

Session 4 - The Gospel Christendom Never Settled

SESSION THESIS

Christendom has never achieved an enduring consensus about what constitutes the Gospel or how its saving benefit is received; therefore, the Gospel must be stated according to Scripture and tested rather than merely named.

The Session Argument



Controlling Questions

- 1 What would an enduring settlement of the Gospel have to define?
- 2 What did the creeds settle, and which saving questions remained unresolved?
- 3 What explicit biblical benchmark can test competing uses of the word Gospel?

A Word Everyone Honors

THESIS

The label Gospel does not identify its own content, saving function, boundaries, or required response, even though Christians routinely use it as an immediate claim of biblical legitimacy.

The Label Carries Borrowed Authority

- Christians readily describe ministries, preaching, music, social action, discipleship, and entire systems as:
 - Gospel-centered
 - Gospel-driven
 - Gospel-shaped
 - Gospel ministry
 - Gospel mission
 - Gospel obedience
 - Living the Gospel
 - Proclaiming the whole Gospel
- The favorable force of the label often precedes its informational content.
 - Gospel-centered may mean centered on a saving message, a philosophy of ministry, the whole Christian worldview, or a program of discipleship and social action.
 - The authority of the biblical word must be distinguished from the authority claimed by a modern use of it.
 - A speaker does not acquire biblical authority merely by attaching Gospel to his program.

Observation and Classification Precede Evaluation

- Observation: materially different things receive the same honored label.
- Classification: identify what kind of thing each source calls Gospel.
- Evaluation: test the resulting definition and saving message by Scripture.

Scripture Names the Message Attached to Gospel

Mark 1:14-15 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

2 Timothy 2:8 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

- Mark 1:14-15 explicitly speaks of “the gospel of the kingdom of God.”
 - The phrase identifies a kingdom-oriented announcement and prevents the assumption that every occurrence must carry an unexplained identical content.

- First Corinthians 15:1-4 identifies “the gospel which I preached unto you” and then states its content.
 - The inspired pattern is not merely to invoke the label but to name the message attached to it.
- Second Timothy 2:8 speaks of the risen Jesus Christ “according to my gospel.”
 - The possessive expression raises questions of message, stewardship, audience, and dispensational setting rather than settling them automatically.

The Label Gospel Does Not Yet State the Saving Message

- Controlling question: When two churches say they preach “the Gospel,” what have we actually learned about the message each gives to a sinner?
- Session 3 showed that shared terms can perform different saving functions.
- Session 4 begins one level earlier: the shared label Gospel can designate different kinds of things.
- Before asking whether a ministry is Gospel-centered, ask what it has placed at the center.

Notes

What Would “Settled” Mean?

THESIS

Christendom could be said to have settled the Gospel only if it possessed an enduring, broadly recognized account of the message's essential content, accomplishment, reception, means, boundaries, and promised benefit.

Distinguish Three Levels of Agreement

- Lexical agreement: Christians use the same word, Gospel.
 - This is genuine but minimal agreement.
 - It establishes shared vocabulary without establishing shared meaning.
- Central-fact agreement: Christians affirm Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, lordship, or return.
 - This is more substantial than lexical agreement.
 - It may still leave the saving significance, receiving terms, and promised benefit unsettled.
- Functional saving agreement: Christians give compatible answers about what the sinner must believe and how the saving benefit is received.
 - This level is required before messages can be treated as interchangeable saving offers.
- An enduring settlement would not require identical sentences, vocabulary, or denominational structures.
 - It would have to exclude mutually incompatible saving conditions and outcomes.

A Settlement Must Answer the Saving Questions

- Kind: Is the Gospel an event, announcement, promise, person, kingdom, story, sacramental reality, or whole plan?
- Problem: Does it principally address guilt, sin, death, corruption, alienation, false rule, oppression, or cosmic decay?
- Content: What must be known or believed?
- Accomplishment: What did Christ's death and resurrection objectively accomplish?
- Benefit: Does the message promise justification, forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life, participation, healing, kingdom entrance, resurrection, new creation, or exaltation?
- Reception: What must the hearer do?
- Means: Does the benefit reach the sinner immediately through faith or through an appointed sacrament, church, ordinance, or authority?
- Possession: Is it possessed now, progressively entered, finally attained, or subject to loss?

- Boundary: Which essential Christian truths and duties remain outside the saving Gospel?

Distinguish a Shared Center from a Full Definition

- Several traditions can affirm together:
 - Jesus is Lord.
 - Christ died and rose.
 - Salvation is by grace.
 - Faith is necessary.
- Those affirmations do not yet explain:
 - What saving faith includes
 - How grace reaches the sinner
 - What baptism accomplishes
 - Whether an institution or authorized minister is necessary
 - What the believer presently possesses
 - What must continue until the final outcome
- If a confession names the central actor and events but cannot distinguish among incompatible ways of receiving their benefit, has it settled the Gospel question?

A Functional Settlement Must Evaluate the Same Hearer Consistently

- A claimed consensus should be able to evaluate one stated hearer consistently.
- If one communion says the hearer possesses eternal life while another says an essential saving means is still absent, the agreement is verbal rather than functional.
- A shared center is indispensable, but a center without defined boundaries and receiving terms is not yet a settled saving message.

Notes

The Creedal Test

THESIS

The ecumenical creeds established essential truths about God and Christ but did not produce an equally durable, Christian-wide definition of the Gospel's content, reception, saving means, exclusion, present possession, and final benefit.

The Creeds Achieved Broad Christological Settlement

- The early councils addressed indispensable questions.
 - Is the Son truly divine?
 - Is Christ truly human?
 - How should his divine and human natures be confessed?
 - Is the Holy Spirit divine?
 - Did Christ truly suffer, die, rise, ascend, and promise to return?
- Their settlements became broad enough to define the principal historic doctrinal tree.
 - Nicene traditions accepted the Trinitarian settlement represented by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan confession.
 - Non-Nicene systems rejected or materially redefined that settlement.
- The result was not absolute unanimity.
 - Dissent remained.
 - Political and ecclesiastical power affected reception and enforcement.
 - Later subscription did not prevent all doctrinal drift.
- Nevertheless, the creeds demonstrate that Christendom could identify disputes, draw boundaries, reject alternatives, and achieve substantial confessional uniformity.

The Creeds Settled Essential Truths but Not Every Saving Term

- Nicaea and Constantinople principally address Trinitarian identity.
- Chalcedon addresses how Christ's divine and human natures are confessed.
- “For us and for our salvation” connects Christ's incarnation and work to salvation.
 - It does not by itself distinguish later Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, or faith-alone saving structures.
- “One baptism for the remission of sins” is soteriologically significant and must not be minimized.
 - Sacramental traditions place it within a saving sacramental order.
 - Other traditions deny baptismal regeneration or explain the relationship differently.

- The wording did not prevent later disagreement over baptism's recipient, timing, efficacy, or relation to Gospel preaching.

The Saving Questions Reveal the Creedal Limits

- Do they identify Christ's death and resurrection? Yes.
- Do they define justification and its reception?
- Do they distinguish faith from works as receiving terms?
- Do they settle the saving function of baptism and the sacraments?
- Do they define the role of the visible church and its ministers in applying salvation?
- Do they say whether salvation is possessed immediately or finally attained?
- Do they settle whether salvation may be lost?
- These questions do not accuse the creeds of failing their historical purpose.
 - They determine whether an appeal to “the historic creeds” can settle later Gospel disputes that the texts do not expressly resolve.

The Creeds Did Not Produce One Complete Gospel Definition

1 Corinthians 1:17 - King James Version

SCRIPTURE

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

- The creeds contain central Gospel facts and significant saving affirmations.
- They did not establish an enduring Christian-wide account of:
 - The precise saving message
 - The sole or compound receiving response
 - The saving function of baptism and sacraments
 - The role of ecclesiastical authority
 - The relation of faith, works, fruit, and perseverance
 - The believer's present possession and security
- The creeds confessed essential saving facts without resolving the disputed questions necessary to produce one enduring Gospel definition across Christendom.
- Matthew 16:15-17 and John 1:1, 14 establish essential Christological identity.
- First Corinthians 15:1-4 states a message explicitly called Gospel.
- First Corinthians 1:17 distinguishes Paul's Gospel-preaching commission from baptizing.

Notes

Every Settlement Produced Another Boundary

THESIS

Councils and confessions repeatedly settled doctrine for particular branches, but the resulting boundaries multiplied incompatible accounts of grace, justification, sacraments, perseverance, authority, and the Gospel.

Every Historical Settlement Can Be Tested by One Pattern

- What saving question was disputed?
- What answer did each side give?
- What institutional result followed-condemnation, confession, schism, or rival communion?
- Did the result become an enduring Christian-wide saving definition, or the settlement of one branch against another?
- Represent each side in its strongest recognizable form.
 - Let the primary sources establish the incompatible functions.

Paul and the Judaizing Addition

- The New Testament supplies the governing category.
 - Acts 15:1 frames circumcision as a salvation requirement.
 - Galatians 1:6-9 calls the altered offer a perversion of the Gospel.
 - Galatians 2:16 distinguishes justification by faith from works of the law.
- The disputed addition was religious, scriptural in origin, and tied to covenant identity.
 - Its pedigree did not make it a valid saving requirement for Paul's Gentile hearers.
 - A message can retain Christ in its vocabulary while changing the receiving condition.

Grace, Will, and Human Ability

- The Augustine-Pelagius controversy asked what fallen humanity can initiate and what grace must accomplish.
- Condemnation of Pelagian claims did not produce one later Western account of:
 - Human inability
 - Divine initiative
 - Enabling or effectual grace
 - Election
 - Freedom and saving response
- Romans 3:10-24, Romans 5:6-8, Ephesians 2:1-9, and Titus 3:3-7 place divine mercy and initiative at the center while excluding human boasting.
- The settlement rejected one boundary but did not end the broader disagreement.

Eastern and Western Saving Frameworks

- Characteristic Western accounts often foreground guilt, satisfaction, justification, and sacramental administration.
- Characteristic Eastern accounts often foreground death, corruption, healing, participation, communion, and theosis.
- Scripture contains these multiple themes, so difference in emphasis is not automatically another Gospel.
- The functional boundary appears when the systems answer:
 - What immediate saving benefit is offered?
 - Is justification a complete declaration, one aspect of transformation, or both?
 - Does sacramental participation belong to Gospel reception or to the life of those already saved?
- Romans 3:24-28 and 5:1-2 must be read alongside resurrection victory in 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 and participation language in 2 Peter 1:3-4 without erasing their distinctions.

The Reformation

- The Reformation disputed justification, faith, merit, sacraments, authority, and assurance-not merely institutional corruption.
- A substantial shared vocabulary remained.
 - Christ is necessary.
 - Grace is necessary.
 - Faith is necessary.
 - Human beings cannot boast before God.
- The functions assigned to those terms remained incompatible.
 - Is justification imputed, infused, or both?
 - Is faith the sole instrument or faith formed by charity?
 - Do sacraments confer justifying grace?
 - Can justification be increased, forfeited, and restored?
- Representative Protestant confessions and the Council of Trent did not converge into one Christian-wide Gospel; they institutionalized rival answers.
- Romans 3:28, Romans 4:4-5, Galatians 2:16, James 2:14-26, and Ephesians 2:8-10 define the textual dispute that each system attempts to resolve.

Protestant Disagreement after the Reformation

- Rejection of Rome did not create one Protestant saving settlement.
- Persistent disputes include:
 - Baptismal efficacy and infant versus believer baptism
 - The relation of faith and repentance
 - Surrender and obedience within or after saving faith
 - Perseverance as result, proof, or continuing condition
 - Possible apostasy and present assurance
 - The distinction between Israel's kingdom proclamation and Paul's Gospel
- Refer back to Session 3 rather than repeating its full source walk.
 - Lutheran and Reformed traditions differ over sacramental efficacy.
 - Reformed and Wesleyan traditions differ over perseverance and apostasy.
 - Lordship and Free Grace traditions differ over the constitution and evidence of saving faith.
 - Baptist and Restorationist traditions differ over water baptism's saving function.
- The evidence denies the existence of one self-evident "Protestant Gospel."

Restoration and New-Authority Claims

- Some movements explain disagreement by claiming that a true church, priesthood, ordinance, gift, pattern, or dispensational message was lost and required restoration.
- The restoration claims remain distinct:
 - Restoration of an apostolic baptismal pattern
 - Restoration of apostolic gifts or required Spirit evidence
 - Restoration of priesthood authority and saving ordinances
 - Restoration of a dispensational message obscured by later tradition
- The same questions apply to each claim:
 - What saving truth or authority was lost?
 - When and how was it lost?
 - Through whom was it restored?
 - Must the hearer receive the restored rite, authority, experience, or message?
- Restoration did not achieve Christian-wide settlement; it added rival claims to exclusive authenticity.
- Acts 20:29-32 anticipates corruption, while Galatians 1:8-9 subjects even angelic claims to the apostolic Gospel test.

Historical Settlements Bound Rival Communions

- Later settlements were real and consequential within their communions.
- Their continuing institutional embodiment proves that the disputes are not extinct misunderstandings among specialists.
- Councils and confessions repeatedly settled doctrine for particular communions, but no settlement became an enduring definition of the Gospel for Christendom as a whole.

Notes

The Word “Gospel” Expanded in Different Directions

THESIS

Christendom uses Gospel for events, promises, a person, a kingdom announcement, a total biblical story, liberation, sacramental participation, and an authorized saving plan—definitions with different boundaries and functions.

Constituent, Implication, and Consequence Must Remain Distinct

- Constituent: part of the message a sinner must believe.
- Implication: a truth that necessarily follows from the message.
- Consequence: a duty or result that should follow salvation.
- Every broad definition risks boundary collapse.
 - If the whole Bible is Gospel, what distinguishes the saving message from all other revealed truth?
 - If every fruit of salvation is Gospel, what distinguishes evangelism from discipleship and ethics?

Saving Event

- Definition: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again.
- Strength: First Corinthians 15:1-4 explicitly identifies this event-centered proclamation as Gospel.
- Question: Does the event summary itself state its promised personal benefit and required reception?
- Romans 4:24-25 and 2 Timothy 2:8 help explain the saving significance and apostolic proclamation without expanding the Gospel into every result.

Saving Promise

- Definition: forgiveness, justification, or eternal life is promised for Christ's sake.
- Strength: Acts 13:32-39 joins good news, resurrection, forgiveness, and justification; Romans 1:16-17 joins Gospel, righteousness, belief, and salvation.
- Question: Is the promise constituent Gospel content or the stated application of the saving event?

Jesus Himself

- Definition: Jesus is not merely the subject of information; he himself is the good news.
- Strength: salvation is inseparable from the person of Christ.
- Limitation: the slogan does not specify what must be believed about him or what he accomplished.
- Second Corinthians 11:4 warns that “another Jesus” makes truthful content indispensable.

Kingdom Announcement

- Definition: God's reign is arriving through Jesus the King.
- Strength: Matthew 4:17, 23 and Mark 1:14-15 explicitly join Gospel, kingdom, repentance, and belief.
- Questions:
 - Which kingdom is announced?
 - Is the kingdom proclamation identical in every biblical setting?
 - Does it state the present saving benefit and reception offered to Paul's Gentile hearers?

The Whole Biblical Story

- Definition: the Gospel is the climax of Israel's story and the narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.
- Strength: Luke 24:25-47 and Acts 13:16-41 place Christ's saving work within the scriptural story.
- Questions:
 - How much of the story must a sinner understand to receive salvation?
 - Can the whole story be called Gospel without making every biblical fact part of the required saving content?

Liberation and Social Renewal

- Definition: Gospel includes liberation of the oppressed, justice, inclusion, healing, and material care.
- Strength: Luke 4:16-21 and 7:20-23 connect messianic good news with liberation and healing.
- Boundary question: are these the saving message, signs and implications of the kingdom, or duties and consequences flowing from salvation?
- Galatians 2:10, 16 permits care for the poor and justification apart from law works to be affirmed without collapsing their functions.

Sacramental Presence and Participation

- Definition: the Gospel is proclaimed and encountered in the church's sacramental life, where Christ's saving presence and power are conveyed.
- Questions:
 - Is proclamation information, divine action, or both?
 - Does Gospel preaching announce the benefit or sacramentally convey it?
 - Which institution, minister, and rite become necessary?
- Romans 6:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 require careful treatment alongside Paul's distinction between baptizing and Gospel preaching in 1 Corinthians 1:17.

The Whole Authorized Saving Plan

- Definition: Gospel includes all doctrines, laws, ordinances, covenants, obedience, and endurance necessary for the final goal.
- Questions:
 - Is the Gospel completed news to be believed or a path to be entered and completed?
 - Where is the boundary between saving accomplishment and covenant performance?
 - Does the final goal mean eternal life, kingdom entrance, glorification, theosis, or exaltation?
- Colossians 2:8-10 and Ephesians 1:13-14 test claims that further authorized gates are required beyond completeness and sealing in Christ.

Gospel Definitions Assign Biblical Themes Different Functions

- The types contain genuine biblical themes but assign them different positions relative to the saving Gospel.
- Christendom does not merely supply several explanations of one agreed definition.
- Its traditions use Gospel for different kinds of claims with different scopes, boundaries, saving functions, and responses.

Notes

Why the Disagreement Persists

THESIS

The appearance of Gospel consensus persists because common facts and vocabulary conceal different saving structures, while institutions and selected histories authorize their own definitions.

The Word Carries Borrowed Authority

- Every Christian tradition wants its message associated with the biblical word Gospel.
- Labels such as “historic Gospel” or “whole Gospel” claim legitimacy before stating a proposition.
- Translate every label into explicit questions.
 - What happened?
 - What did it accomplish?
 - What is promised?
 - What must the hearer do?

Shared Facts Conceal Different Structures

- Agreement that Jesus died and rose may hide disagreement about what his death accomplished.
 - Died for our sins
 - Died to defeat death
 - Died to make salvation possible
 - Died to merit grace administered through the church
- The event may remain verbally shared while its saving function and application change.

Different Human Problems Organize Different Gospels

- Guilt foregrounds justification.
- Death foregrounds resurrection victory.
- Corruption foregrounds healing and participation.
- Alienation foregrounds reconciliation and communion.
- False rule foregrounds kingdom and enthronement.
- Oppression foregrounds liberation and justice.
- Cosmic decay foregrounds new creation.

- Scripture contains all these themes.
 - The issue is not whether the vocabulary is biblical.
 - The issue is which diagnosis defines the saving message and whether distinct benefits are allowed to remain distinct.

Gospel and Christian Life Are Easily Collapsed

- The Gospel produces worship, obedience, service, generosity, justice, fellowship, baptism, discipleship, and hope.
- Because these flow from salvation, speakers may gradually place them inside the receiving terms of salvation.
- Controlling question: Can something be essential Christian truth or duty without being part of the message by which a sinner is saved?
- Ephesians 2:8-10 honors good works as God's purpose for the saved while excluding works from the basis of the gift.
- Titus 2:11-14 presents transformation as the teaching and purpose of saving grace rather than its humanly paid price.

Institutions Define the Gospel through Their Own Saving Role

- If a church understands its ministry, sacraments, priesthood, or ordinances as appointed saving means, access to the institution becomes part of its Gospel structure.
- Distinguish two functions.
 - An institution may announce the saving benefit and direct confidence immediately to Christ's promise.
 - An institution may claim to administer the saving benefit through authorized ministers and rites.
- First Timothy 2:5, Romans 10:8-13, and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 require the role of mediator, message, and messenger to be carefully distinguished.

Consensus Is Often Defined within a Selected Family

- Appeals to “the historic Christian Gospel” raise prior boundary questions.
 - Which centuries count?
 - Which councils and churches count?
 - Who defines the boundary of Christendom?
- Avoid a circular argument.
 - A group defines true Christianity as everyone affirming its Gospel.
 - It then cites agreement within that selected group as evidence of universal historic consensus.

- A teaching may be judged outside biblical Christianity only after the governing standard and actual disagreement have been demonstrated.
 - That theological conclusion must not be smuggled into the historical sample before the evidence is compared.
- The appearance of consensus often depends upon deciding beforehand which branches are allowed to count as the tree.

Notes

What the Evidence Establishes-and Does Not Establish

THESIS

The evidence establishes the absence of one stable Christian-wide Gospel definition, but it does not establish that every formulation is false, every difference is saving, or every adherent is personally lost.

What the Evidence Establishes

- The word is not self-defining.
 - Official sources attach different kinds, saving invitations, means, authorities, boundaries, and outcomes to Gospel.
- The creeds achieved an important but limited settlement.
 - They identify indispensable truths about God and Christ without settling every later disputed saving term.
- Later settlements remained confessional rather than Christian-wide.
 - Councils and confessions bound particular communions while competing conclusions continued elsewhere.
- Modern disagreement has historical depth.
 - Session 3's present branches reflect long-standing disputes over the human problem, Christ's accomplishment, saving means, authority, perseverance, and final benefit.
- Historic labels cannot replace an explicit message.
 - "Historic Christianity," "the church," "the creeds," "the Reformation," and "the evangelical Gospel" each require identification of the specific period, communion, document, branch, and saving claim intended.

What the Evidence Does Not Establish

- It does not show that Christians have agreed on nothing.
- It does not show that no tradition has ever stated the true Gospel.
- It does not make every doctrinal difference another Gospel.
- It does not make all formulations equally true or equally false.
- It does not make historical majority the test of truth.
- It does not prove or disprove a saving message merely by institutional continuity.
- It does not prove that every adherent understands or consistently believes an institution's official doctrine.
- It does not authorize judgments about an individual's eternal state from a denominational label alone.

Preserve the Necessary Conclusion

- The absence of consensus does not make truth inaccessible.
- It removes consensus, pedigree, and shared labels as sufficient substitutes for biblical adjudication.
- The competing claims must be stated explicitly and tested rather than harmonized by assumption.

Notes

The Gospel Must Be Stated, Not Merely Named

THESIS

Christendom has never achieved an enduring consensus about what constitutes the Gospel or how its saving benefit is received; therefore, the Gospel must be stated according to Scripture and tested rather than merely named.

Every Familiar Gospel Claim Requires Explicit Content

- “We preach the Gospel” requires:
 - What saving facts are proclaimed?
 - What benefit is promised?
 - What response is required?
- “Salvation is by grace” requires:
 - Is grace the unconditioned gift received through faith?
 - Is grace infused or conveyed through an appointed sacrament?
 - Is grace enabling power within a continuing cooperative path?
- “We are saved through faith” requires:
 - Is faith reliance upon Christ and his promise?
 - Does faith include repentance from conduct, surrender, or commitment?
 - Must it be validated by inevitable fruit or perseverance?
- “We affirm historic Christianity” requires:
 - Which confession and historical branch define the saving message?
 - Does another equally historic communion contradict it?

The Explicit Benchmark Identifies Basis, Content, Reception, Exclusion, and Benefit

- Basis: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures.
 - First Corinthians 15:1-4 supplies the principal compact statement.
 - “For our sins” identifies the saving significance of Christ's death.
- Content: the Gospel announces Christ's completed saving work rather than works the sinner promises to perform.
 - Romans 1:1-4 and 2 Timothy 2:8 identify the person and saving accomplishment proclaimed.
- Reception: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Acts 16:30-31 answers the direct salvation question.

- Ephesians 1:13 joins hearing the Gospel, believing, and being sealed.
- Exclusion: the receiving response is contrasted with working.
 - Romans 4:4-5, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Titus 3:5 exclude works and boasting from the saving basis.
- Benefit: the believer is complete in Christ and possesses a present justified standing and eternal life.
 - Colossians 2:10
 - Romans 5:1
 - John 5:24
 - First John 5:11-13

A Lowest Common Denominator Cannot Identify the Saving Message

- Christendom offers shared labels, historical facts, and biblical words alongside competing definitions, saving structures, authorities, and outcomes.
- The answer is not to reduce the Gospel to the smallest statement every tradition can affirm.
- A lowest common denominator may omit the distinctions needed to identify the saving message and exclude its alterations.

The Gospel Must Be Stated and Tested

- Christendom has never achieved an enduring consensus about what constitutes the Gospel or how its saving benefit is received. Therefore, the Gospel must be stated and tested, not merely named.
- Scripture rather than consensus must adjudicate the claims.
 - First Thessalonians 5:21 commands believers to test and hold fast what is good.
 - Acts 17:11 commends examination of teaching by Scripture.
 - Galatians 1:8-9 subjects every messenger-including one claiming supernatural authority-to the revealed Gospel test.
- If the word Gospel cannot identify its own meaning, by what authority will we determine which Gospel is true?

Notes

What This Session Established

- The word Gospel is honored but not self-defining.
- The ecumenical creeds settled essential truths about God and Christ without settling every saving term.
- Later councils and confessions created durable settlements within rival communions rather than across Christendom.
- Christian traditions use Gospel for different kinds of messages, realities, and saving plans.
- Consensus, pedigree, and shared labels cannot substitute for biblical adjudication.

SESSION CONCLUSION

Christendom has never achieved an enduring consensus about what constitutes the Gospel or how its saving benefit is received; therefore, the Gospel must be stated according to Scripture and tested rather than merely named.

What This Session Did Not Establish

- Christians have agreed on nothing.
- Every formulation is false or every difference is a saving difference.
- Historical majority or institutional continuity is the test of truth.
- An individual's eternal state can be inferred from a denominational label alone.

