

Let's ask a hypothetical question. If sinful human beings were left to themselves, would anybody respond positively or favorably to the gospel message?

Well, it depends on what they think the gospel message is. If on the one hand the gospel is the message that through Christ's death and resurrection any human being who believes in Jesus will be saved from an endless hell and given the gift of eternal life in heaven, then any rational person would want to respond favorably to the gospel. After all, what thinking human being would want to go to a fearful and terrible hell? What sensible man or woman would want to lose the gift of eternal life in a delightful and beautiful heaven?

If on the other hand the gospel is the message that through Christ's death and resurrection any human being who trusts in Jesus and His saving work will be saved from his or her guilt and sinfulness and sinning, will be given new life which will initially and progressively transform him or her from the inside out, will become a disciple of Jesus Christ for a lifetime of faith and obedience, and will gradually and finally be made fit to live with and enjoy a perfectly good and loving God in a perfectly good and holy heaven for eternity, that is an entirely different idea.

Sinners who have become accustomed to going their own way don't mind it if God wants to save them in their sins, but they mind it terribly if God wants to save them from their sins! They like the idea of heaven if they can go there holding on to their sinful desires and habits, but they really don't like the idea of having to give up those desires and ways in order to enter heaven.

*In fact, giving up their own desires and habits would be like giving up their lives, giving up themselves! In part, those desires and habits define what they are! And asking them to give that up is really asking too much!*

And yet the Bible clearly teaches that God will not allow into His heavenly city any travelers who bring suitcases that contain unforgiven guilt or sinful desires or sinful habits! The sin-detector at the gate of heaven makes no mistakes and will detect anyone who is concealing such contraband; and the security guards will stop anyone who tries to get past the gate without being cleared by the detector!

We sometimes hear the statement that Christians are not perfect people, but just forgiven. But people who enter heaven are people who are perfect and holy and lovers of God and of goodness; people who can live congenially with God and enjoy Him forever! And this holiness and goodness does not wait until