

Why Do Some Believe the Gospel and Others Reject It?

Acts 13:42-52

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Why do some believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and others reject it? Many may think that it's only because some desire the gospel and others do not desire it? Well yes, that's true. But why do some desire the gospel and others not desire it? From where does the faith to believe the gospel and the desire to receive it come? Or better, from whom does it come? Does saving faith ultimately come from man or from God?

God's word teaches that all men do not have saving faith, as we see in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2. Paul urges these Christians to pray that the word of God would be believed and glorified among others as it was with them, and that God would rescue preachers of the gospel from those who are unreasonable and wicked. But why are they unreasonable and wicked? Why don't they also receive the gospel? Paul answers this question: "For all men have not faith." It is not because they have saving faith and simply refuse to exercise it. No, Paul says the wicked don't have saving faith in order that God might turn them from being enemies to friends of the gospel. If all men have not faith, then saving faith in Jesus Christ must have another source than from men/women/children.

Consider now that God's word teaches that saving faith is a gift of God: Ephesians 2:8-9. What Paul is emphasizing is that salvation-by-grace-through-faith (the whole package) is God's gift (not just one part of it, but all of it, including saving faith). Even the faith to trust in Christ which men may boast in as from themselves has its origin in God's grace and not in their own effort (John 6:65).

From our text this Lord's Day, we shall see that there are different responses from those who hear the same gospel preached: some believe alone in Christ alone unto their everlasting salvation, while others reject Christ unto their own everlasting condemnation. But God makes clear from our text that not one who believes in Jesus Christ can ever rightly boast in himself/herself, but must give all glory to God who graciously and freely gives the faith to embrace Jesus Christ as one's own and only Savior from sin.

The main points from our text are: (1) The Reactions of Those Who Heard the Gospel Preached by Paul (Acts 13:42-48); (2) The Response of Paul and Barnabas to the Rejection of the Gospel (Acts 13:49-52).

I. The Reactions of Those Who Heard the Gospel Preached by Paul (Acts 13:42-48).

A. Paul has now completed his sermon to the synagogue, consisting of mostly Jews but also Gentiles (both proselytes to Judaism and God-fearers in sympathy with the monotheism and ethical principles of Judaism). Paul's sermon focused on the central event of all history—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—to which the God of Israel was directing all of Old Testament history. Paul makes clear they need no longer wait for the Messiah—Jesus has come. He was crucified; and He was raised from the dead in fulfillment of clear and specific Old Testament prophecies. Paul calls all who hear to trust in Jesus Christ and to be forgiven and justified at that very moment from the guilt of all sin which the ceremonies of the Law of Moses could not take away. Paul also warns those who hear this sermon that if they turn away and despise Jesus Christ, there will be God's judgment to pay—someone must pay for their sin—either Jesus Christ or they themselves for all eternity in hell.

B. Now what was the reaction to Paul's sermon? At the outset, the reaction to Paul's sermon was

very encouraging.

1. First, the God-fearing Gentiles had not heard enough of what Paul preached—they wanted to hear more on the following Jewish Sabbath when they all ordinarily gathered at the synagogue for worship (Acts 13:42—“besought” is in the Greek imperfect tense—“were beseeching” with the idea of constantly doing so, thus with urgency). It is certainly an encouraging sign when a hungering and thirsting for the faithful preaching of God’s word is evidenced and voiced by those who hear. Paul’s sermon had only whetted their appetite for more and more of the gospel truth.

a. This is what every faithful minister longs to hear from the lips of those who sit under his preaching. The faithful preacher does not want to hear from others about himself or his skills in preaching. He earnestly and fervently prays that from the youngest to the oldest the Holy Spirit would take this spiritual meal and satisfy their need for salvation and sanctification today, and that the meal would be so nourishing to their faith (by way of God’s promises and warnings) that they would return with an ever increasing hunger and thirst for Jesus.

b. That is my prayer for you, dear ones, that you will be fed and nourished to the saving and sanctifying of your souls on the Lord’s Day and that throughout the following week those hunger pangs would only increase for Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, until you sit once again at His banqueting table to be filled with His truth that never perishes, but nourishes unto everlasting life.

2. There was a second encouraging reaction to Paul’s preaching: many of the Jews and Gentile proselytes then followed Paul and Barnabas, no doubt expressing their faith in Christ, for we read that Paul and Barnabas “persuaded them to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). So we have Gentiles wanting more of Jesus Christ preached to them, and now we have many Jews and proselytes professing faith in Christ—they couldn’t continue in God’s grace if they hadn’t first begun.

a. The word “continue” is emphatic (*epimeno*) and has the idea of “continuing long”, “persevering” in the grace of God. There are some who hear the gospel preached, but **like the first soil** in Christ’s parable (Matthew 13) the seed simply falls upon a hard heart that the enemy takes away. There are some **like the second soil** that hear the gospel with joy, but when persecution, trial, and affliction for the truth come their way, they fall away choosing an easier more comfortable life. There are some **like the third soil** that hear the gospel with an initial burst of some fruit, but the cares of this life and the riches of this world choke out the gospel with such a preoccupation that there is no more fruit that is seen in this life. And then there is **the fourth** soil that hears the gospel, receives it by faith, and evidences that faith by persevering in the grace of God and bearing fruit to the glory of God (though differing by degrees of sanctification—30, 60, and some 100 fold)—John 8:31.

b. Paul was cautioning them (and us) against not becoming so preoccupied with what they were suffering or what they were seeking to gain in this world that they fall away, and Paul was persuading them to persevere in the grace of God, persevere in the knowledge of doctrine, persevere in applying the truth to their lives, and persevere in growing the fruit of the Spirit. The clearest evidence of growth is not to compare yourself with someone else, or to compare your growth from one day to the next (as with a photo), but rather from one year to the next, or from five years to the next. Growth will come, but it will not come by standing in front of a mirror day after day, and if there is no growth over years, there must be serious soul-searching.

C. When the next Sabbath day arrives, the news has spread throughout the city of Antioch of Pisidia and almost the whole town has come to hear what Paul has to preach concerning Jesus Christ, the Savior of all who will trust Him (Acts 13:44). Not only did the Jews and Gentiles that professed faith show up to hear more, but they were busy throughout the week, declaring to others what they had heard and encouraging family and friends to gather to hear Paul preach. And though the reactions of many are very

encouraging, the enemy will seek to torpedo the work of God by those who attack the truth and denounce the messengers of the truth. You can count on it.

D. When the large crowd gathers to hear Paul preach, the Jews (the greater number of them and their leaders) were filled with envy and were repeatedly contradicting Paul likely before or while he was preaching and also repeatedly blaspheming the Lord Jesus (Acts 13:45).

1. Let me distinguish for you the difference between the sin of jealousy and envy to better understand the nature of the Jew's sin.

a. **Jealousy** is when you're worried someone's trying to take what is yours. Jealousy is not always a sin—for example, you should jealousy guard the truth that you have or your spouse or your good name if someone is seeking to rob you of them (God is a jealous God for our supreme affection—Exodus 34:14). However, jealousy becomes a sin when your spouse cannot have an appropriate public conversation with someone of the opposite gender, or when someone else is promoted at work instead of you (you considered that promotion yours and not to be touched by any other rival). At that point jealousy becomes a sinful possessiveness (every look and every word is a threat—God Himself becomes an enemy if He would take away what is yours). The answer to jealousy (sinful possessiveness of health, wealth, esteem) is realizing it doesn't belong to you but to God. The tighter you hold on to the things of this world, the less you will be holding on to Christ and the more you will lose (like gripping sand). Jealousy is a fear of losing something valuable to you, and yet Christ is infinitely more valuable (Philippians 1:21).

b. **Envy** (on the other hand) is when you want what someone else has, and you are willing to do something about it. He/She has something that you do not have (a job, a house, a friend) and you must hurt that person by words or deeds in order to have it for yourself. Envy ultimately doesn't want equality; it wants superiority. Envy precedes theft in taking from others what is not lawfully yours. You may be sinfully jealous in your heart about a promotion at work, but when you attack a fellow employee whose popularity is growing so as to rob them of the promotion you want, you have fallen into the more grievous sin of envy. Jealousy may be righteous or evil depending upon the circumstances and heart of the individual. Envy is always sinful. Envy is destroyed by **learning** godly contentment (like Paul in Philippians 4). God loves me, and has given His only begotten Son. He will supply all that I truly need (Romans 8:32). Read Matthew 6:25-34 daily.

2. The Jews were not merely sinfully jealous in wanting to keep their followers among Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, but were envious of the huge crowd that came to hear Paul and Barnabas which they wanted, and they sought to destroy Paul and Barnabas to gain it.

E. Next, we see that this turmoil and the attacks from the Jews did not cause Paul and Barnabas to shrink in fear, but rather the fiery furnace caused them to speak boldly for Christ (Acts 13:46). Dear ones, to have the courage and the boldness of the martyrs, we must have the persuasion of the martyrs. We will never die for that which we are not convinced is the truth of God. May the Lord build up your faith and mine. True faith may be small faith, but small faith may grow to become a confident and assured faith in the truth and power of Christ.

1. Paul and Barnabas declare that by the violent words and blasphemy of the Jews in rejecting the Lord Jesus that they will turn to ministering to the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia who have demonstrated a willingness to hear the gospel of salvation (Acts 13:46). It was necessary according to Christ's appointment that the gospel be first taken to the Jews (to the Jew first as God's ancient people), but by their rejection they showed they were unworthy (all are unworthy in a legal sense, but unworthy in refusing the gift of eternal life preached unto them). Paul and Barnabas declare the Jews have **judged themselves** as unworthy. Before that final judgment at the last day, all those who have heard the gospel and pushed it away will have

already judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. Dear ones, that's what it means to refuse the gospel—it is to condemn yourself as unworthy of the gift of eternal life.

2. There is a principle here that we should all consider carefully. Where family, friends, co-workers, and others make it clear by their words and deeds that they want nothing to do with the gospel, we should not continue to try to knock down that closed door (at least not for the present), but rather pray for and look for those who will listen (the same thing may apply to discussing reformation with Christians).

3. Paul and Barnabas then cite Isaiah 49:6 that prophesies that the Messiah would be a light in bringing the gospel and truth to the Gentiles, ultimately to bring salvation to the most distant nations (Acts 13:47). God never intended that His salvation would be limited to the Jews, but that all nations would bow before Christ (Psalm 72:11; Psalm 86:9; Revelation 11:15). If Jesus is the light, let us pray with hope that He will bring family and friends out of the darkness (even those who have walked away from the light).

F. When the Gentiles heard that the Savior, Jesus Christ, was sent to bring the gospel of salvation to the nations, they rejoiced that they were included in God's salvation (Acts 13:48). Dear ones, their joy is your joy. Their gladness is your gladness. God's salvation has come near unto you even as near as the sound of my voice. Believe it is yours in Christ Jesus. But what does the Holy Spirit say is the ultimate cause behind all those Gentiles who believed (and for that matter, anyone who has saving faith in Jesus Christ)? "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

1. Many vain attempts have been made to twist this passage to mean that which it does not mean. Some have tried to water down the word "ordained" to mean "disposed" ("As many as were disposed to eternal life believed"). According to classic Greek lexicons this is not the meaning of the word. They "were ordained"—they did not ordain themselves. Others have tried to invert the verse, "As many as believed were ordained to eternal life." The Greek grammar will not allow this, for the actual order of the sentence begins with "they believed" and then assigns the reason why they believed to the cause that they were ordained to eternal life: "They believed as many as were ordained to eternal life."

2. Thus, the stated reason why any of us believe in Jesus Christ is because God first ordained us to eternal life from all eternity. There is absolutely no ground for boasting. All glory for saving faith, forgiveness of sin, justification, sanctification, and glorification belongs to God alone. He has ordained it from all eternity. All who are ordained to eternal life will believe. And all who believe will receive everlasting life. Your faith in Christ is as immoveable and unshakeable as the purpose of God (**John 6:37**). There is no uncertainty in saving faith. It can never perish. It may be small or weak, but it will always lay hold of eternal life.

II. The Response of Paul and Barnabas to the Rejection of the Gospel (Acts 13:49-52).

A. As the gospel was proclaimed throughout the whole region (beyond the city), the Jews were not content to have attacked Paul and Barnabas with words and to blaspheme the Lord Jesus Christ, but now they must be driven out of the region altogether. And who did they use to do so: devout women in the city and likely their ruling husbands.

1. Dear Christian women, you are a beautiful adornment to the Church of Jesus Christ, and yet the enemy will seek to use you against the truth of Jesus Christ. Do not join with the multitudes of worldly women who march for their various causes of every stripe and color. The International Day of Women has its roots in the Socialist Party of America (1909). It is not by marches and protests for social reform that God brings true reformation to the world—it is by the gospel of Jesus Christ and obedience to His laws that God promotes reformation through His own institutions: the family (children), the church, and the state. Marches and protests for social reform and voluntary associations are never promoted or even suggested in God's word (such reform movements unite the faithful with the unfaithful and bring about compromise). In fact, all such

public protests in the Bible are led by the ungodly (Acts 13:50; Acts 17:5 in Thessalonica; Acts 19:29 in Ephesus). True reformation was promoted by families, the church, and the state joining hands in covenanting themselves to God to promote reformation (Ezra, Hezekiah, Josiah, the Solemn League and Covenant).

2. Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust from their feet as Jesus taught in Matthew 10:14—a sign that the Jews of that region were to be treated like those who were defiled and wicked heathens. This was a sign of God’s judgment upon them.

3. This persecution of Paul and Barnabas was simply God’s way of saying it was time to move on for God’s work—God was doing his work in drawing converts to Christ, in showing them that persecution was to be expected, that courage comes from being persuaded of the truth, and that joy was not bound up in any man (even in Paul), but is bound up in the Holy Spirit. No doubt Paul and Barnabas had a godly jealousy for these new converts to Christ in Antioch of Pisidia. No doubt Paul and Barnabas longed to stay with them to instruct them, to feed them, to encourage them, and to correct them as loving fathers in the faith. But the Lord said it was time to move on. These converts did not belong to Paul and Barnabas—they belonged to Christ. Paul and Barnabas did not belong to the new converts, they belonged to Christ. Separation is hard, but it is for our good to make clear that all things are God’s not ours. Therein is the only way to peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, and contentment.

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