

The Simple Gospel

Scripture: John 8:21–30

Code: 1246

INTRODUCTION

It's wonderful when a person comes to Christ...they no longer are under the tyranny of sin and guilt or of lust and desire, and they no longer are under the bondage of a purposeless and meaningless kind of existence. Christ not only gives meaning to life, but He restores harmony to our spiritual lives by completely forgiving our sin.

Now, what happens when somebody does not want to establish a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ? What happens when a person maintains the masquerade of Christmas, giving homage to an event, but not tolerating the individual in which that event finds its meaning? If receiving Jesus Christ results in an abundant and eternal life, then not receiving Jesus Christ results in receiving the curse of God.

As we find in this passage of John 8 some very alarming statements by Jesus, I must admit they make the passage a difficult thing for me to discuss, let alone understand. I sometimes want to cry out with Richard Baxter, "Oh, for an empty hell and a full heaven!" It is not my desire, nor is it Jesus' desire for anyone to enter hell, for God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9b). It is not condemnation, but rather warning that Jesus speaks in these verses.

A. The Choice of Rejection

It ought to be brought to our attention that people who give lip service to Christianity while rejecting Christ are engaged in the most foolish kind of fun. It would be comparable to people having a party on the Lusitania, as they went on ignoring the reality of the German threat. If people really knew that their eternal destiny was determined by the Christ of Christmas, whom they in actuality rejected, I doubt whether there would be much for them to celebrate.

All throughout the Bible it is made clear that there is no neutrality on this issue:

1. Matthew 12:30 -- Jesus put it simply and succinctly when He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me...."

2. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 -- All the way back into the first set of writings that the Bible gives us, the Pentateuch, Moses establishes this pattern that continues all the way to the book of Revelation: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose...." Here are the same two things that we see right through Scripture: life or death, blessing or cursing.

3. Joshua 24:15 -- "...choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Two options are given: serving the true God, or serving false gods.

4. John 3:18 -- "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already...." You only have two choices: you're either condemned to hell or not condemned. And the crux of the issue is whether you believe. Then the reason for condemnation is given at the end of the verse: "...because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

5. Revelation 22:17 -- This book closes with an invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." There again is the choice of choosing one of two ways.

The other day, one of my children asked me, "Daddy, is it true that there are only two places you can go when you die, heaven or hell?" And I said, "That's true, only two...heaven or hell." There is no neutral ground, no purgatory, no waiting place in this day and age. Hell may have different designations as to its final form and identity, but there are only two places-- heaven, where God is, or hell, where God is not. You may have heard the old line, "He had nobody to blame but himself." That is actually biblical. There may be a big theological argument about who is responsible when people get saved--whether it's God, or whether men have anything to do with it--but there's no question about who is responsible in the Bible when people go to hell, because it says that men choose.

6. John 5:39-40 -- Jesus substantiated the reality of man's choice of hell when he confronted some of the Jews, saying, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life." The responsibility belongs to us.

7. Romans 1:20 -- Realizing that man is responsible for his choices, Paul says that men "are without excuse."

8. John 16:8-9 -- "And when He [the Holy Spirit] is come, He will reprove the world of sin...because they believe not on Me." To not believe on Christ is the sin of all sins.

9. Revelation 2:21 -- The Lord condemns Jezebel, who was misleading the church at Thyatira, saying, "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not." In other words, God has given the call to repentance, and when people do not repent and turn to Him in faith, that is their own fault for they are responsible.

B. The Context of Rejection

Now as we come to John 8, we notice in verse 21 a powerful statement on the part of Jesus given to the Jewish leaders: "Then said Jesus again unto them, I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins [or `sin']; where I go, ye cannot come." Here Jesus is making a very strong statement about the fact that He is going to heaven and they are not.

1. The Evidence Revealed

Already by chapter 8, He can give such a warning, because they have had enough information to

have made a decision about Him. For eight chapters, John has been chronicling the self-manifestation of God in Christ by recording the many wonders He had accomplished in Galilee and in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Jesus has said many astounding things: His claims to deity are clear--nobody need mistake them. In fact, later on Jesus exhorts those Jews who were evaluating His ministry that they should believe Him for the words and the works that He had said and done (Jn. 10:37-38; 14:10-11).

Through the chapters, we see His works and hear His words again and again: In chapter 1, He is introduced by John as God Incarnate, who "was made flesh, and dwelt among us...the only begotten of the Father..." (v. 14). In John 2, He performed His first miracle at Cana as He changed water into wine. In John 4, we see Him reveal a woman's personal life, never having known her, and talk about the fact that He was living water. In John 5, we hear His dialogue with the Pharisees as He claims to be God, who has been commissioned by His Father to make all ultimate judgment. In John 6, we see Him doing many miracles all day long, including feeding thousands of people on a hillside in Galilee. In John 7, He proceeds to Jerusalem and the things that He says there continue to support that He is God. In John 8, He forgives sin and claims to be the light of the world. All of these words and works, and signs and wonders should have been sufficient to elicit genuine faith and confidence in who He was. And in the mind of Jesus, anyone who was seeing, hearing, and experiencing those things, yet not believing, alone bears the guilt of their own sin--they are without excuse.

2. The Evidence Rejected

Even though many had their physical needs met by Jesus Christ, they still rejected Him, not wanting to have to face the spiritual need for repentance and belief in Him. In Galilee, big crowds initially followed Him because He fed and healed them. But when He started laying down some principles of life and meddling in their sin, they stopped wanting to crown Him king. When He came to Jerusalem, the same thing happened: Great crowds followed Him everywhere. But as He began to turn away from the physical to the spiritual and deal with the sin in the hearts of people, the crowds began to melt away until finally, the only crowd left was a group of Pharisees trying to figure out how to kill Him. Such a tragic rejection was epitomized in John's words: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (Jn. 1:11). The Jews were responsible for their conclusions about Christ, as are you and I and every other person.

Though some did believe, John 7:40-41 tells us there were others who didn't: "Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" To some who rejected Him Jesus said, "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (Jn. 5:40). But they had nobody to blame but themselves, as do all who have full revelation, and yet turn away from the truth (Heb. 6, 10).

C. The Consequences of Rejection

Though the unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees was manifested in their desire to kill Jesus, verse 20 says that "no man laid hands on Him; for His hour was not yet come." Being held back by God from being able to take His life at this point, they are confronted by Jesus in verse 21: "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your [sin]; where I go, ye cannot come."

1. Dying in Depravity

This confrontation reveals the tragic result of refusing Jesus Christ--dying in one's sin. Jesus hinted

at this in the previous chapter when He said, "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent Me. Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me; and where I am, there ye cannot come. Then said the Jews among themselves, Where will He go, that we shall not find Him? Will He go unto the dispersed among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?" (Jn. 7:33-35). Whereas they were honestly confused about what He meant in chapter 7, in chapter 8 the Jews became cynical when Jesus repeats essentially the same warning: "Then said the Jews, Will He kill himself?..." (Jn. 8:22). But their cynicism only serves to reveal their lack of understanding. Jesus was simply saying that He was going to go to the Father in heaven and that they would be unable to, because they would be in hell, having rejected Him. If they sought Him too late, their seeking would be in vain.

2. Removal of Revelation

There is a limit to the grace God will bestow upon those who reject Him.

- a. Amos 8:11-12 -- "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it." And the same thing is true of His gospel about Christ.
- b. Proverbs 1:24-31 -- Divine wisdom is personified turning away from those who would reject it: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD. They would have none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." In other words, when the day of grace has ended, those who have rejected God's wisdom will be responsible and will pay the consequences which they themselves have earned. It is like the prisoner who was instructed by the king to make a chain. Every day he added another link, until finally, they took him and bound him with his own chain. That is how it is with sinful people who reject Christ: They are producing by their life their own ultimate disaster.

D. The Character of Rejection

Whereas Jesus' death would take Him to the Father, the death of those who rejected Him would not, because of sin. Now what sin did Jesus have in mind when He told the Pharisees that they would die in their sin?

1. The Supreme Sin

This is the sin of rejecting Christ. John 16:8-9 says that the Holy Spirit will convict of sin, because they did not believe in Christ. If you want to rationalize and say, "Well, I don't commit any sins; I'm a very good person and I try to do everything I can," it will be of no avail, because if you have never received Jesus Christ, that is the ultimate sin. This is why Jesus says that those who seek Him too late will die with sin that is unforgiven. Of course that is the supreme disaster, because such a person is destined for hell.

2. The Substituted Salvation

These Jewish leaders did seek heaven all their life long. But do you want to know something? They

sought it in the wrong place. Instead of seeking it at the feet of Jesus, they sought it in their own self-righteousness. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing a message about Christ. But instead of seeking it there, they sought it in their own books, laws, and rituals.

3. The Superficial Search

They not only sought it in the wrong place, but they sought it in the wrong way.

a. Romans 10:2 -- Paul says about the Jews, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." They were seeking God according to their own system, and it was far from being a wholehearted search.

b. Jeremiah 29:13 -- "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." The scribes and Pharisees didn't give their whole heart to seeking God, because they had devoted their whole heart to the proud propagation of their own self-righteousness.

So, many of the Jews were seeking in the wrong place, in the wrong way, and unfortunately, they would also be found seeking at the wrong time. I'm sure there have been countless people who, when it was far too late, started their search for heaven after sentence had been passed on them for their continual rejection.

I read somewhere that somebody had calculated that at least one hundred people a minute go to hell. That's a fearful thought, isn't it? Jesus tried to convey the fearfulness of hell with some of His parables. For instance, in Mt. 13:40, Jesus said, "As, therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this age. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." There are only two places to spend eternity: hell, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, or heaven, where you shine as the sun. And Jesus says that if you have ears, then you had better listen. It's a fearful warning.

Why does God warn man?

When Jesus warns the Jews in this passage, He is not brutalizing them by sovereignly ending their choice or putting an end to all possibility. He is merely warning them of the consequence of their present choice. When you hear people criticize God for speaking negatively like this, saying that God is not a loving God, don't believe it for a minute. God is so merciful and so loving that He warns us. No one ever went to hell who didn't choose to go there. But God isn't going to force Himself eternally on someone who doesn't want Him.

Now, there are four elements that I see in the rest of this text that guarantee a person he can die in his sin. Let's look at them. The first way is...

I. BE SELF-RIGHTEOUS (vv. 22-23a)

The first way to guarantee that you will die in your sin and not go to the Father's house in heaven where Jesus is, is to be convinced that you don't need to be saved...that you are spiritually all right. By far, those who deny their need of a Savior are the most difficult kind of people to reach. People who claim to be already righteous apart from Christ by saying, "I belong to this special group," or "I'm one of the 144 thousand," or "I've got my papers that say I'm a righteous person," are only deceiving themselves. Self-righteous people, who have developed a system which they believe gives them the right to enter God's presence, are the hardest people to convince that they need a Savior, because they already feel they are all right. Satan is clever. When he puts together a phony system based on human achievement and works-righteousness, he does it in such a complex and supposedly biblical way that it is tremendously deceiving. People become captivated in cults and falsely assume that they can gain righteousness by what they do. But nobody ever comes to Christ who doesn't see Him as a Savior who takes away sin, and himself as a sinner who needs his sin taken away.

A. The Assumption of the Jews (v. 22)

The Jews that Jesus confronts are clearly self-righteous, as you can tell from their answer. Jesus had just given them a loving warning, and their response is a mocking joke: "Then said the Jews, Will He kill Himself? because He saith, Where I go, ye cannot come." They implied that Jesus was going to commit suicide.

1. Identified

Now, the Jews believed that suicide was the worst sin, for which the blackest part of Hades was reserved. People who had killed themselves had no possibility of ever entering "Abraham's bosom" (Lk. 16:22). Therefore, the Jews concluded that if Jesus killed Himself, He would be going to Hades, the opposite place to where they assumed that they were going. They didn't even understand what Jesus was really saying. They were so self-righteous, having systematized their religion so carefully, that they believed they were the ones who would populate heaven. Nevertheless, Jesus mercifully warns them with an announcement of impending doom. How deaf could they be?! If you read the whole New Testament, you would be hard pressed to find a story of the conversion of a Pharisee. There are a few, but not many because they were such hard people to reach with biblical truth.

The Jews were correct in concluding that Jesus was going to die. However, they were completely wrong in thinking that His death was going to be by suicide. Rather, it was going to be a self-sacrificial, voluntary offering of Himself to be crucified. Acts 2:23 says, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." It was murder, not suicide. But He was a willing victim to accomplish redemption.

Satan's Big Lie

Self-righteousness is the big lie of Satan. The truth is you are saved by Christ; the lie is you are saved by anything other than Christ. That lie can come in all kinds of packages: You can be saved by following these rules, doing these routines, belonging to this or that system, being good enough to outweigh your shortcomings...there's a myriad of possible systems to counter the one truth, and they

are all part of Satan's big lie. If Satan can get somebody into a system that says they are righteous, it's very hard to extract them from it. One reason is that self-righteousness is very proud. I am reminded of what Job said to those who judged him: "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you" (12:2). Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes...." Luke 16:15 says, "...that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." When men believe Satan's lie and develop a system that is highly esteemed in their eyes, it is an abomination to God. Salvation can never be earned by good works and keeping religious rituals.

2. Illustrated

So, the first way to die in your sins is to be self-righteous and laugh at anybody that talks about sin or hell. The world does that all the time. It mocks Jesus, making a joke out of His warnings about hell. It gets no more serious about hell than to put devil suits on little kids at Halloween. It refuses to admit its sin and its need of Christ's forgiveness as it trusts in good works or self-made religion for salvation. A person who gets wrapped up into the kind of self-righteous systems that the world offers, whether it is a religious institution like Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses, or one's self-made system, can become very belligerent once they become committed to it. For example, I read an article that was sent to a Melbourne paper by a person after he had heard Billy Graham preach, which said:

"After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television, and seeing reports and letters concerning his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul and everyone else's needs saving, whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitious preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children goodness and not sin. If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned."

Now that's a pretty precarious position to be in. Evidently, the man has developed a system in which he believes he has attained self-righteousness before God, and therefore fearlessly mocks the truth.

B. The Answer of Jesus (v. 23a)

That article exactly reflects the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes. Desiring to give a correct analysis of the situation, Jesus responds to their mockery: "And He said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above...." Jesus understood their implication that He was going to kill Himself and go to Hades. But Jesus says, in effect, "It is you who are from Hades; I am from above. You've got it reversed." With this cutting reply, Jesus does not mean that they were literally from Hades; He means that their unbelief, hypocrisy, false religion, ignorance, and willful self-righteousness were spawned from the enemy. He makes the distinction clear that they are following Satan while He is following God. They were--like all unbelieving people are in this world--from beneath in the sense that they were part of the evil system. In John 8:44, Jesus said to them, "Ye are of your father the devil...." Such people operate their lives "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air..." (Eph. 2:2b).

Whereas the unbeliever is unknowingly guided by Satan from beneath, the believer is guided from

above because his citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and he positionally resides "in heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3; 2:6). We are connected to either heaven or hell while we are alive by virtue of who we identify with. So Jesus, warning the Pharisees, puts things in perspective, saying, "Your roots run downward to Hades, because your life-style makes it manifest. You had better recognize the source of your religious system." If you want to die in your sin, just follow the Pharisees' attitude: Believe you don't need Christ as your Savior, assuming that you are okay, have solved all your problems, and have attained righteousness. Convince yourself of that and you will die in your sin.

There's a second way to die in your sin, and that is:

II. BE EARTHBOUND (v. 23b)

"...I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world."

A. Worldliness Defined

Jesus draws another contrast. He tells the Pharisees that they are part of the world system of which He is not. The term "world" simply refers to the invisible spiritual realm of evil. We use the word ourselves to identify a particular system, such as the world of politics, the world of sports, and so on. The system that Jesus has in mind here is the system of evil that is opposed to God and Christ. If you want to guarantee that you will die in your sin, just be a part of the world system, accepting whatever it is offering. Then you can be classified as "children of this world" (Lk. 16:8) entrapped in "this present evil world" from which Jesus seeks to deliver man (Gal. 1:4). Opposed to the truth of God, the world propagates its own self-righteous systems.

B. Worldliness Described

You could characterize the system in this way: It is materialistic and humanistic, believing that man is going to solve his problems by himself and rule his own fate; it is lost in preoccupation with sex; it plagued by carnal ambition, pride, greed, jealousy, envy, self-pleasure and selfish desire, murder, and so on. Its opinions are wrong, its aims are selfish, its pleasures are sinful, its influences are demoralizing, its politics are corrupt, its honors are empty, its smiles are phony, and its love is fickle. Furthermore, it is in the process of dissolution; according to 1 John 2:17, "...the world passeth away...." It will self-destruct.

So, Jesus identifies those mocking Him as being of the world system. They were sinful, selfish, and earthbound souls, who were controlled by the dictates of the evil system run by Satan. They had separated themselves from Jesus Christ with a gulf in between that was impassible. And even though they were religious, and maybe even humanitarian at heart, they were still part of Satan's evil system opposed to God. Jesus is simply saying to them, "You're going to die in your sins for two reasons: number one, you are self-righteous, and number two, you are totally engulfed in the system--you buy whatever the world is selling."

There's a third way to die in your sins:

III. BE UNBELIEVING (v. 24)

"I said, therefore, unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."

The third way to guarantee that you will die in your sins, is to be unbelieving of the gospel. You don't have to go out and kill somebody and be bad to go to hell, because hell is not just for criminals, it is for everybody and anybody who refuses Christ. If you refuse Christ in this life, God isn't going to force you to dwell with Him forever in eternity. But the way of faith is open--you can believe. Or you can decide not to believe...the choice is yours.

A. The Content of Belief (v. 24a)

You say, "Well, what am I supposed to believe?" I remember a song that used to be popular, called "I Believe," which kept on repeating the words "I believe." I believe what? Another song is "I Believe in Music." Well, if that is all you believe in, you are in trouble. You find the same kind of vague or misdirected faith when you ask people, "Do you believe in Christ?" "Yeah, I believe in Christ, He lived and so forth."

But Jesus had something more definite in mind. Notice what He says: "...if ye believe not that I am He..." (He being implied in the sentence structure). In others words, "If you do not believe that I am the One I claim to be...." It isn't enough to believe that Jesus is the One that you think He is; you must believe that He is the One He claimed to be. He claimed to be God by such phrases as "I am the bread of life..." (Jn. 6:35), "...he that believeth on Me shall never thirst" (Jn. 6:35a), "...I am the light of the world..." (Jn. 8:12b), "I am the good shepherd..." (Jn. 10:11a), "I am the door..." (Jn. 10:9a), "I am the resurrection, and the life..." (Jn. 11:25a), "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (Jn. 14:6a). Therefore, because Jesus was identifying Himself with God, saving faith not only becomes a question of turning from sin, but trusting the Son as well. It's a question of believing Jesus is who He claimed to be. You ask, "Well then, am I going to die in my sin unless I believe that He is all that He claimed to be?" That's right. You ought to find out who He claimed to be, for Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing a message about Christ. You can never have true faith unless you hear the truth about Christ. (Some of the old translations say, "...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." But the best Greek manuscripts say, "...by the word of Christ.") True faith is the result of hearing and believing with your heart that Jesus is who He claimed to be, and that God verified that claim by raising Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9).

B. The Consequence of Unbelief (v. 24b)

Jesus promises His opponents that they will die with their sin unforgiven if they do not believe that He is who He claims to be-- God in human flesh. For not to believe and turn away shatters hope and leaves only hell's gloomy foreboding. That's how it is.

One time when I was sitting on a plane, I had a man ask me, "How do you become a Christian?" after he found out that I was a Bible teacher. So, I shared the gospel with him, telling him that he

must believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be: God in human flesh, the Savior who died for your sin and rose again. A person can go to hell and remain there eternally for just not believing those few things. Faith in Christ comes by hearing a message about Him, and if you haven't heard enough, then you ought to read some more or find somebody who can tell you. There is no sense in going to hell for something you failed to do, because not believing is the same thing as rejecting: "He that is not with Me is against Me..." (Mt. 12:30). Don't be like the Pharisees who should have known, but continued to mock.

Finally, we come to the fourth way to die in your sins:

IV. BE WILLFULLY IGNORANT (vv. 25-29)

When someone hears a speech about Christ, but doesn't let it register, that person is willfully ignorant. The Jewish leaders had enough evidence about Christ...they just refused to believe, and in their chosen ignorance, even mocked Him. They were willfully ignorant...

A. Of Christ's Identity (v. 25a)

"Then said they unto Him, Who art Thou?..."

Far from being an honest question, this could be paraphrased like, "Who do you think you are, fella? These are some pretty ridiculous things you are saying, telling us that we're going to die in our sin. Do you know who you're talking to? We're the spiritual elite. Who do you think you are? You're some nobody from Nazareth, who has come down here to tell the leaders of Jerusalem how to run things. What gives you the right to assume the role of equality with God?" Such willful ignorance is manifested in other places in Scripture.

1. John 8:19 -- "Then said they unto Him, Where is Thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know Me, nor My Father...." "You are hopelessly ignorant. You think you know God, but you really don't. And you think that I'm a fake, so you don't know Me either. You can't recognize the truth because you are so dominated by sin.

2. John 9:30 -- Do you remember when the blind man was healed in John 9 and all the Jewish leaders wondered how the blind man was able to see, admitting their disbelief in Jesus' power? "The man answered, and said unto them, Why here is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from where He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes." This blind man had more sense than these Jewish leaders. Why? Because they willed to be ignorant of the truth. Hell will be filled with people who are there simply because they willed to be ignorant, not wanting Jesus making claims on their lives. They will be those who didn't want to know the truth...who were satisfied with what they already believed.

3. John 7:17 -- To the close-minded Jews who questioned His authority, Jesus said, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself." In other words, for the willing heart the truth is available. But they weren't willing. You say, "But how can people be like that?" The answer is simply stated in...

4. John 3:19 -- Men are like that because they love their sin: "...men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Because of their sin, the Pharisees didn't want to expose themselves. They were so smug in their self-righteousness and confirmed in willful ignorance that they turned their backs on the truth. That's tragic, because that puts them right into the category of those in...

5. Hebrews 10:29 -- Those who have heard enough information to believe the truth, but have rejected it, are going to receive a punishment more severe than others: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing...." In other words, the greater punishment in hell is reserved for the people who knew the truth but trampled on it.

These Jews were also willfully ignorant...

B. Of Christ's Authority (vv. 25b-27)

"...And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you; but He that sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him. They understood not that He spoke to them of the Father."

Because these Jews refused to accept what Jesus had been saying, Jesus doesn't provide them with any further revelation. But He does say that He has words of judgment to speak concerning them, which come from the Father, who "hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (Jn. 5:22b). Willful ignorance brings judgment, as do unbelief, earthbound attitudes, and self-righteousness, and the Pharisees were characterized by all of them. In their spiritual blindness, they didn't recognize who He was or understand that He spoke to them about God the Father. They just thought He was talking about some judgment on His own part. They did not understand what He was talking about, and yet He had made it clear again and again. Judgment is a terrible result for those who continually refuse to hear the truth. That is why Jesus warned, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt. 13:9).

The Jews also gave evidence of their willful ignorance...

C. Of Christ's Immortality (v. 28)

"Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things."

"How were the Jews going to know that?" you ask. Well, what did the Father do at the death of Christ to verify the claims He had made? He raised Him from the dead. Repeatedly the Bible teaches that. In effect, Jesus says, "When My resurrection comes, then you are going to have to look honestly at My claims." And do you know what happened? Many of the Jews did. When it became known that Jesus had been resurrected, the church was born, and literally thousands of people in the city of Jerusalem did see the truth and believe, didn't they? There was a great response. Maybe out of the very crowd before Jesus there were some people who later became a part of that early church.

Finally, the statement in verse 29 shows that many of the Jews were willfully ignorant...

D. Of Christ's Unity (v. 29)

"And He that sent Me is with Me. The Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him."

The Pharisees could not comprehend Christ's unity with God. So Jesus says, "You are going to know the Father is with Me and has sent Me and that all the claims I made are true, in the day that I am lifted up to be crucified, because the result of death is going to be the resurrection." But for now, they didn't know. And many of them never knew and consequently died in their sins to be separated from God for eternity.

CONCLUSION (v. 30)

It's not really possible, but I wish we could transport ourselves back in a time capsule and meet those people so that we could understand the tragedy of rejecting Christ. You would get a little idea of the intensity and the fearfulness of such a warning as Jesus made here. Those self-righteous, earthbound, unbelieving, and willfully ignorant Jews didn't need to die in their sins...there was and is another option: "As He spoke these words, many believed on Him." Aren't you glad for that?

You can't always preach the positives...you have to preach the negatives, because the negatives are needed to bring some folks to Christ. If you have never committed yourself to Jesus Christ, you are separated from Him by a gulf that you could never ever span on your own. Not all of your good deeds, self-righteousness, or religion could do it. The only way that gulf can be spanned is for you to recognize your sin and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have a desire in your heart to do that today, just simply in your heart pray something like, "God, I want Jesus Christ as my Savior. I receive Him now. I don't want to die in my sin. I want to go where You are." And if you do that in sincerity, He will hear that prayer and your life will be "translated...into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13b). If your faith is weak, ask Him to help you to believe. If you need more information so that you can make that decision, and you truly want to know Him, ask God to teach you the truth about Christ.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What are some positive results of coming to Christ?
2. What does not receiving Jesus Christ result in?
3. Can a person remain neutral rather than choosing to follow Christ? What did Jesus imply about choosing in Matthew 12:30?
4. Why are some men condemned, according to John 3:18?

5. Who does the Bible say is responsible when a person goes to hell? Why?
6. For what two reasons did Jesus say that the Jews should believe Him (Jn. 14:10-11)?
7. Why did the crowds initially follow Christ? Why did many later on no longer want to crown Him King?
8. What is the tragic result of refusing to believe in Jesus Christ?
9. What sin did Jesus probably have in mind when He told the Pharisees in John 8:21 that they would die in it?
10. Where were the Jewish leaders seeking for heaven? Where should they have been seeking it?
11. What is one way for a person to die in their sin? Why are these people the hardest to reach with the truth of the gospel?
12. What are the phony religious systems that Satan puts together based upon?
13. What did the Jews conclude about the reason they would be unable to go where Jesus was going to go?
14. Rather than suicide, what type of death did Jesus die?
15. What is the big lie of Satan? What does it contradict?
16. What is the attitude that accompanies self-righteousness?
17. Who did Jesus imply that the Jews followed when He told them that they were "from beneath" (Jn. 8:23a)? Where are believers guided from?
18. To what does "this world" refer in the context of this passage? What are some of its characteristics? What is the world's eventual destiny according to 1 John 2:17?
19. What is it that one must believe in order not to die in one's sins?
20. Who is the greater punishment in hell reserved for (Heb. 10:29)?
21. On whose authority was Jesus judging?
22. What did the Father do at the death of Christ to verify the claims He had made?
23. What was the positive response in Jerusalem that occurred as a result of the resurrection?

Pondering the Principles

1. Do you know someone who is seeking for God in the wrong place and in the wrong way? Do you observe them being tremendously committed to a system that is only a dead end, because it will never lead them into a true knowledge of God? Read Romans 10:1-4. What attitude did Paul have and what action did he take with regard to Israel, which had "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge," according to verse 2? Of what was Israel ignorant? Using Paul's pattern, pray for that person whom you desire to see saved, asking that you might have an opportunity to show him or her that in Christ only, is true righteousness found and granted to us by faith.

2. In sharing Christ with others, do you present the negatives as well as the positives? If you stated that Christ could change a person's life and give peace and joy, what might a professing Christian do when trials came in his life, according to such verses as Matthew 13:20-21? What might a non-Christian never do unless he was informed of the consequences of rejecting Christ? Observe in the following verses how Jesus mixed the negative with the positive: Matthew 13:45- 50; John 12:44-50. As you share the gospel with others, make a commitment to tell them that the Christian life will not mean freedom from trials (2 Tim. 3:10-12), and that those who refuse to believe in Christ will die in their sin and be eternally separated from Christ (Jn. 8:24; 2 Thess. 1:7-10).

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