

## Gospel Confusion

We're looking at Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount pertaining to spiritual deception, particularly as it relates to the end times judgment that scripture speaks of. We saw last time that it's not enough for anyone to say, in effect, that Jesus is our "Lord" if we never want to follow him according to the truths given to us in Holy Scripture. At the heart of Jesus' teaching in this passage is the truth of the gospel. It's clear that those who genuinely believe in Him will—not perfectly, but as a pattern of life—want to do the "will of my Father who is in heaven." (vs. 21) We all fail in many ways, but a great mark of genuine saving faith is to know that we're not saved by our obedience. Those who are saved by grace in Jesus Christ alone receive a new heart and new, Holy Spirit given, desires to obey. Salvation, properly speaking, is not just a rescue operation from spiritual death and slavery to sin, but a wonderful promise of the gospel is that God, by His Word and Spirit, is intent on our growth in likeness to Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...." (Romans 8:29)

Sadly, rather than the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, many have been taught that being right with God is determined by our external obedience. This teaching continues to bring devastating effects on many lives. I once knew a man named Richard who became involved in a "church" where he was taught that—although Jesus has died for your sins—it's up to you to keep yourself in his love. Richard was told that he could lose his salvation by disobedience to a set of manmade rules. Sadly, as is often the case, the things that were seen as really bad were things like dancing, drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, etc. Richard had grown up in a very dysfunctional family. He had very little Christian influence in his life and, as often happens, he started smoking cigarettes at a very early age. By the time he was in his mid-teens he had a two pack a day habit. When Richard was invited by a friend to come to this legalistic "church," he would regularly hear fiery sermons on Hell and judgment. The preacher would always conclude by giving an emotionally charged altar call.

Richard had a tender heart and was often convicted of some sin or other in his life. On more than one occasion the evils of smoking cigarettes was framed in this same legalistic manner by the minister; "give up smoking or go to Hell!" Richard would inevitably walk down the aisle, confess his sins and then go outside the church and throw his pack of cigarettes away. He believed, because of false teaching, that this is what made him acceptable to God. God would love him if he could just stop smoking cigarettes. Sadly, because of the devastating addiction of nicotine Richard would always return to his old habits. Tragically, so many people, like Richard, believe that God loves them or ceases to love them based on their performance. This type of false teaching is powerless to save us or help us in our struggles. When we fail, as everyone will, false teaching results in heaping on more and more shame and guilt. Although we'll all know some measure of regret for the sins in our lives, the true gospel will never leave

us riddled with guilt and shame but rather, it has the power for true life change. Paul writes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16) God does not set his saving love on us based on what we do or what we fail to do, but rather we’re loved by faith in what Jesus Christ has already done. If we’re resting in the perfect life, death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ, our lives will, necessarily, change for the better. That truth is promised in the gospel.

There’s a great difference between, “God will save you if you obey” versus “God will save you in Jesus Christ and give you a new heart which always results in new desires to repent of sin and grow in our obedience to His word.” The difference is between a false gospel of salvation by our works and a true gospel of salvation by resting, by grace, in the perfect work of Jesus Christ for sinners. Gospel confusion has eternal consequences.

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