

Only One Gospel

Experiencing Wholeness in the Christian Life

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Acts 20:13-38; Romans 7:1-8:39

The cause of so much spiritual, mental, and relational suffering within the Christian community is the loss of the gospel of “the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27). What we understand to be the gospel within both Catholic and Protestant circles, is in fact a myriad of different *versions* of the gospel all of which were imported from the European state-church system. Now, what is important for your spiritual, mental, and relational health is to realize that the state-church demanded a trimmed-down, distorted version of the gospel, but you need the whole will of God in order to realize the wholeness for which Christ died and rose again.

The question that needs to be asked is simple: Is there more than one gospel? Is there a Catholic and a Protestant gospel? We can even break it down further by asking, is there, under the Catholic umbrella, a Roman or Greek Orthodox gospel, and under the Protestant umbrella, an Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed Baptist or Dispensational Baptist, and Pentecostal gospel? Just how many versions of the gospel exist? Now, someone would argue that the great dividing line exists only between Catholic and Protestant, for in the Protestant world, there is unity on the essentials of the gospel regarding justification by faith alone. But this only demands the question: Does justification by the faith alone represent the whole will of God? Or is this doctrine, *as important as it is*, only one aspect of the whole will of God?

In other words, is the whole will of God fully represented within the doctrine of justification by faith alone? Now, I realize it may make many of you uncomfortable to even ask this question. After all, did not Luther say that justification by faith alone is the singular doctrine whereby the church stands or falls? And is it not the case that we have made this doctrine of justification the “core” of our faith, and the basis of fellowship among various Protestant and evangelical churches? Yes, this is all true. And I am not arguing against the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but instead, this is a call to raise our sights and broaden our

understanding of the gospel so that what we preach and teach is in fact, the whole will of God, and nothing short of it. Let me illustrate: Justification by faith alone is necessary, just as water and food are necessary to sustain life, and yet we never say that water and food define the whole of human life.

But one would think that justification by faith alone represents the totality of the gospel of Christ given that this doctrine, and not the whole will of God, are the sole basis for fellowship among differing Protestant and evangelical bodies.

Are you willing to consider why this is? I hope so.

Because as I already stated, if you are going to know the fulness of life which is in Christ, you must be willing to consider this chief theological reality: The doctrine of justification by faith alone, *as important as it is*, does not reflect the whole will of God. The apostolic writings affirm this fact. So, let's stop listening to me and turn instead to what they have to say.

The Spirit Who Gives Life

The book of Acts is Luke's record of the preaching and missionary work of the early church following Pentecost. The Lord Jesus had preached and taught and performed many good works and miracles for three years, all of which led to his all-sufficient, atoning work on the cross, as was affirmed by his resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. And so important was this giving of the Spirit, that the risen Christ instructed his apostles to not go anywhere or doing anything, "but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5). Put simply: The immeasurable worth and efficacy of the cross and resurrection was made fully effectual by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Without Pentecost, the work of Christ would have been in vain.

Now, if this shocks some of you, it is only because you have been taught something less than the whole will of God. What I am saying is what the church has always taught: salvation is a trinitarian work—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But we live in an age in which Protestants, evangelicals, and even many Pentecostals, operate as though salvation is binitarian, Father and Son, only; or worse, a false trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Bible. In our just zeal to recover the

essential truth of the supreme authority of Scripture, we have gone too far and forgotten the author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit. Now this is critical in order to recover the salvific paradigm in which the Holy Spirit is the sole agent of transformation, with the Scripture as the instrument the Spirit uses to bring about that change.

So while it is true that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; this fact assumes the work of the Holy Spirit who first regenerates the dead sinner, by hearing the word of God, and imparts the gift of faith so that he or she responds to the call of God to believe in his Son (see Ephesians 2:1-10). Indeed, it is the Spirit that works in the believer from the moment of initial rebirth to completion on the day of Christ Jesus (see Philippians 1:3-6; Galatians 3:1-5). The one in Christ is, therefore, a Spirit-person. He or she no longer belongs to realm of the flesh, and under law, but to the realm of the Spirit and under grace (see Romans 7:1-8:30). Now please, mark this carefully: It is not until you grasp what I have just said about the work of the Spirit in you and for you that you will be available to experience on an existential basis the wholeness derived from all Paul promises in Romans 8: 31-39.

Let us pause, here. In the next lesson, we will examine more closely what Paul meant when he referred to the “whole will of God,” and how we can know we are walking in it, and thus walking toward a life of wholeness.

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