

“What is the Gospel: Part 5”

Review: God, the true God, the Creator of all things, created man, and therefore has the right to tell him what He wants him to do. When He first created man, He placed him in a garden called Eden to cultivate it and to guard it. God also entered into a covenant with the man, whose name was Adam, in which he represented himself and all of his offspring, excepting Christ alone. The probation, or test, God gave Adam, was whether he would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God told Him not to eat of, or whether he would repel the intruder as God had commanded. If he passed the test, he and his posterity would gain eternal life. But if he failed, all of them would die. The devil tempted Eve, and she ate. She then gave some of the fruit to Adam, and he also ate. They both fell away from God, and in doing so, fell under the sentence of eternal death.

II. This is what we will want to look at this morning: What is that state the fall brought man into?

- A. Is it important for the lost to know what the penalty is for their crimes? Yes.
 1. What is that penalty? Paul says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).
 - a. He might say, “So what! All men die”? What should you do? The severity of it needs to be emphasized.
 - b. What is the severity of that penalty? It is not only physical death, it is also judicial and spiritual death. Judicial death is the sentence of hell. Spiritual death is the inability to do anything pleasing to God.
 - c. Let’s look first at judicial death.
 2. What is the just sentence of God for sin? Hell. What is hell?
 - a. Some say that it is the absolute absence of God. Is this true?
 - b. No. It is the absolute presence of God in all His fury.
 3. But how bad is it really?
 - a. It is a place of agony. “Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:22-23).
 - b. Is there any comfort there? It is a place where there is no comfort. “And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:24-26).
 - c. But does this suffering go on forever? Yes.
 - (i) Jesus said, “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to

be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47-48).

- (ii) John writes of those who are cast into the lake of fire, “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night” (Rev. 14:11).
- d. Why does God require that all sinners suffer forever?
- (i) They suffer forever, because they are being punished for offending the infinitely holy God.
 - (ii) God is infinitely holy. Therefore every sin committed against Him is an infinite sin.
 - (iii) A sin is more or less grievous depending on the personal worth of the one sinned against. R. C. Sproul once pointed out that to scratch Christ would be a far greater crime than to kill President Lincoln.
 - (iv) God is infinitely worthy. Therefore every sin we commit against Him deserves infinite punishment.
 - (v) But we can’t suffer infinitely. We are finite creatures. Therefore our punishment, in order to be just, must go on forever.
- e. But does everyone suffer to the same degree? Will the punishment for Charles Manson be the same as that of John Doe who lived a fairly upright life, even though he was never saved? No. There are also degrees of punishment, based on the sins we commit in this life.
- (i) Jesus tells us, “And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:47-48).
 - (ii) He says, “But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet, we wipe off *in protest* against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment, than for you” (Luke 10:10-14).
 - (iii) Solomon writes, “The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecc. 12:13-14).
 - (iv) Paul writes, “God . . . will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom. 2:5-6).
- f. There are also those who believe that the sins that men commit in hell will increase their judgment.

- (i) They reason that if the sins men commit here will increase their judgment in hell according to the number and severity of them, why wouldn't the sins the commit in hell do the same?
 - (ii) If this is the case, then when men are in hell, and the common goodness of the Lord has been removed, then every evil thought, intention and word they have will only increase their agony.
 - (iii) Hell would then be conceived as a bottomless pit into which men endlessly spiral downward in a fiery vortex into greater and greater levels of punishment.
4. Now why is it important for an unbeliever to understand the severity of hell?
- a. To awaken him to his danger.
 - (i) What does it mean for someone to be awakened? It means for a person to wake up from the slumber of death and become aware of his lost and dangerous situation.
 - (ii) Will our telling someone that they are in danger be enough to awaken them? No. They won't really wake up unless they believe that what you are telling them is true.
 - (iii) How can they become convinced? They won't with any true conviction unless they are made alive by the Spirit of God. But the Spirit also does a work short of conversion in which He greatly heightens their consciences and causes them to fear enough to be concerned.
 - (iv) Why are people so insensitive to their sin and judgement? Because their sin dulls their senses, and their minds rationalize away their danger. (Cf. Rom. 1:18-32).
 - b. What else can be useful in awakening a person to their danger? The threatenings of the Law.
 - c. Why is it important for someone to become awakened?
 - (i) To motivate him to begin to look for the Redeemer.
 - (ii) If a person never senses their danger, why would they ever look for a Savior?
- B. But man has another problem. What is it? Not only is he under the just sentence of hell, he is also spiritually dead.
- 1. What does it mean to be spiritually dead? It means that man is totally depraved.
 - 2. What does total depravity mean?
 - a. Every part of his being is affected by sin.
 - b. Everything he does is tainted by sin.
 - 3. If this is true, how can he ever come to God and receive the gift of life that He offers in His Son? He can't. Man is also totally unable to do anything to commend himself to God.
 - a. Paul writes, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).
 - b. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws

- him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).
- c. And again, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (6:65).
 - d. And Paul writes, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:10-12).
 - e. Even if salvation is offered to man, he can never savingly embrace it, apart from the grace of God. He might be able to understand something about it. He might even want it to escape hell. But he will never be able to savingly embrace Jesus with all his heart, because until his heart is changed, he really doesn’t love God or Christ at all.
4. Why is it important that an unbeliever know that this is true?
- a. He needs to know that there is nothing he can do to save himself.
 - b. He needs to know that he cannot of himself even receive the gift of eternal life that God offers him, but is absolutely dependent upon God from first to last for his salvation.
 - c. If an unconverted man ever comes to believe that he can be saved at any time he wishes, he will put that promise in his back pocket and live the way he wants to, until he really believes that he needs it, usually at his death bed. But he needs to realize that this is not the case. If that is his attitude, it just shows that he loves his sin and not God, and therefore is not saved.
 - d. Next week, we will begin to look at what God did in order to save fallen man from his sins.