

The Litmus Test

Written by Lonnie Mazingo, Jr
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One of the greatest blessings the child of God can experience in this world is to hear and believe the gospel. Jesus Christ and the apostles all cite believing the gospel as evidence of being a child of God. In Joh 5:24 the Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Paul the apostle said, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;. . . And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. . ." (1Th 1:4-6). The beloved disciple John said, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. . ." (1Jo 4:6)

Note that in each of these three instances, hearing the gospel and believing it is evidence of -- not the means of -- one being a child of God. Indeed, each one of these statements teaches that one must already possess everlasting life in order for him to be able to hear and believe the gospel. The Lord taught in Joh 5:25 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." Note that the means by which one becomes a possessor of everlasting life is by direct operation of the Holy Spirit, characterized by the Saviour as hearing "the voice of the Son of God". Simply put, the dead sinner must hear the voice of the Son of God before he can hear the voice of the preacher. Therefore, one who hears the voice of the preacher shows evidence that he has already heard the voice of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful blessing to receive the assurance of being born again by hearing and believing the gospel! As we said before, so say we again, it is one of the greatest blessings a child of God can experience in this world.

Sadly, there are some who go beyond this great truth and teach that not only is hearing and believing the gospel a great blessing for the child of God, it is the necessary evidence a child of God must have, going so far as to say that the Bible offers no assurance for those who do not hear and believe the gospel. This, of course, makes hearing and believing the gospel the litmus test for being a child of God. Tragically, this teaching unwittingly diminishes the sovereignty of God and the glories of the grace of Christ, while robbing many of God's poor children of their hope for loved ones and millions around the world who have never heard, much less believed, the gospel.

Thankfully, the word of God will not support such an extreme position. In the same chapter 5 of John's gospel, our Saviour tells us the evidence of grace he will cite on resurrection day. He says, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (Joh 5:28-29). Notice that the Saviour

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did not say they that have heard and believed the gospel shall come forth to the resurrection of life (although all those surely are part of that number), but rather He said “they that have done good”. The evidence of grace the Lord cites on resurrection day is “they that have done good”! Again in Mt 25:1-46, the great Shepherd of the sheep indicates who are His sheep and who are not. He says, “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” (Mt 25:33-36). Observe that He does not say to His sheep, come ye blessed of my father... for when ye heard the gospel ye believed it (though surely those are part of the sheep), but rather “I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat. . .”. What is the evidence of grace the Lord cites on resurrection day? Not a positive response to the gospel, but rather good works born of love. So it is with Paul, though he cites a positive response to the gospel as evidence of grace, he does not make it the litmus test of who is and who is not a child of God. As a matter of fact, he even gives hope for those who are “enemies of the gospel” stating “as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.” (Ro 11:28) Even the beloved John, who so forcefully states, “he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us” goes on to say a few verses later, “...every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” (1Jo 4:7-8) Look carefully. John did not say he that does not hear us is not of God. John said he that is not of God heareth not us. John is teaching that the non-elect do not hear or believe the gospel, but he is not saying that every elect person will hear and believe and if someone doesn’t hear and believe, he is surely not a child of God. In other words, he does not make hearing and believing the litmus test, excluding all assurance for those who have not heard or who have not believed. The necessary evidence John cites is “every one that loveth”. He even says in the 3rd chapter, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Who-soever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1Jo 3:14-15). The distinction is love and hate. There are multitudes of God’s children who have never heard the gospel but, by grace, have the love of God in their hearts, and as Paul said, “. . .do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts . . .” (Ro 2:14-15). There are even those of God’s children who, having been deceived, do not believe the gospel, yet as Paul said, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” (2Ti 2:13; Ro 11:32; 2Ti 2:18-19) Yes, believing the gospel is a wonderful evidence of grace, but it is not the litmus test of who is and who is not a child of God. That test is love!

What shall we say then? Shall we give hope and assurance to every Christ-denying mullah because he has warm feelings for his pet camel? God forbid. But neither do we take away hope for the little trembling child of God, smothering under the burka she is forced to wear as she goes about feeding those among her that are hungry, visiting the sick and doing works of righteousness (Ac 10:34-35; Mt 25:33-36). Praise God that, though she may never hear a gospel sermon, or being so brainwashed by false teachers that she does not believe it when she hears it, she still has heard the voice of the Son of God by grace and carries His love in her

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heart!

Do we give hope to every Christ-hating, creation-denying infidel that teaches evolution to our children just because he has affection for his cat? God forbid. But neither do we dismiss the little child of God in the back of the classroom who has his faith overthrown by philosophy and “oppositions of science falsely so-called” (2Ti 2:18-19). Shall we say that a wicked man who does not know God and believe in Him will still go to heaven just because he loves a pet? God forbid. Every elect person must and will be born again by grace. That new birth makes God known, gives faith, and produces a righteous nature. (Heb 8:10-11; 1Jo 4:7; Ga 5:22-23). Do we teach that hearing and believing the gospel is a thing of little importance? God forbid. But we do not take hope away for God’s loving, affectionate, yet mentally challenged people just because they cannot understand and believe the gospel like the able-minded child of God. No, eternal salvation and survival is not just for the spiritually fittest. It is also for the poor, the outcast, and the destitute. No matter what men say, eternal salvation and preservation are still by His grace.

The scriptures do not teach the extreme position that there is no hope for those who do not hear and believe the gospel. They do teach that, though it is impossible to hear and believe the gospel without love in the heart, it is possible to have love in the heart without hearing and believing the gospel.

In Hope~ Elder Lonnie Mozingo, Jr.