

# Evangelism

## The Spread of the Gospel Before and Because of the End

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### Evangelism Before the End

*This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

Matthew 24:14

#### Introduction

Why did the gospel have to go to all nations before the end would come? What did Jesus mean by “the whole world?” If Jesus promised to return in that generation, was this goal of His accomplished? In this essay, we will answer these questions and more.

But to answer them, we first must go back in the Bible. While we could go as far back as Genesis 1-3, we will begin in Genesis 11-12 for time’s sake. In this presentation, we will cover three major topics: (1) the nation’s need for the gospel in the Hebrew Scriptures, (2) what constitutes “the whole world” and was the mission accomplished, and (3) why was preaching the gospel to the whole world necessary?

The nations needed the gospel because they too were under the dominion of sin and death, so they were included in the promise made to Abraham. The gospel, then, would go to the known world at the time of Christ. This was necessary because it is the gospel that abolishes death and brings salvation.

#### The Promise Made to Abraham

To understand the promise made to Abraham, we really need to begin in Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel episode. Mankind came together united under the same language to construct a tower. There were several reasons (and problems) for wanting to accomplish this task, but the key one for our study is found in verse 4:

And they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and **let’s make a name for ourselves**; otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of all the earth.”  
(Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

We might be able to make a name for ourselves in our temporary life here on earth, but this is a works-based goal that has no eternal implications within and of itself. Many good

and evil people have made names for themselves, but that name alone does nothing for them beyond the grave. As you know, these tower builders were unsuccessful because God “scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9).

So, we come to Genesis 12 where God tells Abraham to pack up and leave everything behind:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you into a great nation, And I will bless you, **And make your name great**; And you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. **And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**” (Genesis 12:1–3, Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

First, the distinction between Abraham and the Tower of Babel is apparent: those who tried to build a tower were seeking to make their name great while God promised to make Abraham’s name great. On a side note, when Isaiah, such as in Isaiah 56, talks about a new name that would be given or when the New Testament speaks of the same, it is referring to this promise which ultimately looks forward to the name of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, Abraham is told that the nations of the earth would be blessed, which, of course, refer to those who were scattered in the previous chapter. Thus, the necessity of a world-wide gospel mission to fulfill the Law and the Prophets is apparent from the very beginning of the Bible.

Paul, that great student of the Hebrew Scriptures, focused on this point above all in his letter to the Galatians and Romans. Without quoting all the verses one could in relation to this subject, I’ll try to make my point in just one from Galatians 3:

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Galatians 3:8–9)

The gospel, in this passage, is the truth that all blessings come through Jesus and to all nations. The nations in this text are no different from the ones in the original scripture cited above in Genesis 11, and they all need the gospel. Thus., when Jesus says that the gospel must go to the whole world, it is inclusive of those in Genesis 11. To emphasize this point, we’ll look at a few major passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 4:12. This is the name common to all believers: Christian. Regardless of our parties or denominations, we can have unity in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Empires, Sodomites, and Pure Language

In the biblical narrative by the time of Isaiah, Israel had a lot of enemies, but no two were greater than Assyria and Egypt. It was Egypt who originally enslaved the Israelites, and it was Assyria who tore the Northern tribes from their homeland. As Hosea recorded, “Israel is swallowed up; They are now among the nations Like a vessel in which no one delights” (Hosea 8:8).<sup>2</sup> Despite their understandable hatred for their enemies, God still included them in His plan of redemption.

The first major text we’ll notice is from Isaiah 19. After promising to judge Egypt by coming swiftly to them on a cloud, God promised redemption:

And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the Lord, and He will respond to their pleas and heal them. On that day there will be a road from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria; and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third party to Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of armies has blessed, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.” (Isaiah 19:22–25)

While the political and trade situations of Isaiah’s day play into the interpretation of the above passage, the point is simple: God was invested in the well-being of the nations. Isaiah envisions a time when all three nations would join in worship to God. In the *Anchor Yale Bible Commentary*, Blenkinsopp explains,

In the final passage this imagining of the future opens up into the vision of a tripartite axis in the middle of the known world (as set out in the “Table of the Nations” in Gen 10) bound together in the common worship of the God of Israel, **a central zone in which the Abrahamic promise (Gen 12:1–3) attains its fullest instantiation**. Israel (Judah) still occupies the central position both geographically and symbolically as uniquely the possession of Yahveh, but Egypt is also God’s people and Assyria (Syria, Babylon) owes its existence to the same source.<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

Another major enemy of God’s people in the Hebrew Scriptures was Sodom. In 2 Peter 2, Peter comments on Lot’s unfortunate situation:

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that Israel was swallowed up *by* the nations. The nations (Hebrew: *gôy*; Greek: *ethnos*) are distinct from the northern tribes of Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Blenkinsopp, Joseph. [\*Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary\*](#). Vol. 19. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008. Print. Anchor Yale Bible.

...and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example of what is coming for the ungodly; and if He rescued righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the perverted conduct of unscrupulous people (**for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds**). (2 Peter 2:6–8, Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

Despite these two nations being destroyed, Jesus exclaimed, “Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment, than for you.” (Matthew 11:24). I suggest that this passage makes most sense in light of Ezekiel 16: “Nevertheless, I will restore their fortunes, the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own fortunes...” (Ezekiel 16:53).

The point of both the above passages, for the purposes of this paper, is that God cares for the nations. Despite their major sin in Genesis 11 in which they were scattered, God had in His plan a place for them. Of course, there is still the language barrier these nations must overcome. What language would God use to unite these people? Miraculous tongues? English? Some sort of German/ Chinese hybrid? Zephaniah had other thoughts, but first let’s notice the comments from the *Hermeneia* commentary on Zephaniah 3:9:

Verse 9 therefore emerges as Zephaniah’s attempt to portray YHWH’s projected punishment against the nations as a purge like that envisioned for Jerusalem and Judah in 1:2–18. **It also emerges as a reversal of the scattering of the nations in the tower of Babel tradition now found in Gen 11:1–9.**<sup>4</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

Again, is this some sort of miraculous transformation of human language? No. I suggest the tongue which unites the nations is the gospel of Christ. These sentiments are expertly laid out by Matthew in the *New American Commentary*:

Luke’s report of the founding of the church at Pentecost has been interpreted by some commentators as an intentional echo of Genesis 10–11. If so, by the outpouring of the Spirit the human family again becomes one people, and language no longer is an impossible barrier (Acts 2:5–13). The Spirit does not give one language but numerous dialects by which the gospel is heard. Pentecost shows that national distinctions are

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<sup>4</sup> Sweeney, Marvin A. *Zephaniah: A Commentary*. Ed. Paul D. Hanson. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003. Print. *Hermeneia*—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible.

secondary to the union of a single people by the baptism of the Spirit in Christ. **The gospel therefore is the reconciling antidote to the plurality of nations as it is preached among the world's peoples.**<sup>5</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

God demonstrated His care for the nations in His promise to Abraham. He emphasized this repeatedly throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The one thing that would reunite the divided nations is the gospel of Jesus. It transcends cultural barriers, language, and any other human institution. The gospel is the language of God, the language of love. This is just one dimension of its importance in the eschatological drama one reads in the New Testament. Now we turn to the question concerning the great commission and its first century fulfillment.

### **The Gospel to the Whole World**

For those who read this who may be on the fence concerning the nature of the resurrection, I believe that this section on the purpose, spread, and power of the gospel will not only answer questions you have concerning my view of the resurrection but will also help you appreciate the gospel of Jesus in a way you may have never thought of it before even if many questions persist. Before we get to that, though, let's notice our key passage: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

To set the stage for the coming discussion, allow me just a few moments to talk about the context of Matthew 24. Jesus had spoken of His coming just a few times in Matthew so far: Matthew 10:23 and Matthew 16:27-28. He would go on to mention it two other major times: Matthew 24:30 and Matthew 26:64. All four of these passages carry with them the expectation that Jesus would come sometime in the lifetime of His disciples. Some would die, be persecuted, and martyred, but that generation would not pass until He would come (Matthew 24:34).

In Matthew 24, Jesus told His disciples that the temple would soon fall. Since He had previously spoken of the end of the age and the coming of the kingdom in the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13, the disciples asked, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus then tells of several things that would happen, but the end would not quite arrive (Matthew 24:6). The spread of the gospel to the whole world would be their first major indicator that the end would come (Matthew 24:14). It is this passage that will be the focus of our remaining time in this section.

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<sup>5</sup> Mathews, K. A. [Genesis 1-11:26](#). Vol. 1A. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996. Print. The New American Commentary.

First, if Columbus didn't sail the ocean blue until 1492, how can any reasonable person assert that it was even possible to complete this mission within one generation when they had no major methods of travel, internet, or even international snail mail? The answer comes through our understanding of the word "world" (Greek: *oikoumenē*). BDAG defines this Greek word in several ways: "(1) the earth as an inhabited area, exclusive of the heavens above and the nether regions, (2) the world as administrative unit, *the Roman empire*, and (3) all inhabitants of the earth."<sup>6</sup> An additional definition is given which includes "the realm of transcendent beings," but that one isn't specifically relevant to our essay.

Now, which of these three was meant by Jesus? Let's explore.

We must first consider Jesus's own promise that this would be fulfilled within that generation at the end of the age (Matthew 24:34; Matthew 28:18-20). This alone seems to rule out the possibility that He meant literally the entire earth as we know it today with our ability to scroll out on Google Earth and view city streets halfway across the world. But let's see if this is held up by Scripture.

One of the definitions given above mentioned those who lived on earth to the exclusion of the heavens. This is in line with something Luke recorded in Acts. "Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from **every nation under heaven**" (Acts 2:5, Emphasis mine—bold and underline). Earlier in Acts, Jesus said something like our main text in Matthew 24:14, "...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as **the remotest part of the earth**" (Acts 1:8, Emphasis mine—bold and underline). From this we can infer that "every nation under heaven," "the remotest part of the earth," and "the whole world" mean basically the same thing, i.e., the Roman empire.<sup>7</sup>

This interpretation is further confirmed in Paul's own testimony:

...if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Colossians 1:23)

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<sup>6</sup> Arndt, William et al. [\*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature\*](#) 2000 : 699. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this understanding of "the whole world" may help those who have questions concerning Acts 17:31, "...because He did set a day in which He is about to judge the world in righteousness..." (Young's Literal Translation; cf. Matthew 25:31ff).

This echoes his statement from earlier when he wrote, "...the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is bearing fruit and increasing..." (Colossians 1:5-6).

In these two passages, Paul uses the same Greek words employed by Jesus in Mark 16:15 in which the great commission is recorded: "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world [*kosmos*] and preach the gospel to all creation [*ktisis*]' " (Mark 16:15).

To summarize, Jesus said multiple times He would come within the lifetime of His disciples. One major sign of His coming would be the preaching of the gospel to the whole world, i.e., the Roman empire. Paul affirmed that this had already happened by the time he authored Colossians (AD 62). One can reasonably conclude, then, that the end of the age was at hand when Paul wrote Colossians.

I believe James saw the same things Paul did and had Jesus's words in mind from Matthew 24:29-34 when he wrote, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door" (James 5:8-9).

Having established the original scope and fulfillment of Matthew 24:14, let's turn to the function of the gospel. Most believers I know are familiar with Romans 1:16 where Paul teaches that the gospel is the power of God for salvation, but what is salvation? Salvation from what? What blessings does that include? In Isaiah 25, the prophet records,

**He will swallow up death for all time**, And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited **that He might save us**. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; **Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation**." (Isaiah 25:8-9, Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

Salvation, then, is inextricably tied to resurrection. This text from Isaiah 25 is one of Paul's key passages in discussing resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Of course, it is also alluded to in passages such as Isaiah 65-66 and Revelation 21; its importance cannot be understated. Thus, in Hebrews 9, the Hebrews author related the second appearing of Jesus to salvation in verse 28.

But how does this relate to the spread of the gospel in the first century? While there is much we could write on this, let's simply notice the connection between Matthew 24:14, 1 Corinthians 15, and 2 Timothy 1.

First, Mathew 24 says that the "end" would come when the gospel was spread to all nations. This end of the age would be accompanied by the coming of Christ in His kingdom (Matthew 24:30; Matthew 25:31; cf. Matthew 16:27-28). I see no reason to

separate this coming of Jesus in His kingdom at the end of the age from the one found in 1 Corinthians 15. Both passages speak of the coming of Jesus, the end, the role of the gospel in their salvation, and the inheritance of the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:23-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:50; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11 for “the end of the age”).

But when we survey the verb tenses in 1 Corinthians 15, we see a predominate use of the present tense. For example, the ESV renders 1 Corinthians 15:1-2:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and **by which you are being saved**, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Emphasis mine—bold and underline)

The word translated “you are being saved” is in the present, passive, indicative. While not translated the same, it is the same tense, voice, and mood of the expression “will be abolished” in 1 Corinthians 15:26: “The last enemy that will be abolished is death.” In other words, while the gospel was actively working on them to bring about salvation, death was in the process of being abolished. But what force was abolishing death? My answer is the very gospel that was saving them.

2 Timothy (AD 64-65) supplements this argument:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for **the gospel** according to the **power of God**, who **saved** us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, **who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel**, for which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher. (2 Timothy 1:8-11)

It is the gospel that saves. It is the gospel that abolishes death. It is the gospel which brings life and immortality. Paul was specifically chosen to be a minister of the gospel to the nations. His emphasis on the faith of Abraham shows how he understood that he was uniquely positioned among the apostles to fulfill the promise made to that great father of faith. In laboring for the “hope of Israel,” Paul was being used by God to bring life to the whole world.

Paul recognized that his mission to the Gentiles would help Israel receive her promises, so he wrote, “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will



their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15). The gospel needed to go to the whole world because the whole world needed resurrection.

Hopefully this section gives you a greater appreciation for the gospel of Christ, which is God's power for resurrection. In the next major section, we'll discuss how the gospel didn't lose its power at the coming of the Lord; it was amplified a hundred-fold.

## **Evangelism Because of the End**

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

Revelation 22:1-2

### **Introduction**

“That’s it? Jesus already returned, the gospel was preached to the nations, and the kingdom already came? It seems a bit anti-climactic. What are we supposed to be doing today? What’s left for us? What does the future hold?” I’m sure you have heard these questions asked by most people you have talked to about the coming of the Lord. In fact, you’ve most likely asked these questions yourself. To be honest, I don’t know if one could ever satisfy these questions for every single person, but I will do my best to give you the foundation for some potential answers in this lesson.

Our main goal is to talk about how our view of fulfillment should lead us to be super-evangelists, spreading the good news of Jesus everywhere we go through our lives, through sharing the gospel, and through the fruit of the Spirit which should be evident in every person who has Christ in them and has a better understanding as to what that entails.

This section will be a lot less technical than the last one and a bit more philosophical, but its main purpose is to inspire you to share the gospel with those who need it in your life because, let’s be honest, the world around us still needs healing! One section of this essay will cover the difference between doctrine and the gospel, between preaching and teaching.

### **The Nations Still Need Healing**

When we read Revelation 21-22, there are some things that stand out to me about the New Jerusalem: (1) the gates are never shut (Revelation 21:25), (2) the gates are on each side of the city (Revelation 21:12-13), (3) there is no night (Revelation 21:25), and (4) the tree of life bears its fruit every month.

Is this not a perfect picture of the eternal kingdom?

There’s always room for one more person at any time and in any place. You can come from the North, the South, the East, and the West and always find a home. The Spirit and the Bride say come. Unlike the fig tree, which was cursed by Jesus, the tree of

life bears fruit in every season and in every month. Its purpose? The healing of the nations.

Couldn't our nation use a little healing? But what is the power that can bring that healing? Nothing but the blood of Jesus, the gospel of Christ.

If you really believe that prophecy has been fulfilled and we are living in the eternal kingdom, then you are equipped with power to bring about radical change in the world around us. I believe that the gospel was way ahead of its time and way ahead of ours but that we are on a trajectory set by Jesus for the continual increase of His kingdom.

As caretakers of this new world through the gospel, it is up to us to spread its message, to invite people in, and to spread the joy of Jesus. Those who are holding out for a future coming of the Lord preach the same gospel we do and are our brothers and sisters in Christ; there is no denying that. But we are uniquely positioned as those who accept this message of fulfillment to take evangelism to the next level. It is the same good news in the end, and God is working through us all, but having a better perspective, at least what we truly feel is a better perspective, should have a dramatic impact on everything we touch.

The potential for unity is possible. Look around in the crowd here at Blue Point. We have people from all different kinds of religious and ethnic backgrounds. We come from different creeds or no creeds, but we are all here together. What ultimately brings us together is the gospel of Jesus. That's why we're here. But the gospel worked through our understanding of prophecy to tear down the walls established by human institutions and to bring us under one roof.

For example, I was raised in the strict Churches of Christ, which is an offshoot of what's incorrectly called the Restoration Movement. Our sister churches are the Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ. Growing up, however, we only had fellowship with those who agreed with us in every point except for a few things that were considered non-essential. I truly believed for most of my twenty-eight years that we were the only ones going to Heaven. Yet here I stand liberated from the legalism of my past by the everlasting gospel.

Six years ago, I would have not called most people here my brothers and sisters in Christ, but the gospel still works. The leaves of the tree of life have brought healing to my life, so I know they can do the same for all who answer the Spirit's invitation, which is our invitation.

So, this unity movement, which we are poised to lead, has already begun, but what are some things that may be holding it back? I'm convinced it's because there are too many Preterists who happen to be Christians and not enough Christians who happen to be Preterist. When I say this, believe me that I consider myself like the apostle Paul when

he wrote, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15). Not that I was in sin when I was a Preterist who happened to be a Christian, but I wasn't where I was needed most.

While there are men and women, such as Don Preston, who do wonderful work for the kingdom in teaching the Preterist perspective serving as guides to those who are first discovering this truth on their own and in building up those who wish to know more about our Lord's coming, if everyone in the body of Christ were an ear, where would be the seeing? If everyone were a hand, where would be the smelling?

Preterism presents us with a paradigm in which many can come to know Jesus, not that there is no other way to come to know Him, but we will be operating at maximum efficiency only when we learn to balance preaching and teaching.

### **Preaching Versus Teaching: A Balancing Act**

In my life, I rarely make a distinction between preaching and teaching. Typically, I would call myself a preacher, but most of my time is usually spent teaching, not preaching. In the New Testament, the word translated "to preach" comes from the Greek word *euangelizō* which the expression "to teach" is a translation of *didaskō*. The first word comes from the word translated gospel, which is *euangelion*. The second word comes from the word translated doctrine, which is *didachē*.

The difference between the two is important and balancing them can be the difference between being one of those Preterist Christians and being a Christian Preterist. Preaching, as seen above, is really focused on spreading the gospel, that is, the good news concerning Jesus. Whereas teaching has more to do with discipleship, building up the one who is already a believer. Confusing preaching and teaching leads to division, legalism, and lack of outreach.

The following two sections (in blue-gray) are excerpts from a recent essay I wrote on the Stone-Campbell movement, which is typically called the restoration movement.<sup>8</sup> These sections reveal how confusing doctrine and gospel can cause all sorts of trouble.

#### *In Opinions, Unity?*

There is no doubt that we are united in the gospel of Christ. Paul said in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is God's power to save us. Anyone who has ever been saved or will be saved will have the good news of Jesus to thank for that. The passage quoted above has been used throughout my lifetime to condemn every disagreement under the sun.

Basically, anytime someone doesn't agree with the elders of a particular church, they will withdraw from them and say that the person has left the gospel of Jesus. When I was withdrawn

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<sup>8</sup> This essay can be found at <https://labornotinvain.com/2021/09/30/in-opinions-liberty-part-1/>

from by my Stepdad and Granddad, I received a letter asking me to “return to the gospel, forsaking this other which leads to destruction.” Two passages are behind that line of the letter: Matthew 7:13-14 and the one above (Galatians 1:6-9).

What had I done to receive such a letter? Deny that Jesus is the Son of God? Call into question the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus? Deny faith in God? Reject the teaching that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God? None of that. Through diligent, sincere study I reached a different conclusion on the nature and timing of the coming of Jesus. Apparently, this was enough to set me on the wide path that leads to destruction through accepting “another gospel.”

I don’t bring this out to shame my family or their congregation. I sincerely believe they were doing what they thought ought to be done. As twisted as their actions may seem to some reading this, I can guarantee they did it out of love. They simply were following the traditions handed down to them which had their genesis in men like those who authored the *Address and Declaration* in Sand Creek in 1889.

I bring all this up to show how one may reword the title of this section to make it more clear to us. When we talk about matters of faith, we are speaking of things which pertain to the gospel. When we talk about matters of opinion, we are speaking of things which aren’t expressly taught in Scripture. The question, of course, is how broad we may define the term gospel. For example, there are Christians within some of the more radical sects of the Churches of Christ who will condemn others for believing “The Core Gospel Heresy.” These are ones, they tell us, who believe that one can have fellowship with another simply based on their common faith in the gospel, specifically faith in Jesus as the Son of God, his death, and resurrection.

They call this “The Core Gospel Heresy” because these individuals believe that anything which isn’t specifically authorized by a command, example, or necessary inference is contrary to the gospel of Jesus and falls under the umbrella of what Paul was talking about in Galatians 1; however, when we look at the context of Galatians 1, we will find that this conclusion is unwarranted. After a brief survey of the word “gospel” in Galatians, we will look to history to see what the founders of the Stone-Campbell movement thought about unity.

#### *What is the Gospel in Galatians 1?*

Anytime we study the Bible, it is important that we notice the context of the passage we are trying to understand. Context means more than just the verse before or the verse after; it can include the chapter, the book, the rest of the Bible, and even the historical or cultural situation at the time. To understand the parables of Jesus, one may need to read up on marriage customs of the first century, how shepherds kept their flock, and probably know what a mustard seed looks like.

To really understand the book of Galatians, we would need to take time to find out when the book was written, who wrote it, to whom it was written, and what situation the writer was responding to. While doing most of this is outside the scope of this article, taking the time to answer these questions, and more, would help one’s overall understanding of this epistle. For our purposes, we will stay within the confines of Galatians and try to understand how the original audience would have understood these terms.

Whenever someone quotes a passage isolated from its context to make a point, this is called proof-texting. Proof-texting doesn't automatically mean that the person is using the passage incorrectly, but the verse should be examined more closely when the opportunity arises, especially when the speaker or writer is condemning someone else with an isolated passage. Galatians 1:6-9 has been used for this exact purpose, to condemn people with different interpretations of the Bible. Simply waving our hand at this and dismissing it isn't enough; we must do our due diligence and see what the Bible says and how it defines the word "gospel." We'll begin in verses 3-5.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)

This is the gospel in simple terms: God is our Father, Jesus is Lord, and He died for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age. Paul was concerned because people were being drawn away from these truths through the teaching of some Jewish individuals. Instead of teaching a message that "rescues" people, they were trying to bring the Gentiles under bondage by demanding that they be circumcised (Galatians 2:4). While Paul had taught the gospel of the new creation, they were trying to keep people within the old, fleshly world of the Law (Galatians 6:15; cf. Galatians 5:1-13).

Paul mentions the gospel again in Galatians 1:11-12, but we will skip down to verses 15-16 and 23.

But when He who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood...

...but they only kept hearing, "The man who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."

To Paul preaching the gospel meant preaching "Him" (Jesus). This is also what is meant in the expression "preaching the faith." What was it that Paul was preaching? That the Son of God has come to rescue us from our sins. He preached and they believed. Where in Galatians, or in Paul's teaching in Acts, do we read about instrumental music, the number of communion cups, donating to orphanages from the church treasury, praise teams, or any of the things that have divided our Movement? Paul preached Jesus. He preached the Cross. That's what saves, not all this other, which leads to division.

In Galatians 3, Paul says something mighty strange if the popular way of understanding Galatians 1:6-9 among the Churches of Christ is correct.

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in

you.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.  
(Galatians 3:8–9)

The gospel was preached to Abraham. Now, did God tell Abraham about the dangers of instrumental music, praise teams, or baptizing people in stagnant water?<sup>9</sup> Of course not. God told him about Jesus. He then concluded, “So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.” Those who are of faith are blessed. Faith in what? Commands, examples, and necessary inferences or Jesus, the Son of God?

There is no room in Galatians 1 for condemning every group who doesn’t see things your way. Paul said, “For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). Those who have faith in Jesus are the sons and daughters of God, and where He has a son or daughter, I have a brother or sister.

The above demonstrates the difference between preaching and teaching, between the gospel and doctrine. As Preterists, we need this lesson just as much as anyone else who enjoy theology. It is true that Preterism is a great apologetic tool, but it is ultimately the gospel that saves soul. Paul said that he was determined to “know nothing” among the Corinthians except “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Unfortunately, I got into the habit of knowing nothing among those who looked to me for spiritual guidance except eschatology.

If we are going to participate in the transformation of the world around us, we need to be teaching and preaching. We mustn’t forget that our main priority as Christians should be proclaiming the name of Jesus to those who do not know Him. We can talk about Preterism, have friendly debates, and do in depth studies on eschatology, but we must be balanced.

### **What Do You Have to Lose?**

If you really believe that Jesus lives among us in His kingdom, what do you have to lose? If you believe that “all things are yours” and that Jesus has overcome His enemies, then preach! Share the message of Jesus, the good news, with everyone you can. There’s a country song that says to live like you are dying, but we should be living like we are living because we are! And the privilege of sharing this life with others is the greatest gift we can give.

Sharing the gospel isn’t limited to speaking; we can share it through exuding the fruit of the Spirit in everything we do. If God’s gospel could transform people like Paul, then it can transform us and assist us in living in such a way that we spread life and light

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<sup>9</sup> See Dallas Burdette’s essay “Oddities in Pattern Theology” which can be found in his free book *From Legalism to Freedom*, chapter three for all the sad, strange things we have divided over. <https://freedominchrist.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/From-Legalism-to-Freedom.pdf>

everywhere we go. Study Preterism. Learn it. Love it. But make a pledge to be a Christian first in all you do. Then we can transform the world.