

Would the Gospel Survive?

By the end of the first century, all the books of the New Testament had been written and all of the Apostles and first generation Christians had died. A few of the writings had started to be compiled together, like the four Gospels. But, most of the letters still circulated in local areas with only a few copies of each in existence. The church was really still in her infancy and quite immature. Would she survive and would the Word of the Lord continue to grow the Kingdom?

As the Second Century (the 100s) progressed, dangerous false teachings and divisive movements arose in the church and threatened the gospel. These can be divided into four groups:

- 1) **Legalistic Heresies** – For instance, the Ebionites (who lasted for 400 years) did not believe in the deity of Christ, though they did think He was a prophet and the Messiah. They taught that salvation was only possible through circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses.
- 2) **Philosophical Heresies** – The most well-known of this type is Gnosticism. These immature “believers” allowed too much of their Greek thinking to enter into their Christian life. They taught that all physical matter is evil and only the spirit is good. Therefore, Jesus could not have come to earth as a man because flesh is evil. Therefore, He did not suffer for our sins and die. Furthermore, only the people with special spiritual knowledge (“gnosis” means knowledge) could be saved.

- 3) **Theological Heresies** – Monatism was an early form of charismaticism, whereby the preacher Monatus taught that God still spoke directly, especially through him. He said Jesus would soon return and give Monstus himself him a special place in the Kingdom. Another group was the Monarchians, who taught an early form of universalism. And there were others.
- 4) **Ecclesiastical Schisms** – Even in the early days, the church was all divided over certain opinions and beliefs that pitted one group against another. Various groups though they were the true church to the exclusion of the other Christians. The Donatists of North Africa were one such well-known group.

One last point—a very important point! In spite of all of this turmoil and division, God still grew the church at an amazing rate. Also, all of the disagreement led to debates that caused the church to solidify her understanding of what the true Christian teachings are. As part of the fight against the false teachers, all the books of the New Testament were gathered together, tested for authenticity, and then recognized as the 27 books we have today.

To answer my question from the title of this article, “Of course the gospel would survive!” God, through the Holy Spirit, protected the teachings of Christianity and the transmission of the Bible all along. Yet again, in spite of human sinfulness, God redeems His people and continues to oversee the march of His Kingdom.

Since the beginning, men have tried to have their way with God and turn Christianity into a manmade religion. But, patiently and purposefully, God continues to win! The Church and the Word have survived... and they continue to knock down the gates of Hell even today.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mark 13:31).

Thank you, Jesus!

Scott