

# THE GOSPEL AND YOU

## Lesson 3

### The Unique Evangel

- It is of utmost importance that we are accurate in what we mean by “the gospel.”
- Today we are faced with the challenge to properly define the *evangel* in the word “evangelical.”
- Evangel comes from the old Middle English word for “the gospel.”



### The Gospel

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

- “Ask any hundred self-professed evangelical Christians what the good news of Jesus is, and you’re likely to get about sixty different answers. Listen to evangelical preaching, read evangelical books, log on to evangelical websites, and you’ll find one description after another of the gospel, many of them mutually exclusive.”<sup>1</sup>
- The Scriptures define the gospel with simple clarity. After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-48).<sup>2</sup>
- The uniqueness of the gospel is that it is objectively historical. It was completed by Christ Jesus alone to save dead in sin and rebellious sinners who cannot do what is necessary to be right with God. This gospel of Christ results in the salvation of many who do experience changed lives.
- What are false gospels that distort the true gospel?”


- Often is the case when Christians share the gospel, we dilute it or replace it with the benefits of the gospel (those truths that accompany our union with Christ) and make the gospel a “therapeutic self-help gospel” or “a man-centered gospel of works.”
- The benefits of the gospel are distinct downstream realities that the historical gospel brings forth by the Spirit; yet, they are *not* the gospel.

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, Greg. *What is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 18.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Acts 26:22-23 [Acts 3:18, 21, 24, 17:2-3; 1 Pet 1:10-11]

- Testifying to the gospel means you must share the objectively historical, non-repeatable, life, death and resurrection of God in Christ for sinners.
- There are consequences for getting it wrong:
 

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)
- *The Universal Call of the Gospel*: The indiscriminate offer of the gospel to all who hear. When we evangelize, we witness to others without reservation or discrimination. We sow seeds to whomever we can.

### Christian Responsibility and Divine Sovereignty

- How do we square man's responsibility and God's absolute sovereignty over all men?
  1. *Man is responsible*
    - a. "For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:11-12)
    - b. "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." (Phil 2:12)
    - c. "Go therefore, and make disciples..." (Mat 28:18)
    - d. "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb 9:27)
  2. *God ordains all that comes to pass*
    - a. "...so then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God..." (Rom 9:16)
    - b. "...apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)
    - c. "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matt. 19:25-26)
- How is God both King and Judge?
- *Antinomy*: When two logical statements on their own clearly stand, and when put together, these logical statements reveal an *apparent* contradiction.
- We must affirm both statements because the Bible does. We have to accept it and learn to live with it. Accepting it means we do justice to both truths. We can comprehend the antinomy. Yet they are not rivals to one another even if your mind cannot exhaust the antinomy. They are to be complementary truths, working together for the good.
- "If God is going to save the elect, and no one can get in the way of that, then why bother evangelizing?" Since God has ordained all the elect to be saved, he has also ordained the means by which all the elect will be saved. For Paul would not have said, "For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

### *Christian Responsibility*

- “Evangelism is the inalienable responsibility of every Christian community, and every Christian person.... The Christian, therefore, must constantly be searching his conscience, asking himself if he is doing all that he might be doing in this field. [It is] a responsibility that cannot be shrugged off.”<sup>3</sup>
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 - God has given us a ministerial work as ambassadors for Christ. This appeal that God makes through Paul is the very appeal he makes through us to our neighbors, family, spouses, children, and coworkers! How we think of ourselves as ambassadors matters since we can sometimes place expectations on ourselves that are not true to the Biblical role of ambassadors.
- What does an ambassador do?
  1. Represents someone else
  2. Says what someone else wants him or her to say
  3. Acts on the basis of someone else’s authority
  4. Is a citizen of a different country who does good while in a foreign land
  5. Promotes the business and plans of their homeland
- What are some key qualities of a good ambassador?
  1. *Knowledge*: You must have the clarity of the message, the basic knowledge (Biblical truths) necessary for the task at hand.
  2. *Wisdom*: It is not enough to have simply an accurately informed mind. Our knowledge must be tempered with the kind of wisdom that makes our message clear and persuasive.
  3. *Character*: Our moral character can have great influence behind the words we say, or it can detract significantly from the argument we lay before our hearers. Christians are a public people. We are to flee all sin, yet gross private and/or public sins will affect our character (Matt 5:16).
  4. *Diligence*: We are all busy. It’s a matter of what we busy ourselves with. Diligence (perseverance) in evangelism is a Christian virtue.
- It is tempting to have too high a view of man. Let’s not elevate the doctrine of human responsibility over and against the doctrine of man’s depravity. We didn’t decide to follow Jesus. Our sin is too great. God decided to save us. We didn’t choose him but he chose us.
- The *free will* doctrine confuses the scope of man’s ability. The limitation of human responsibility is in the power to act. Man is only free to exercise his will within the limitations of his disposition.
- Original sin means man is incapable of saving himself because of a lack of saving faith. Sin blinds man and renders him unable to seek, find, and please God. Faith is a gracious gift of God that God must give to man in his fallen state. In his fallen state, man does not possess any innate ability to choose God.
- Once in Christ, you are responsible, and you can do it. This includes your evangelistic witness.

### *Divine Sovereignty*

- God decrees and ordains everything that comes to pass. 2 Cor 5:18 states, “All this is from God.” The “this” is the work of God to reconcile people through the ambassadorial message of Christ crucified and raised. The gospel comes by way of the work of Christian evangelism.
- A temptation with divine sovereignty is to reject or minimize Christian responsibility. Argument: If we are to believe in the sovereignty of God over all men, doesn’t it mean the death of evangelism?
 

“Hyper-Calvinism is the denial that God in the preaching of the gospel calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests

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<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 31.

itself in the practice of the preacher's addressing the call of the gospel, 'repent and believe on Christ crucified,' only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration and, thereby, of election, namely, some conviction of sin and some interest in salvation."<sup>4</sup>

- The gospel is a call to all who hear to repent and believe. If Peter didn't do it, then they wouldn't have heard at Pentecost and repented. If Paul didn't go to the Areopagus, then they would not have heard, and some believed. We are commanded to sow seeds wherever and whenever we can.
- Another temptation is personal critique that leads toward non-action. This is a correct view of God's sovereignty but a hyper-focused critique of witnessing methods. This often leads to bitter cynicism (self-righteousness) which practically results in a rejection to make Christ known.
- First, since God's authority has ordained all the events which come to pass, then we have the greatest ground to evangelize. Since we know that God works all things for the good of those whom he has called, then we stand on the sure foundation that the authority and power to convert someone is God's not ours. We are not an unbeliever's Savior.
- Second, since we have been made children by God's sovereign power, then everything he tells us to do matters greatly, including the command to share the gospel.
- Third, since we are securely united to Christ by the Spirit, our sense of self-worth is not grounded in anyone or any response to us. If shared with clarity, gentleness and respect, the offense is in the gospel. They're angry not because of you but because of their sin and rebellion. Our hope and joy is not grounded in man's response to us as ambassadors but in the love of God for us.
- Acts 17:24-26:
 

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place...

  - Since God has determined allotted periods (the days/months/years we live) and the boundaries (where we live), do you not think he has also placed your everyday neighbors in your life as well? You do have a reason for the coworkers you have. You do have a reason for the specific family members in your families. We are to be ambassadors to them, God making his appeal through us so that they would be reconciled.

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<sup>4</sup> David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994), 15-16.