

Introduction

Paul and the early Christians were frequently attacked for their preaching by the religious Jews of their day. Was this because those Christians were living immoral lives? Indeed not! Was it because those Christians failed to do good works? No! Why then were they so persecuted? It was because the truth they preached was offensive to human pride.

They preached that salvation, even for the best person on earth, was only possible because of God's grace shown in Christ's death on the cross. They knew nothing of the requirement of human decision, which many today insist is necessary if a person is to be acceptable to God. They knew only one way of salvation — that of God being gracious. And this teaching of grace does not appear briefly in their preaching; it shines, reigns, triumphs; it is the only thing they preached. To them, any idea of human worthiness to be saved was totally wrong. Our most shining deeds and valuable qualities — while highly useful and right in our human circles — count for nothing in the matter of salvation. The apostolic preaching addressed all men as guilty, condemned, perishing wretches in God's sight. The only hope of salvation is *if* God will be gracious.

This teaching offends many people. Decent, moral people feel the need to defend what they call holy living (though often more by talking about it than by doing it). They accuse this teaching of being likely to produce all manner of immoral living.

Nor is it merely that this preaching offends human pride by insisting that there cannot be any human worthiness for salvation. The preaching also offends because it insists that God being gracious is the only way of salvation, so that all who reject this teaching are necessarily left under an everlasting curse. This, it is said, is so very narrow-minded. It is much more charitable, surely, to allow those who differ in their sentiments to be safe in their own way? Paul, however, speaking about the gospel of grace, said emphatically: "If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

The preaching of the early church was an unceremonious message! It paid no respect to human worthiness. Its business was with the worthless and the miserable, whoever they were. It had nothing for those who were pleased with their own self-sufficiency. This was why Paul was so often attacked by the proud religious authorities of his day.

And this is still the basic difference between Biblical Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. As long as pride in his achievements infects the heart of a man, he will object to the doctrine of the apostles, not understanding its real nature. But wherever the gospel of grace has been modified, to allow some merit in human actions towards salvation, instead of holiness being promoted, the reverse has been true.

While self-sufficient people may despise a salvation which is only by God being gracious, the "poor in spirit" will love it! To those who have been awakened to the reality that they are sinners, the gospel of grace is a joyful sound. And whereas those ignorant of this gospel are ready to imagine it will produce careless living, in fact we state boldly that it makes men holy.

True, some who hold this truth of salvation by grace merely in a theoretical way may live carelessly. They have never experienced the beauty of this gospel in their affections nor the power of it in their wills. So I write to show the power, glory and majesty of this gospel in the salvation of sinners. I shall try to illustrate the words of Paul: "EVEN SO GRACE MIGHT REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS TO ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD" (Romans 5:21). And while I pray for spiritual wisdom to write truthfully, I entreat you to think carefully about the contents of the following pages.