

Christianity Clarified Volume 59

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- [0 : 0 0] Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 1, First Century Crises Continue, Part 21. As of the 21st chapter of the Book of Acts, the Apostle Paul has just returned to Jerusalem.
- He had now completed his third missionary journey in ten years. He'd had several successes and established churches, not only in Asia Minor, which is now modern Turkey, but also in Europe.
- But for those successes, Paul had paid dearly. He was forced to endure much for having preached the gospel of the grace of God committed to him.
- And that he would suffer opposition from many was made quite clear from the very time he was called by Christ in Acts chapter 9. Having concluded his third and final trip, Paul returned to Jerusalem, anticipating arriving there in time for the annual Feast of Pentecost.
- He received a warm welcome from Jews who had presided over the council that earlier met in Acts 15 over the issue of the Gentiles and the question of circumcision.
- [1 : 1 0] The Jews rejoiced over the good news Paul gave them about how the Gentiles had responded to the gospel of grace that he had preached to them on his last trip. But then they had a serious concern to share with Paul.
- It regarded a problem that had been brewing among his fellow believing Jews in connection with Paul's ministry. Verse 20 explains it in saying, Brother Paul, you see how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.
- And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs.
- What then can you do about this? They will surely hear that you were here. Now, here is what you need to do in order to defuse this situation.
- We have here four Jewish men who are under a vow. And if you join them and purify yourself ritually along with them, and if you pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads, then everyone will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law.
- [2 : 3 4] The text goes on to tell us that Paul followed through with their advice. And to this day, scholars disagree over whether or not Paul sold out and knuckled under to the Jewish brethren, insistent on keeping the law of Moses.
- Now, here is the problem. Several years earlier, about 10, when Paul was on his first missionary journey, he told the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, recorded in Acts chapter 13, that through Christ, everyone who believes in him is freed from all things from which you could not be freed through the law of Moses.
- Now, please realize this was a full 10 years earlier, and these believing Jews are hung up about keeping the law of Moses. What gives here? A lot.

And the confusion continues. And listen, if you get a handle on this, you will be grasping something that few Christians do, and it really makes a lot of difference. You will see.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 2, First Century Crises Continue, Part 22. The Apostle Paul is between a rock and a hard place.

[3 : 47] When demands were made on him to reaffirm his Jewishness by upholding the law of Moses, which he was not required to do, ever since Christ made his payment and justified men from all things by which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.

So when Paul was told then to purify himself and pay the cost of the four young men who were under a vow, according to the law of Moses, Paul could have said, Nothing doing!

We have all been freed from that. Or did Paul cave, surrendering his liberty in Christ to go along with the demand? Even today, some scholars see it one way and some see it the other.

And to arrive at what seems to be the solution about Paul's actions and his motivation, whether yea or nay, a fuller picture is needed. So let's ask ourselves some questions. First, is the Apostle Paul to be placed on a pedestal, assigning to him the impossibility of being wrong?

Of course not. The only one for whom being wrong was impossible is our Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul is certainly not in that league.

[4 : 54] So, is it possible Paul caved in, played the coward, and meekly knuckled under to their demands? Yes, yes, it was possible. But how probable was it? Not at all.

And why wasn't it? To begin with, when Paul was first called by the risen Christ to be his Apostle, he was told up front through Ananias in Acts chapter 9, that he, Paul, was going to come in for a lot of suffering, simply because he would be representing Jesus the Messiah.

And it would come with a lot of suffering. And from whom was Paul going to receive nearly all of his suffering? It would come from the anti-Jesus Jews, the same crowd to which Paul himself earlier belonged, as a leader.

Was Paul already a veteran of much opposition from his own countrymen? He sure was. And did it not take extra courage to go toe-to-toe with the Apostle Peter?

And Peter's caving in to the Jews about his eating with Gentiles and his hypocrisy? Don't you think it took some real moxie for Paul to publicly read Peter out for his hypocrisy?

[6 : 02] You can read it in Galatians chapter 2. It was really something. No, no. Paul passed up many opportunities to play the coward. But he never did so.

And there appears to be only one reason that explains why Paul went along with the Jewish demands about the vows. And it certainly had nothing to do with Paul being too cowardly.

Not at all. The passage is found in 1 Corinthians 9, and it explains it better than anything I can say, beginning with verse 19. For though I am free, said Paul, from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law, as under law. Though not myself being under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.

To those who are without law, as without law. Though not being without the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak, I became weak.

[7 : 05] That I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. That was Paul's rationale.

Now. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 3.

First Century Crises Continue, Part 23. What was the established authority throughout the Old Testament, beginning with the birthing of the nation of Israel after God led them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses?

Was it the Ten Commandments? Or the covenant between God and Israel? Or the sacrificial system established at Mount Sinai? Or the requirement of circumcision?

Or the observance of the Sabbath? The answer is, all of the above and more. All told, the relationship between God and the people of Israel involved some 613 commandments.

[8 : 05] And what they all boiled down to were the ten that actually were etched in stone tablets written by the finger of God. Numerous directives given by God exclusively for the people of Israel were called laws, commandments, statutes, precepts, ordinances, judgments, testimonies, all of which and more are found in Psalm 119, referred to as the longest chapter in the Bible, with 176 verses.

The amount of confusion surrounding the whole intent and purpose of the law is astounding. There may be only one term more widely misunderstood than the word law, and that would be the word grace.

Law, particularly the law given through Moses, dominates the Old Testament from the book of Exodus to Malachi. But it doesn't end there, although that is where most Christians end it.

Very clearly, the law of Moses continues to permeate all four of the New Testament gospels and well into the book of Acts. John 1 tells us, And it is true that Jesus did bring the provision and reality of grace to humanity.

God's grace had always been around. It was shown to Adam and Eve in the fall, and it was shown to Noah who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. But it was nothing less than the substitutionary payment Christ made for human sin that caused grace to abound and overflow, if you will.

[9 : 57] That payment made by Christ satisfied the just demands of a holy God. It gave him, then, the prerogative of freely bestowing it upon humans who acknowledge their sin and the need for God's forgiving grace.

And the resurrected Christ then commissioned Saul of Tarsus to be the primary dispenser or administrator of that grace to all humanity, especially of all people, to the Gentiles.

Saul of Tarsus, unlikely as he was, became to all of humanity what Moses had been to the Jewish people. The chief administrator, the dispenser, the vehicle, the proclaimer of something so grand, so glorious that many today consider it to be too good to be true.

But it is true. It was grace that was needed and grace that was provided to rescue us from our fallenness of which all are partakers.

And more explanation about this is just ahead. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 4. First Century Crises Continue, Part 24.

[11 : 13] It is certain the subjects of law and grace, so misunderstood in the first century, causing much confusion, remain as principal areas of confusion even today.

This confusion spans 2,000 years and has been firmly entrenched in the psyches of people from Old Testament times to the present. Here is where the principal confusion about the law God gave through Moses is found.

It is in the erroneous concept that through the keeping of the law, salvation and acceptance with God is achieved. Well, isn't it? Yes and no.

Well, now, what does that mean? It means that any human being who is unfailingly and completely and consistently without any violation fulfills all that God demands will find salvation and acceptance with Him.

So that's the yes part of the answer as to whether salvation is achieved by the keeping of God's laws. Well, who among us humans has ever done that?

[12 : 21] Only one. He is humanity's half-brother after the flesh, and His name is Jesus. It is He who did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

And He did that by the perfect observance of it. That is why He alone is called the spotless Lamb of God and He who knew no sin. It is also why that made Jesus the only person in the entire human race who had the moral credentials needed to be the perfect sacrifice God could accept.

Theoretically, you too can be accepted by God by perfectly keeping the law of God unflinching and consistently, just as Jesus did. Now, are you prepared to step forward and make that claim?

Well, if you cannot, then you are doomed. Absolutely doomed. Truth be told, we are all doomed because none of us measure up.

And that's why we all need, desperately need a Savior. And that is precisely why Jesus came. He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ.

[13 : 35] Did you get that? Jesus balanced the books. It also means that while you can be accepted by God theoretically by keeping the law perfectly, and it also means that you are accepted by God in reality by trusting in Jesus Christ who paid your sin debt in His sacrificial death.

The reason we need Jesus, and Jesus exclusively, is because no one else did or could do what He did alone to pay for our sin. All laws of God are a reflection of God's holiness and righteousness.

His laws are consistent with His character and His standards. So again, theoretically, if you measure up to that standard, you have nothing to worry about. But if you don't, you're sunk.

And if you don't have a Savior to rescue you, you will stay sunk forever. But is that fair? No, it isn't fair in human terms, but it is righteous.

Not fair, and that's why without Christ, you're sunk. But glorious rescue lies just ahead next. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 5, First Century Crises Continue, Part 25.

[14 : 56] We are exploring the biblical concepts of the righteousness of God and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. God's demands for acceptance with Him require purity consistent with His own character.

And while we just don't have that, Jesus does. And what is more, He stands ready to give it to you as a free gift which He Himself already paid for on that cross.

Jesus picked up the check for you and all humanity when He said, It is finished. When anyone is willing to admit their sin and their remorse for it, they immediately become eligible to receive free, full forgiveness forever from the only one in the universe who has it to give.

And He extends it as a totally undeserved gift. Immediately, someone will object with, Well, that's too easy. Well, of course it's too easy.

That's because Jesus Christ already did the hard part, all of it. That's how and why He can offer it to you as a free gift. And that's why He is exclusively the only salvation for us all.

[16 : 09] He alone was sent by His Father to be the Savior of the world. He alone suffered and died on that cross. He alone was delivered up for our offenses. He alone was raised from the dead for our justification.

He alone is seated at the right hand of His Father, and He alone is coming again to collect on what He paid for in His first coming. All this and more rightly entitles Him to wear the name Savior and Lord.

Do you have another in mind to compete with that? Insistence that Jesus Christ alone is Savior is not a Christian idea.

We never thought that up and set it forth as Christian dogma. That came straight from the top. John the Apostle tells us in his first epistle, chapter 4, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

In this is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the payment for our sins. And then John the Apostle of Christ continues with, And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

[17 : 24] Now because Jesus did all that was required to make our sin payment on our behalf, the gift has been obtained and paid for in full. It only awaits recipients to accept it.

So please consider this, as impossible as it sounds, God gave the very most He could give in the person of His Son, and His Son gave the very most He could give by yielding up His life to die in our place, so that they could require from us the very least that we could give, which is our simple faith and trust.

We can see, can we not? why this is called good news. Actually, it's the best news ever. Largely misunderstood from the first century to the present, but it's still the good news of the grace of God that explains it further.

I can hardly wait. It is so good. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 6, First Century Crises Continue, Part 26.

We've just noted that, theoretically, keeping the law of God will result in finding favor and acceptance with God. You do not need God's forgiveness because you never thought or did anything wrong so as to need forgiveness.

[18 : 47] But, admittedly, that is just so much stuff and nonsense. Still, it is true, and that's why it is said theoretically. But in reality, and not theoretically, the only one who ever did do that was Jesus Christ.

All the rest of us, to one degree or another, stand in desperate need of God's forgiveness. And the only reason God is able to forgive us is because Jesus Christ paid the sin debt we all owe, and that satisfied the just demands of a holy God.

God's willingness to apply the payment Christ made to each believing sinner is the capstone of God's grace. His grace is free, but certainly not cheap.

It costs the substitutionary death of His own dear Son. That has already been described as the seminal event of all the universe and of all time. This unfathomable love of God for a world of lost sinners is expressed so vividly in the Romans letter in the New Testament where the God-inspired Apostle Paul penned these words, Let them sink down deep into your heart.

Verse 8 of chapter 5 reads, God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That is the most amazing and glorious concept ever to have occurred, or it is absolutely nothing and a mere fantasy.

[20 : 17] Take your pick, the greatest truth and expression of divine love and care for a wayward creation, or the greatest hoax of history ever perpetrated upon the human race.

Those believing and acting on the former enjoy the peace of mind and heart that comes from believing it and having their life revolutionized by it, while those embracing the latter, who regard it as a hoax, are hard-pressed to explain the changes in the lives of the former.

But that change, too, is explained in that if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away and all things have become new. That's just one way the Apostle Paul explained it.

And he could speak from personal experience as he stated it there in 2 Corinthians 5. And in that monumental third chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus himself likened it to being born again.

How dramatic is that? The only question is, how true is that? The answer is, we have it on the authority of the God who cannot lie.

[21 : 27] If we can't believe God, who can we believe? And apart from believing God, there simply are no answers, not as to origin, meaning, or destiny.

Only the Bible provides answers to these greatest of all questions. And only with that does the peace and comfort alone come from believing it.

Have you? Do you? Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 7, First Century Crises Continue, Part 27.

We have earlier addressed the issue of human inability to keep the laws God has given and have shown that only Christ did so. That being the case, then what about the rest of us?

If Jesus was the only one who could and did keep the law, why then was it even given? Good question, and the answers are forthcoming. The first is from Romans chapter 7 that tells us, The law is holy, and the commandments are holy, just, and good.

[22 : 42] This is descriptive also of the character of God who gave the law, whether the law of God given to the Jews through Moses, or the law of God written on the hearts of every Gentile, as in Romans 2 and verse 12.

The point is, the laws God has given are consistent with His own character and nature. We look at those laws reflecting God's nature, then we look at ourself and we quickly realize, we've got a problem.

The laws God has given, while reflecting His character or standard of holiness and our inability to reflect and produce the same, are vastly different. We all fall far short of those God-possessed standards.

And this all ties in with the affirmation of the Romans 3 passage that reminds us, all have sinned and fall short of God's standards, which all ties in with the very reason Jesus came.

Are you connecting these dots? Here's another dot to connect also from the inspired pen of the Apostle Paul as he related in Galatians chapter 3, stating, For if there had been given a law which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

[24 : 01] But the Scripture has confined all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Did you get that? Given to those who believe.

Given! Yes! It's a gift! Freely given by God to all who are willing to receive it. That's why it's called the gospel or the good news.

Have you ever heard such good news to top this good news? No, you have not. Because it does not exist.

This is the good news. And when this good news of the grace of God has been extended to undeserving sinners, which is the only kind we are, undeserving, that's what makes it so amazing.

And it's also what made it so hard for the first century Jew and Gentile to believe. Just too good to be true. And do you know nothing has changed from that first century to the 21st century?

[25 : 05] Many still regard it too good to be true. But bless God, it is true. And the very integrity of God and His Son Jesus Christ is riding on it. That old 18th century slave trader so deeply appreciated this truth of God's grace being extended even to vile sinners like himself, he had to write a song about it.

And that song still tops the music charts around the world in multiple languages and it's called Amazing Grace. Are you a recipient of this amazing grace?

You can be because it is extended to us all and only awaits our receiving it. Christianity Clarified Volume 59 Track 8 First Century Crises Continue Part 28 These present segments of Christianity Clarified as well as several preceding are labeled First Century Crises and indeed they were.

But we also need to realize that crises continue. Early on they were largely due to the Apostle Paul having received from the Ascended Christ an update, a serious update, to the information Jesus left earlier with the twelve apostles when he ascended before them in Acts chapter 1.

Christ's update to the newly chosen Apostle Paul contained an element not included in the commission Jesus gave to the twelve when he called them. They were to convey to the Jews exclusively the gospel of the kingdom.

[26 : 40] And what was the element that Christ updated to Paul and what did it include? It too was good news or a gospel but it was not about the kingdom and it was not to be preached to the Jews alone.

It was the gospel of the grace of God and of all things it was to include Gentiles. That's right Gentiles. And that was about as unthinkable as anything could be.

Why in the world would God want anything to do with the Gentiles? For the same reason he wanted something to do with the Jews. It's called the love of God and it is extended to Jews and Gentiles alike for there is no difference for all have sinned and come short of God's righteous demands.

Recall Romans 5 telling us God demonstrated his great love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. If you do not see the uniqueness of that the rarity of that the exceptional aspects of that then you just don't understand what actually took place.

It was God who was in Christ reconciling the world including you dear friend to himself not imputing their trespasses to them and why not?

[28 : 03] because he imputed your trespasses my trespasses everyone's trespasses to Jesus instead. Our sins were born by Christ so we need not bear them or pay the penalty for them.

By him they were born because no one else was qualified to bear them. It was he who knew no sin that was willing to take our sin upon himself so that we might be made the righteousness of God through Christ.

And only he could do that because of who he was. As the eternal sinless son of God Jesus absorbed our penalty which is death separation from God and Jesus being deity and a member of the eternal Godhead suffered our death of separation from God in those three awful hours between noon and three p.m.

on Calvary. And God placed his stamp of approval upon the payment made by his son through raising him from the dead on the third day. The penalty separation deity separated from deity was accomplished.

This was all utterly unheard of completely unimaginable in that confused first century and God raised up Saul of Tarsus to preach it and how it is received today is no different from the first century and you will see why next.

[29 : 31] Christianity Clarified Volume 59 Track 9 First Century Crises Continue Part 29 The previous session revealed the gospel of the grace of God that Paul the apostle was commissioned to proclaim came across in that first century as might well be supposed.

Impossible. Unthinkable. Too good to be true. And so on. And here we are 2,000 years later with that same good news often being received or rejected just as it was 2,000 years ago.

Think about it. What is really involved in this good news called the grace of God? Well for starters full free forgiveness for all our sin past present and future.

Eternal life in a heavenly state as good as God can make it. blissful existence with the absence of sin, pain, war, conflict, hunger, disappointment and more.

And those are just starters. Most of all we will enjoy the eternal presence and fellowship with the very one who did for us that which gave us the right to be there.

[30 : 42] Can you not see how so many upon hearing assurance of any one of these blissful realities would stand in line to believe and be saved? In that first century we are describing many did but most did not.

And that first century crisis is now a real part of our 21st century crisis. Why was this in the first century and in our present 21st century the way it is?

The answer is those spaced 2,000 years apart the people of then and the people of now are the same. Doesn't matter what century you put them in.

Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians chapter 1 when he preached that incomparable good news the Greek intellectuals in his audience regarded the gospel as foolishness.

Actually moronic is the word used in the original Greek text and I can hear them now. Whoever believes this stuff Paul is preaching about some man who was crucified and supposedly rose from the dead three days later and he that one is supposed to be the savior of the world?

[31 : 57] You'd have to be a moron to believe that. And such was the typical response to the intellectual Greeks in Athens the then center of learning.

And when it was preached to the Jews the response was don't try to tell us our beloved Messiah the one to be sent by God to restore Israel was Jesus of Nazareth whom the Romans put on a cross?

How revolting. Downright embarrassing to all of Israel to connect that man with the nation of Israel as our Messiah. Our Messiah on a Roman cross?

Why the very idea is preposterous. those were typical first century responses Paul got when he preached the sacrificial death of Jesus God's son for the sins of the entire world.

And we ask you today has anything changed? Not really because man hasn't changed either. And the two most basic formidable reasons why the gospel 2,000 years ago and today as well really falls on hard times wherever it is preached are made clear upcoming.

[33 : 08] Hope you will be able to listen and see how these obstacles apply to us all even today. Christianity Clarified volume 59 track 10 first century crises continue part 30.

There is no question about the extent the fall had on the entire personhood of our first parents. The greatest physical evidence is clearly seen in the aging process disease factors and eventually their deaths.

And there is no point in arguing against those realities. They are too obvious to deny. But what is often overlooked and not as obvious are the mental or intellectual issues.

When our first parents underwent the moral fall that would eventually end their lives they as well as underwent an intellectual alteration.

Their very logic and thinking skills were impaired right along with every other facet of their being. And yes this impairment was also passed along to every generation following.

[34 : 16] What else do you think is responsible for humans normally thought to be well normal yet coming up with some of the most bizarre and harebrained ideas one could possibly imagine.

Let's face it folks maybe we aren't all brain damaged but there is no denying some sort of intellectual impairment is under foot in us all. And such is precisely what the Bible attests to.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 Paul the apostle refers to the gospel of which he is not ashamed as the wisdom of God while at the same time he tells us the way it comes across to man is its foolishness.

Wisdom and foolishness are at opposite poles. One is assigned to God and the other to man. Wisdom and foolishness do you have any problem in assigning which to which?

Likewise in the very next chapter Paul tells us the natural person does not nor cannot receive or understand the things of the Spirit of God because to him they are foolishness and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised or comprehended.

[35 : 30] The things of the Spirit of God include the divine truths and realities the Holy Spirit inspired men to write in putting together the sacred scriptures.

The natural or spiritually unchanged man who remains as he was born just doesn't get it. He does not absorb or take to the Word of God because being a natural man he simply lacks the spiritual equipment to do so.

And while the natural man even with his Ph.D. degrees just doesn't get it the laboring peon relatively uneducated who has been spiritually regenerated into a supernatural man can and does get it.

And that's because the very truth of Scripture enlightens the mind of the regenerated person. The entrance of thy word gives light the psalmist reminds us.

This is an all important reason why the Bible is of little interest and nearly no understanding or appreciation to the natural or unconverted person. It's merely a decorating item on the coffee table.

[36 : 42] It's a powerful reason why people just don't get it. They lack the wherewithal to get it. But thank God that can be changed and we are so grateful.

Christianity Clarified Volume 59, Track 11, First Century Crises Continue, Part 31. It's got to be one of the very most sobering of all concepts in the Bible.

And we do not know precisely how this works, or perhaps better, how He works it. We only know He does. Of whom do we speak? We speak of the adversary, Satan himself.

And what we are talking about is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and it is something to be reckoned with for sure. Listen to these sober words. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Paul says this gospel, or good news, can be veiled, that is, have a covering over it, obscuring its message, so that it is not clearly seen or understood.

[38 : 00] And the result is obvious. One cannot commit to something that is not understood. If you don't get the message, you cannot believe the message. And this was a big problem Paul had to contend with 2,000 years ago, and we still contend with it today.

Why hasn't the time past enabled man to get it? It's because, spiritually speaking, people today are made of the same stuff as people 2,000 years ago.

We're all cut from the same bolt of cloth. And you add to that the fallen intellect as well. And our own fallen intellect that we were born with, plus the potential for satanic blindness, means that lost humans on their way to perishing already have two strikes against them.

Was this a problem when Paul preached the gospel of the grace of God 2,000 years ago? Oh, it certainly was. And is it still a problem today for the same reason?

It most certainly is. And the irony of it all is the fact that although the circumstances and divine solution that brought about the gospel are very complex, yet the message itself is not at all so, but simple.

[39 : 18] It is so simple, in fact, that many have been heard to say they don't know why they didn't get it sooner. How could they have missed it? But they did. Many testify to having multiple exposures to the gospel before they actually got it.

The text tells us Satan blinds the minds. The minds. Not the eyes, but the minds. Because the gospel must be appropriated through the human mind. Christianity is a thinking faith that is dependent upon evidence to evaluate, historically and philosophically.

And it needs to be processed by the hearer. For many, before the breakthrough that followed and allowed them to understand the message, it went right over their head.

Remember the proverbial old adage about water off a duck's back? Well, that is often the response to the gospel upon the initial hearing of it.

The truth generates, germinates, and grows in one's mind. And then, voila, the light comes on and we find ourselves amazed we didn't see it sooner.

[40 : 33] Do you see it now? Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 12, First Century Crises Continue, Part 32.

As regards the hearing and receiving of the gospel today, how shall we describe the varied attitudes that people have? Well, let us at least try.

First, there are those we would call sincere seekers. They hope there are answers to this thing called life. They don't know that there are, but they want there to be answers.

They want life and death to make sense, but so far it doesn't. Yet, they are open and willing to listen. Secondly, there are those convinced there are no answers.

For them, life has no meaning or purpose, and the idea of an afterlife is nonsense. When you die, that's it. No heaven, no hell, no consciousness, no nothing. And these, of course, are people for whom, sadly, suicide is often a viable option.

[41 : 40] Thirdly, there are those whose hope is in institutional religion. It may be that of Judaism, or the Roman Catholic Church, or the Protestant Church. But everyone desperately needs to know the salvation of which we are all in need is not found in any institution, but in a person.

And predictably enough, this person is referred to as Savior. And not merely Savior, but the Savior. Human salvation is not outsourced.

God has given each of us a will, a volition, the use of which makes us all responsible. We do not have a will so we can hand over the responsibility for our salvation to any institution, priest, preacher, or rabbi.

We, as a sinner, have a will so that we may use it to place our faith and trust personally in the very one who died for us to make himself available as our Savior.

And our doing so means Christ then becomes our personal Savior. And while he died for the sins of the world, he died for each of us as if we were the only one to benefit.

[42 : 57] And while no church is able to affect the salvation of anyone, their responsibility is to proclaim and point to the only one who is equipped to regenerate our human spirit, Christ alone.

No doubt, unintentionally, many churches have so encumbered the gospel message of God's grace with tradition, paraphernalia, and religious hoops through which people are required to jump, that the saving grace of God is obscured if not hidden altogether.

And such may be more accurately called churchianity, but it cannot be called Christianity. And no religious organization is exempt from this sad distortion, but each is in danger of falling into this.

It is nothing short of close adherence to the truths set forth in the Bible that can provide the needed protection from that temptation.

And so for the sincere seeker, God will not allow the sincere seeker who is really looking after truth to go without the needed truth.

[44 : 06] The insincere need not apply. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 13. The First Century Recapped, Part 1.

What has generally been called the first century began with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. It was this seminal event that many believe justified splitting the calendar between B.C., meaning before Christ, and A.D., also meaning Anno Domini, from the Latin meaning the year of our Lord, also in reference to his birth.

The record of his life from the age of two, when he was taken by his parents to Egypt in order to escape Herod's execution order of the innocents, is briefly described in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 2.

The biblical record of the years of Christ's childhood from the age of two till the age of twelve is silent. From that time until he arrives on the scene and is baptized by John, we have no record.

Scripture is silent about the life of Jesus from the age of twelve until he is thirty, when his public ministry would begin. It would soon become the most significant, action-packed period to be imagined.

[45 : 26] His miracles were numerous and uncontested as to their reality. His teaching was both simple and profound, as he delivered spellbinding truths to eager ears.

But because Jesus, who, like John the Baptist before him, did not meet with the approval of the religious establishment in Israel, he almost immediately met with criticism.

Before John and Jesus arrived on the scene, the masses of the people were completely controlled politically by the Romans, who were occupying Israel as one of their many conquered countries.

Religiously, they were controlled by the chief priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees, all of whom represented the supreme authority of Judaism and its practices.

Jesus of Nazareth brought a spiritual and moral refreshment to the people in addition to his miracles that quickly intrigued and won the people over.

[46 : 26] The singular issue that arose repeatedly was whether this Jesus was indeed the heaven-sent Messiah that God had promised through the writings of the prophets.

His twelve apostles firmly believed that. They too were given miraculous powers to aid in proclaiming the message that, with Jesus of Nazareth on the scene, the long-awaited kingdom of heaven was very near, and Jesus would be the king.

The ruling class of Jews saw all this as threatening to their authority and position, leaving but one remedy. Jesus had to be eliminated.

His arrest was achieved with the aid of an insider of his apostles, Judas Iscariot. Mock trials were held before both the Jewish and the Roman authority, Pontius Pilate, and that ended in his execution carried out on Mount Calvary.

Jesus of Nazareth was dead, out of the way, or so it seemed. But after three days, Jesus would be anything but out of the way. The reality of his bodily resurrection became undeniable and provided the basis for a new element to be added to his life.

[47 : 43] His death and resurrection thus became the essential, central theme of their message. The world would never be the same, and it still isn't.

Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 14, A First Century Recap, Part 2. Following his resurrection and multiple appearances to different audiences over a period of nearly six weeks, the apostles are gathered with Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

Their curiosity prompts them to ask him a key question. Is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Significantly, he did not tell them they were mistaken or had misunderstood what he taught about the kingdom.

He merely told them that the arrival of the kingdom was at his father's discretion. What they were to do in the meanwhile was to stay in Jerusalem, and at the right time they would be infused with a new heaven-sent kind of power.

It would enable them to proclaim his death and resurrection everywhere they went, beginning there in Jerusalem. Then, right before their very eyes, Jesus simply began an upward ascent until he soon disappeared out of sight into the heavens.

[49 : 01] Stunned in perplexity, there immediately appeared two angels telling them that their Lord they'd watched disappear out of sight would one day come again just as they had seen him go.

Returning to Jerusalem, the annual feast of Pentecost would occur in ten days. As Jews, they were there at the temple for all the festivities of that holy day.

And there had never before been the kind of feast of Pentecost this would be. The Spirit of God descended unexpectedly with a demonstration of power and enablement unimagined.

The language barrier, keeping these Jews in attendance from communicating with each other, disappeared. Though they were all Jews, they as pilgrims attending the annual feast had come from different areas all over the Mediterranean basin.

The religion they had was in common. They were all Jews. But their languages were so varied, having been reared among Gentiles who spoke other languages. And when they asked what all this phenomenon meant, Peter rose to the occasion, telling them what they were seeing and hearing the prophet Joel had prophesied many years earlier.

[50 : 14] And then he went on to charge them with guilt and the death of their Messiah. But God raised him from the dead. And what is more, those who would believe in Jesus as Messiah and submit to the baptism of John would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, everything hinged on their willingness to repent or change their minds about Jesus, whom they earlier denied.

The text in Acts 2 tells us 3,000 responded to Peter's message. And while that was surely an encouraging number, the record will go on to reveal that the nation as such, particularly the leadership, did not concur with the repentance of the 3,000 and the masses.

They, however, remained in the mode of unbelief. More such differences will ensue as the book of Acts continues to unfold in this most tumultuous first century.

And the plot, if you can imagine, will thicken even more upcoming. It is not an overstatement to say that this first century was among the most critical, confusing, and transitional ever to have existed in the history of humanity.

You will see. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 15, A First Century Recap, Part 3. Following his message and the response to it by 3,000 people on Pentecost, Peter has a second opportunity to address his fellow Jews in Acts chapter 3.

[51 : 53] He and John are used of God in the healing of a beggar who had been lame from the time of his birth. It caused a huge commotion as the people apparently knew the man and his condition and had known him for years.

As the crowd of onlookers grew, Peter, in essence, delivered a similar message to that on Pentecost. To this audience also, as they stood and listened there on the Temple Mount, Peter told them of Christ and his resurrection.

He assured them that God had done his part in that he had provided Jesus of Nazareth in his substitutionary death on that cross. Now, said Peter, that God has done his part in that gracious provision, what remained is for the nation of Israel to do their part by believing on and accepting that provision God and his Son had made for them.

Doing so would complete the requirements needed for Jesus to return and commence the establishment of that long-awaited kingdom predicted by the prophets.

A positive response was enjoyed by some, but it was far too little. As the next chapter 4 begins, the opposition and threats from the establishment begin to intensify.

[53 : 21] The conclusion of the religious establishment to the preaching of the apostles was telling and damning in itself. They admitted to each other in private that the miracle of that lame man was real, and they could not deny it.

Everybody knew it was real. Unable to contend against that, they concluded if they did not stop the preaching, more and more people would believe the message of the apostles about Jesus and the resurrection from the dead, and the whole affair would get out of hand.

Having then delivered a serious threat and warning to cease their preaching, they dismissed them. But in chapter 5 following, the authorities are intending to kill the apostles because they had not heeded their warning, but boldly continued preaching about Jesus and his resurrection.

It was only the intervention of the learned teacher Gamaliel who dissuaded them from carrying out their intent. But this time, instead of a warning, they ordered the apostles to be flogged and then released.

Still, undaunted by the beatings, the apostles maintained they could not be silent about what they knew to be true regarding Jesus. No doubt, they felt silence would be treasonous.

[54 : 41] And as their preaching continued, the opposition and persecution would continue as well. Tragic as it was, it consisted of Jews persecuting their fellow Jews, and all over the identity and claim of another Jew, none the less than Jesus of Nazareth, their now risen and ascended Lord.

What might be called the worst persecution yet will follow in the strategic upcoming chapter 7, and it's next. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 16.

First Century Recap, Part 4. What is arguably the greatest injustice perpetrated since the crucifixion of Jesus will take place in the 6th and 7th chapters of the Book of Acts.

Stephen, described as an extraordinary disciple of Christ, was having a great public impact through the miracles God was doing through him. Gifted as well with his speaking and persuasive arguments, the opponents of Jesus simply could not answer Stephen's arguments, his wisdom, and his spirit.

Desperate to silence him, they bribed some local ne'er-do-wells, the kind of men who would do anything for money, and arranged to have them testify that they themselves had heard Stephen blaspheme God.

[56 : 06] The penalty under the law, of course, for that was death. The false witnesses gave their testimony, and Stephen was then asked to defend himself before the council. He accurately recounted the rebellious history of the nation of Israel from the time God brought them out of Egypt 1,500 years earlier.

And then Stephen accused the council members with the same corrupt attitude their ancestors had displayed toward God centuries earlier. His indictment of them blamed them for being the betrayers and murderers of Christ their Messiah.

Stung by the charges leveled at them, the council members rushed Stephen en masse, and physically jostled and pushed him outside the city to where the stoning pit was located.

Throwing him in the pit, these, supposedly the leading men of Israel in wisdom and justice, would rain down large stones on the body of Stephen until he was dead.

It was a physically exerting task for these council members to carry out. In fact, to maneuver and throw the stones required them to remove their heavy, bulky, floor-length outer garment.

[57 : 21] A noted opponent of Jesus, named Saul of Tarsus, was present and volunteered to care for their garments until the stoning job was complete. And it will be later, with great pain in the days to come after this, that Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul the Apostle, that in his memory he will recall his being there and giving his voice to Stephen's death.

Most significant to this entire event of the stoning, Stephen, whom the convicting authorities knew to be innocent, is the fact that they themselves would physically carry it out.

Now imagine, if you will, the most powerful, revered, and supposedly just and wise, the legal and moral, so to speak, cream of the crop of Israel, guilty of such a heinous crime.

This council of men, called the Sanhedrin, consisted of 70 of Israel's best and brightest and most highly respected. They were presided over by the high priest of Israel himself.

No doubt angry and embarrassed, they could not answer Stephen's charges. They stooped to the evil of personally destroying him. It is all painfully reminiscent of their attitude toward Jesus Christ himself when they handed him over, is it not?

[58 : 47] Many see this event as Israel's final answer to Jesus as the Messiah and the issues that surrounded it. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 17, A First Century Recap, Part 5 Following the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7, Chapter 8 tells us Saul of Tarsus, who not only witnessed the stoning but gave his voice to it, was obviously energized by it to the extent of expanding the persecution of followers like Stephen.

He volunteered to lead a posse of temple police to Damascus in Syria because the word was out that followers of Jesus had fled Jerusalem because of Stephen's stoning and they were taking refuge in Damascus, a large city in Syria, about 125 miles to the north.

Just before arriving in Damascus, it happened. That dazzling light from heaven was so bright it physically blinded Saul. It was accompanied by a voice, a voice that spoke directly to him, Stunned by it all, the voice called him by name, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Having no idea the voice belonged to Jesus, Saul managed to ask, Who are you? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now rise, go into Damascus, and it shall be told you what you must do.

Blinded and obviously in shock, Saul was led by the hand into the city. The men with him had heard a voice from above, but saw nothing and could not understand what the voice said.

[60 : 30] But Saul did. Thus the conversion of Saul of Tarsus had begun. It has been described as the most important event to have occurred since the resurrection of Jesus, because here was the man who would noise that resurrection throughout the world.

And it would not be an exaggeration to call Saul of Tarsus the second most important man ever to live, because Saul of Tarsus will become Paul the Apostle, who will proclaim and explain the first most important man ever to live, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Man, Son of God, and Messiah of Israel.

You may think of Paul the Apostle as the world's first and greatest publicity agent that the world would ever know. He will spend and be spent solely for the glorious purpose of publicizing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ Jesus the Lord.

No one will so powerfully and persistently extol the person and work of Christ as will this former blasphemer and persecutor of Christ.

It is he that will write to his Galatians in chapter 6, whom he had won to Christ, saying, God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[61 : 49] And then to his Corinthian audience in chapter 2, saying, I determined to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Well, Paul, what else really mattered? Absolutely nothing. To be in Christ makes everything else minor by comparison, both in this present world and in the world of eternity to come.

All else is failing and fleeting. Jesus Christ alone fills and satisfies the human heart. Has He satisfied yours?

Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 18. A First Century Recap, Part 6. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus in Acts chapter 9, monumental beyond description in its impact and consequences for the entire world, is now followed in chapter 10 with another crisis event that also makes that first century so critical.

It is Peter the Apostle and his opening the door of faith to, of all people, a Gentile. A Gentile? Yes, a Gentile.

[63 : 07] His name was Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army that was occupying Israel at the time. Even though a Gentile, he is called a God-fearer in Acts 10.

And that means he had discarded the worship of multiple gods the pagan Romans worshipped. Instead, Cornelius had become convinced there was but one true God, and he was the God worshipped by the Jews.

He was so convinced he even put his money where his mouth was. Cornelius had been a generous contributor in the giving of alms to the Jewish people and engaged in frequent prayer to the God of Israel.

As he was praying one day, an angel appeared to him and told him God had taken note of his prayers, and an answer to them will be provided you by a man named Peter.

You are to send men to the town of Joppa. Find Peter and fetch him back here to Caesarea. And when he arrives, he will tell you what you need to know.

[64 : 12] Meanwhile, in Joppa, Peter is struggling with the meaning of a vision he had been given three times over. It depicted all kinds of animals, clean and unclean, gathered together in a huge sheet-like container.

He was told all of them were edible, which to a Jew was unthinkable. Then being told all were cleansed by God.

It dawned on him the animals, clean and unclean, represented much more than animals. It represented Jews and Gentiles.

Clean Jews and unclean Gentiles? But now God declares them both clean and acceptable to him? Well, they may have been to God, but they surely were not yet, at least not yet, to Peter.

And just then, the delegation sent to Peter by Cornelius is knocking at his door. And Peter is assured, this thing is of God, and he is to accompany these men to Caesarea.

[65 : 15] He takes some fellow Jews with him, and as perplexed as he can be, they set out. Arriving later at the home of Cornelius, what does Peter find but a house full of people, all Gentiles, awaiting his arrival?

Peter is dumbfounded. And very uncomfortable that he, a Jew, is in a situation like this with unclean Gentiles. With tense amenities out of the way, Peter tells them all about Jesus of Nazareth.

They all believe Peter's message and embrace Jesus as their Savior and Messiah. The Spirit of God descended upon these Gentiles, just as he had upon the Jews at Pentecost.

Peter is dumbfounded, but of necessity accepts an entirely new thing that God is doing. Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly so. And Peter will have to explain it all to his fellow Jewish brethren.

And it is revolutionary. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 19. A First Century Recap, Part 7. Acts, Chapter 10 records an event that no Jew ever thought could be possible.

[66 : 25] Gentiles? Being accepted by God? Impossible. But we are reminded with God, all things are possible. And here now is this Gentile, Cornelius by name, and of all things, an army officer belonging to Rome that had invaded and subjugated the Jewish people to the idolatrous Romans.

But Cornelius had already rejected the idols of Rome, having become persuaded the God of Israel was the one true God. This made Cornelius what Jews called a God-fearer.

There was no question God had visited Cornelius and the other Gentiles gathered with him, awaiting Peter's arrival. And when Peter told them about Jesus and his Messiahship, his subsequent death and resurrection, everyone in Cornelius' house who heard the message from Peter came to faith.

And God responded by sending the Holy Spirit upon them, breaking down any language barriers that might have separated them. Peter was perplexed, but could not deny what had happened and that God was behind it.

He no doubt surmised the only thing then to do was baptize these Gentiles, just as the 3,000 Jews on the day of Pentecost had been baptized when they believed in Jesus.

[67 : 50] Afterwards, Cornelius and those Gentiles with him besought Peter to remain with them a few days longer. And one can only imagine the many questions these Gentiles would ask of Peter about all that he knew about Jesus.

In Acts 11, Peter arrives in Jerusalem and is called on the carpet by his fellow Jews who had heard that he had gone to the house of a Gentile and even sat at table and ate with them.

Clearly something no Jew had any business doing. When Peter recounted all that happened, he asked his critics, what else could he have done? What was he supposed to do?

Tell God he couldn't have anything to do with Gentiles? Then they, having heard the whole matter, could only conclude that God was also granting repentance to Gentiles and was accepting them as he had been the Jews.

And as difficult as it must have been for them to conclude such a concept, they backed off of their criticizing Peter and began to understand that God was in this.

[68 : 54] Meanwhile, Jews who had left Jerusalem because the persecution became more intense with the stoning of Stephen had fled to safer, distant areas, continuing to preach about Jesus, but only to their fellow Jews.

Yet, it wasn't long until the message was also going to non-Jews who were responding in great numbers. When word of these Gentiles coming to faith reached Antioch, large numbers believed.

And word of that got to Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch to check it out. And sure enough, Gentiles were responding in large numbers. Barnabas recalled Paul saying that God had called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

And he set off to find Saul at his hometown in Tarsus. Gentiles! Wow! Saul has got to get in on this! Oh, he did.

And how he did. More ahead. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 20. A First Century Recap, Part 8.

[70 : 03] Barnabas was able to locate Saul in his hometown of Tarsus. And he related to him what God was doing in the city of Antioch in Syria. And then the two of them made haste to get there.

Upon their arrival, they began teaching large numbers of believers for an entire year. And it was then the Spirit of God moved upon the believers at Antioch and conveyed to them the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas to take the message of the ascended Jesus abroad.

This would be the first of three mission trips the apostle Paul would take. It would be launched there from Antioch and would be 17 years after the crucifixion of Jesus and about 14 years after Saul's Damascus Road experience with the risen Christ.

The Jewish believers, many of whom had believed Jesus to be the Messiah even before he was crucified, are surely puzzled as to just what God was doing with this great influx of Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus.

What is this? They obviously were gladdened for the Gentiles forsaking their false idols and embracing the Jewish Jesus, as had Jews who also believed.

[71 : 19] But what did this all mean? Was God somehow enlarging Judaism by adding Gentiles to it? But how could that possibly be?

Those who were not descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are simply not Jews at all. Still, there was a way that Gentiles could become bona fide like Jews, even though they were not born such.

They could become proselytes, that is, they could adopt the law of Moses and place themselves under its requirements, just as those who were born Jews and had always done.

But where were they to begin with that? Well, there is only one place a Gentile who was to be added to the commonwealth of Israel could begin. He would have to begin where those males born of Jewish parents began.

Circumcision! One certainly cannot become Jewish without that. But were these Gentiles actually becoming Jewish? If so, wouldn't they also have to observe the Sabbath, the feast days, the kosher diet, and all things Jewish?

[72 : 27] And if these Gentiles were not actually becoming Jews, then what were they? It was a very confusing, controversial time, to be sure. It was one of those many critical items of confusion that was besetting that volatile first century.

A major showdown, particularly involving this issue of Gentile circumcision, was brewing. There would have to be some kind of final answer to this issue.

And whatever it is, by way of final resolution, would automatically be a part of the message about Jesus the Messiah going forth. So what all will that include?

Will the circumcision of all non-Jews who believe be a part of that message? Or not? And if not, just what will that message consist of?

It has to be resolved. And soon. And it will be as we pursue it upcoming. Christianity Clarified, Volume 59, Track 21.

[73 : 36] Preview of Upcoming, Volume 60. Previous sessions on this 59th volume of Christianity Clarified revealed how very critical the first century was.

Repeatedly, we saw confusion surface regarding Jews and Gentiles, Law and Grace, Paul and Moses, Paul and Jewish vows, Exclusivity of Christ, Human Minds Satanically Blinded, The Timing of the Kingdom, Peter and the Cornelius Incident, The Increase of Gentiles Coming to Faith, And the Circumcision Issue Regarding Gentiles.

All these and more revealed time and again that things were in a state of confusion and upheaval throughout the 30 plus years covered by the book of Acts.

Needless to say, it would require great care to even attempt the establishment of doctrinal conclusions based on the movement or progression of doctrine in transition in the Acts of the Apostles.

Despite the danger of drawing wrong conclusions based on transitional events, several have done that, including both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

[74 : 50] The error and more confusion that will arrive from that will become even clearer in the following volumes of Christianity Clarified. An upcoming, in Volume 60, the historic destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Romans will be addressed, the fallout of which will affect worldwide Jewry even to this present day.

The development of Christianity that will flow from Judaism will be key to understanding the formation and the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church as well as that of the Protestant Church that will be derived from it.

All in all, enlightenment and the appreciation that will come from it will be a mainstay of upcoming Volume 60. So this is Pastor Marv and the good folks here at Grace Bible Church saying, thank you so very much for being with us for these studies and may the Lord richly bless you.