations and the calculations coupling and uncoupling with the responsibilities you have to both your family and yourself (with analogous echoes of **Acts 16:31**, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”).

Is it fair to say that in the end you will consider the *builder* of the boat more so than the boat itself? Indeed. If you trust the builder of the boat, you will get into it before the tsunami comes. If you don’t trust the builder, you are putting your faith in your own abilities to deliver yourself from impending doom. The issue is *trust*. Sound familiar? The heart issue of the

Gospel is that facts alone are never enough. We must *trust* the Architect of our salvation, "*the author and perfecter of our faith*" (**Hebrews 12:2**); that His good work is *sufficient* to save us, that is, *if* we even think that we *need* saving, which is the base issue of humility.

The overarching theme of the Gospel is trust. A humble heart places its trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation. An arrogant heart rejects Him.

Before a person can get into the boat, Jesus desires that His sheep understand what it means to gain passage on His vessel. He wishes to be fair to all when they are presented with the Gospel. In lay terms, He demands that a person "count the cost" of being a slave of His. Paul wrote perfectly, "*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness*" (**Romans 6:16**)?

The simple fact is that all men are slaves. There is never a time when they are *not* slaves; however, their masters differ completely. Jesus is the perfect Master to those who are saved. Sin is the odious master to those who are not saved. All men fall into one of these two buckets, whether they choose to believe it or not is not the issue - God says it's so.

When Jesus invites a person "into the boat", He is up front and honest about the *fact* that He is Lord, not just Savior. The implication is that when a saved person repents and turns to Jesus Christ in faith, they are redeemed from the slave market of sin and placed into bondage to Christ. Mary, in her "Magnificat", speaks what is arguably the most beautifully stated human viewpoint regarding the joy of being a slave (aka a *bondslave*) of Christ.

And Mary said:

"My soul exalts the Lord,

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

*"For He has had regard for the humble state of His **bondslave**;*

For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

"For the Mighty One has done great things for me;

And holy is His name.

**"AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER
GENERATION**

TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

"He has done mighty deeds with His arm;

He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones,

And has exalted those who were humble.

"HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS;

And sent away the rich empty-handed.

*“He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy,
As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his descendants forever.”*
(Luke 1:46-55)

Slavery is a beautiful thing to a true believer. It means that their Master will always care for them. However, that same Master demands obedience. *“And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32)*. A new convert will not understand all the details of obedience for they have not yet learned their Lord’s commands (they are not even able to beforehand - **1 Corinthians 2:14**). However, God sees if the heart is humble enough to receive the concept of lordship. In other words, a person must be willing and open to surrendering to Jesus Christ as Lord before Jesus will say, “come aboard!” The key word is “willing”, for the heart is willing even before a person is able. By grace, God is able to facilitate a sinner’s obedience, but a person must first accept His will for them. There will always be some who attempt to hedge their bets against this very truth, the craftier of them even trying to teach a different way of salvation.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”
(John 10:1-5)

Suffice to say that Jesus isn’t interested in any other Gospel than His own. Anyone who doesn’t enter through *the* Gate, Himself, isn’t welcomed into the kingdom of Heaven. To the humble, this is more good news. It means that Jesus is a man of integrity, beginning with His very own presentation of the Gospel. The good news is that for those with humble hearts, His voice will be heard and they will follow Him and be saved.

So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and

kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

(John 10:7-18)

To get into the boat, one must leave the self-life behind. A person mustn't overthink and overdraw lines in the sand between repentance and saving faith. God is the one who quickens the humble heart, resulting in salvation. The Gospel, in a sense, is really a pair of fundamental considerations that believers take with them the rest of their lives, even after they are saved. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* **(Romans 1:16-17)**. The Gospel to a believer is the *"hope we have as the anchor of the soul"* **(Hebrews 6:19)**. In this way, the artifacts of a consummated "Yes" to the Gospel remain with believers forever...and God wills it so! All God wants to know is what a person's heart thinks about getting in the boat.

For the arrogant who may choose to dismiss the full force of the Gospel, they unfortunately do so at their own peril. Jesus rejects them.

"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

(Matthew 10:32-33)

Jesus Rejects Some

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall.”

(Matthew 7:21-27)

This is a picture of those who have *claimed* to have already “jumped into the boat” but later on will be revealed as phonies left to “drown” in their own self-righteousness (the tsunami in the analogy represents divine judgment).

Could there be a worse revelation for a person? Scripture adds to the unbeliever’s impending doom by stating, *“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment”* (**Hebrews 9-27**). Since there will be no second chances after a person dies, believers, as representatives of Christ’s heart, must assume the gravity of the situation, and be motivated towards fulfilling the “Great Commission”, *“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’”* (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

The *last* thing a believer wants to do is present a Gospel that conforms to some false hope that an arrogant person clutches to regarding eternal life. For someone to believe they have gained access to the boat through false pretenses is a tragedy. It doesn’t mean that a person cannot still be saved from said condition, but one must consider the stumbling block a watered-down, convenient, accommodating gospel presents to an unsaved person. To present such a thing is to be accursed, *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed”* (**Galatians 1:8-9**)!

If Jesus presented the Gospel with full force, even turning away many as we see in scripture, then we ought to stand firm as “[soldiers] of Christ” (**2 Timothy 2:3**), even when the Gospel becomes very unpopular, as it seems to be, and as is prophesied to be in the last days. “*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons*” (**1 Timothy 4:1**). Believers must be on guard, protecting the purity of the Gospel, that it not be added to or subtracted from, “*You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you*” (**Deuteronomy 4:2**).

Believers mustn't be afraid to reject the viewpoint of some who claim they are saved while simultaneously clinging to a false gospel. Paul dealt with this form of ungodly tolerance with the Corinthian church, “*For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully*” (**2 Corinthians 11:4**). Even if believers endure personal assault as a result of standing firm, they ought to be encouraged, “*So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you*” (**1 Thessalonians 4:8**).

A believer cannot change another person's heart. Heart issues are between God and His creatures. All a believer can do is pray that they respond to divine appointments in ways that bring glory to the Lord. “*Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person*” (**Colossians 4:5-6**). Believers should be encouraged knowing that grace does not imply weakness, rather, quite the contrary. Since grace originates with God, it is omnipotent - powerful in ways that are beyond man's ability to recognize it. Therefore, “*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love*” (**1 Corinthians 16:13-14**). As painful as it may be to watch an unbeliever walk away from the Gospel, one must understand that God gave them that right. Begging is not the solution, the unadulterated Truth is.

A ruler questioned Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.’” And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” When Jesus heard this, He said to him, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in

heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

(Luke 18:18-27)

Jesus saw that the young ruler was really trying to save himself through self-righteousness, something he had apparently postulated as the right *formula* for achieving his goals. He didn't see the need to deny the self-life because to his brand of arrogance, such things aren't perceived as problems; rather, they bore a proven utility in the world. To him, eternal life was merely another conquest to be added to an already bulging portfolio. That's not humility, and Jesus saw it.

God saves the humble.

Chapter 3 - God Saves

God saves, not man. Even the so-called greatest evangelists to ever have lived, if they were worth their salt, understood that they were powerless to afford the kind of grace an unbeliever requires at salvation. For how can mere man impart belief, repentance, and faith that saves to another human being? They cannot. Only God has the ability to impute perfect righteousness to the account of a human that hasn't their own source of it. Only God can regenerate a person so that they are "born again" unto eternal life.

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"*

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his

deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

(John 3:1-21)

Only a fleshly man would entertain the thought of saving a person. Isn't that what unbelievers prove to be, self-saving persons? If so, then it's not a stretch for arrogance to assume it can save others, along with self.

Justification By Faith

To be justified means to be made righteous. In God's eyes, justification is the result of His own good work in a person. It is purely His good work by grace alone. Man, through faith, receives the gift of eternal life when God imputes perfect righteousness to him. There are a multitude of things that occur at salvation, many of which an unbeliever cannot even begin to understand, nor are they typically interested in the details beyond their own rationalistic, human abilities. Nonetheless, many things happen at salvation, including justification. The "good news", then, certainly contains these mysteries as they unfold to a person once they are indeed saved.

But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

(Romans 5:15-19)

The apostle Paul, as scripture reveals, dealt with a variety of attacks on the Gospel that were ingenious and meant to invoke the flesh's rationalistic tendencies against the supernatural facts concerning salvation. Because the Gospel is presented with the hope that one humbly receives it and is saved, one way to coordinate an attack on the Gospel is to flank it by sowing

doubts upon the forensic details of salvation, itself. As one might suspect, those that challenged the Gospel in this way were often the intellectuals of Paul's time. This would include the Judaizers, religious leaders, Gnostics, philosophers, etc.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

(Ephesians 2:1-10)

In many ways, the epistles in the New Testament are responses to outside stimuli. In other words, many of the letters were written in order to reassure true believers in the churches and /or defend the Gospel against attack. While Jesus spent His time establishing the Gospel through Himself, Paul and the other writers of the New Testament spent their time either extolling its virtues, for the sake of encouragement, or defending it. That's not to say that the Gospel cannot be pieced together by books other than the four Gospels, because it certainly can. However, since the Gospel saved countless people between the time Jesus ascended until the completion of the canon, we must conclude that the Gospel was fully articulated in the absence of the grainy details that were necessarily expounded upon in the epistles, all of which came decades after Christ's incarnation.

Justification by faith is a glorious doctrine in the Word of God. To borrow from the boat analogy in the previous chapters, a person may not learn to appreciate the integrity of the boat and all of its finer saving details (nails, wood, tar, glue, etc.) until *after* they have been granted passage. The more they fellowship with the Builder and others in the boat, the more they appreciate all that went into saving them. Likewise, a believer has the privilege and the honor of growing in the grace and knowledge of God, the One who saved them, "*You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on*

your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:17-18). For believers, their greatest joy in time is living the Gospel reality...enjoying the boat ride to Heaven.

As Peter alluded to in the scripture above, there is hazardous thinking from without the boat. There are still those outside the boat (antagonistic unbelievers) who systematically challenge the integrity of, or even the necessity for, a boat. These are the individuals that point to the nails and say, “Look at those nails, they are inferior...be wary you don’t sink!”...or “That wood the boat builder used isn’t going to hold up...beware!” Some of Satan’s agents are even well versed in scripture, knowing just enough to be *dangerous*, twisting scripture and tempting those *inside* the boat to doubt. Doubt is “normal”, but correctly applied scripture puts it away. Jesus demonstrated how this is done.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’”

*Then the devil *took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and *said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,*

‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’;

and

‘ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP,

SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’”

Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’”

*Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus *said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’” Then the devil *left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.*

(Matthew 4:1-11)

Jesus used whatever scripture He had available to Him in order to fend off any temptations that the Devil threw at Him. Believers have been given the completed canon in order that even the most astute unbelieving Biblical scholars (yes, they exist - consider Satan in **Matthew 4**) will be thwarted by correctly applied scripture. *“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7)*. The more scripture a believer has under their belt, the fewer doubts they will fall prey to. This directly relates to one’s sense of assurance in their faith. The greater the maturity, the greater the faith, with the result that fewer temptations will ever become a cause for sin. Faith breeds confidence.

So, in many ways, the New Testament has equipped believers to do what Paul had to do, either extol or defend the virtues of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “Justification by faith” was what stood against the perversion of “justification by works”, something that had a prominence in Paul’s time due to the constant presence of Judaizers, among others.

Conversion May Take Some Time

“Regeneration and conversion are words to describe two different ways of viewing salvation. Regeneration is viewing salvation from God’s side; it is an instantaneous impartation of new life to the soul. We may or may not be conscious of the exact moment this happened to us. Conversion, on the other hand, is viewing salvation from our perspective. It is a process of the entire work of God’s grace from the first dawning of understanding and seeking, to the final closing with Christ in new birth. For some, this is a period of years; for others merely an hour. We respond in time to God’s action in eternity.” - Will Metzger

A person isn’t going to jump into the boat right away. Even the thief on the cross took his time, it seems, having witnessed the Lord beside Him for a while (we don’t know, but the repentant thief may have had some knowledge of Jesus even prior to this scene). If the thief is closest to the most expedient of conversions, it still took a considerable period of time from God’s perspective. Most others in life apparently require even more time.

One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering

justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.

(Luke 23:39-43)

Consider the plain fact that Jesus Christ's *own* family didn't believe in Him immediately. *"For not even His brothers were believing in Him"* (**John 7:5**). May those struggling to evangelize family and/or close friends take heart and not be discouraged. Conversion may take some individuals longer than others. Furthermore, if relationships prove to be a stumbling block because of familiarity with the evangelizer, conversion may take a bit longer until someone *outside* the close knit circle presents the Gospel anew.

*Jesus went out from there and *came into His hometown; and His disciples *followed Him. When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.*

(Mark 6:1-6)

Any attempt to rush a person's conversion is merely a fleshly attempt to complete something in someone that a human being has no right attempting to do. In the simplest of terms, it is heresy to assume a person can quicken another person to salvation, regardless of how intent they may be in that endeavor. Man doesn't save man, God does. *"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"* (**2 Peter 3:8-9**). If God exercises patience while His creatures consider the Gospel, then believers ought to reflect that same virtue. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law"* (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

In honesty and integrity to their own conversion, many believers can empathize with unbelievers as they "count the cost". While justification by

faith is something that occurs instantaneously, this exercise of conversion, as Metzger refers to, may take some time. Part of the good news is that God has afforded each an ample amount (whatever that may be) so that a full conviction concerning the Gospel can be reached prior to His passing a judgment on their salvation status. Jesus taught this very same concept.

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace."

(Luke 14:25-32)

God is not bound by the construct of time the way humans are. For Him, election was carried out before human history even began. Even now, the things that man labors over regarding his future are fully known by Him. Patience appears in scripture as a touchpoint for man in his relation to God. It's an element created within the construct of time, a necessary response regarding man's relative slowness in it. To "*calculate the cost*", as Jesus states, man must confront the conviction he receives at the Gospel presentation. Thankfully, God sees that even a humble heart may need a little time, a little cultivating, before the soil is ready to support firm roots and ultimately bear fruit that brings glory to Him. Until that time, there may be multiple fits and starts, but only from man's perspective (God calls and saves His elect).

That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

*Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."*

(Matthew 13:1-9)

Conversion takes time. So that His judgments are just and righteous, God gives His creatures ample time to be saved. Judgment follows.

Chapter 4 - Judgment Day

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace” (Hebrews 13:8-9a).

God gives grace to the humble. He saves the humble. He sees the heart and either quickens it or waits patiently. If that activity results in unbelief, His sentence to Hell is just. He does all of this in light of the Gospel, the one that He designed for man’s salvation, the one that His Son perfected on the Cross. He assures His creatures of these things in order that His own justice be vindicated in an age-old conflict that even Satan has his murderous hands in (cf. **Job**).

The good news is that God can and does save those who cannot earn or deserve it. The good news is that Jesus Christ, the builder of the boat, says, “You’re going to drown in your sins unless you get into the boat and leave everything behind. **Trust Me**. I built the boat Myself - it is seaworthy and able to save you. **Trust Me**. My Spirit will pull you into the boat with Me. Don’t worry about how right now. **Trust Me**. OK? I’m coming soon.”

*And he *said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”*

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies

*to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*
(Revelation 22:10-21)