



What We Believe

Article 6 of 13: The Gospel

The Gospel: We believe that the Gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is Christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if His death and resurrection are not central. This good news is biblical (His death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

Introduction

The good news of redemption by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is every lost sinner’s most desperate, urgent need and is at the same time every believer’s comfort and abiding confidence. Christ is the very wisdom of God incarnate, 1 Cor. 1:24, 30. Also the wisdom of the Tri-une God is displayed before all creation, Col. 2:13-15 and is displayed in the Gospel indeed as well, 1 Cor. 2:1-7, Eph. 3:1-12. Although the Gospel and the cross are folly to the lost, it is God’s chosen message, the very power of God for salvation:

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” Romans 1:16, 17

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18

Creation – Fall – Redemption

As we have been progressing along through our statement of faith we have actually been following along the lines of a well-established theme in Scripture known as “Creation – Fall – Redemption.” In Article 3, our statement covers the Creation of Humanity. In Article 4 we covered The Fall. Beginning with Article 5, The Plan of God, through Article 13, The Restoration of all Things, we will be touching upon Redemption. To a very large extent our statement of faith follows along this long recognized Scriptural motif or pattern.

The Gospel



When we think of the word Gospel as Bible believers, we almost automatically think of John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Or we think of the Apostle Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 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.”

Before we begin to examine the actual content and message of the Gospel in more detail, let us look at the meanings of some very important words. The word Gospel itself, the words proclamation, witness and doctrine. The word Gospel in the New Testament is the Greek noun *euangelion*, which means “good news” or “glad tidings.” John Piper writes,

“It’s built out of a prefix that means good or joyful and a root word that means message or news. The word was used widely in the New Testament world to mean “the message of victory, but also used of political and private messages bringing joy.” In a period of history without print media or radio or

television, the messenger with the good news delivered the news in person. It was spoken as an announcement. It had a celebrative feel to it. The messenger exulted over the news he had to bring. It was good news.” John Piper, *God is the Gospel*, p. 19, 20

The Greek verb *euangelizomai* means to bring good news or glad tidings or evangelize. The word was once used of those spreading the news of their king’s victory over an adversary! This brings to mind God’s promise in Genesis 3 that the Messiah, the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent in that King Jesus would conquer the prince of darkness. Another interesting thing to note is that the Greek word for angel, *angelos*, meaning “messenger” is related to the same root as *euangelion*. Angels were messengers of news many times in the Bible, but particularly of the good news of the announcement of the Incarnation of Christ such in passages such as Luke 1:19, and 2:20, and the proclamation of the eternal Gospel in Revelation 14:6.

Scripture uses the word Gospel in various connections. Some examples of this are the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Gospel of the Jesus Christ or of Christ or of the glory of Christ, the Gospel of God, the Gospel of peace, the Gospel of the grace of God, the Word of Christ, the word of the cross, or simply the Gospel.

The Gospel as a Message to be Proclaimed - The “Kerygma”

The Gospel is a message, the content of which, is the real historical Person of Jesus Christ and His real historical life, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead according to the Scriptures! The Greek word for “proclamation” is *kerygma* and is used for how the Gospel was communicated, whereas *euangelion* is the essential nature of the content. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p 474
The word kerygma was used to describe the message of the Gospel in the primitive church. The Apostolic kerygma is the proclamation of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ to sinners that they may rest their faith in the power of God for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, 1 Cor. 2:2-5; 1 Cor. 15:14.

Witness – Testimony – “Martyres”

The Greek word for bearing witness is *martyres*. It speaks of one who testifies. As part of fulfilling the Great Commission through disseminating the Gospel, Christians may bear witness to Christ as the only Savior and His saving power.

“Because such testimony often meant arrest, scourging, exile, or death, the Greek was transliterated to form the English word “martyr,” meaning one who suffers or dies rather than give up his faith.”

Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, p. 1174

We do have to realize that just giving our personal testimony is not the Gospel. That would be our experience. Testifying to the power of the Gospel in our lives can be an effective approach, but it should be accompanied by the facts of the Gospel.

Doctrine/Teaching - “Didache”

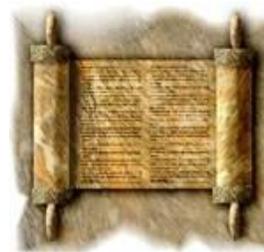
In the Great Commission, Jesus told the Apostles to teach the disciples all He had commanded them. This is the Greek verb *didasko*, which means to teach, to impart instruction or teach doctrine. The doctrine or teaching itself is the noun *didache*. In Acts 2:42 we are told that the early Christian disciples devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.

The Gospel is Historical and it is Biblical

Our Gospel is both historical and Biblical. Creation-Fall-Redemption has occurred in real time and space history. Unlike the messages of some other world religions, the Gospel is not some fanciful myth, but is based on historic facts, historic people, and historic events. The Gospel is also Biblical, it is “according to the Scriptures.” The Scriptures are God’s historical revelation of redemption including the “jewel” that is the Gospel. Since Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus were real historical people, and the Creation-Fall-Redemption Gospel truths, types, foreshadows, and fulfillments are recorded in Scripture, our Gospel is both historical and Biblical. The practice of some other religions may continue whether or not their characters or events were actually true. Not so for Christianity. The Gospel is all about Christ! If Christ is not a real-live historical individual and if He did not really die and rise from the dead, then the Gospel is false and Christianity is not genuinely viable. Yet, Christ really did become flesh, die on the cross and rise from the dead and the Gospel really is historically and Biblically true. The evidence for this is compelling!

The Development of the Gospel in the Old Testament

St. Augustine is famous for writing that the “New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.” Contrary to the views of some, the Gospel and salvation by grace are not completely new to the N.T. era. It is wrong to say that salvation was by works in the O.T. and by grace in the N.T. The good news of salvation has always been by God’s grace. Let’s look at how God began to reveal and unfold the good news of the Gospel in the pages of the O.T.



As we begin, we could say that Genesis 3 is the passage of first mention when we think of the development of the Gospel. In the O.T., the first suggestion of the Gospel is what is known as the “Proto-Evangelum,” in Gen. 3:15, where in proto-typical form, elements of the Gospel were revealed. As God is pronouncing judgment on the serpent He declares:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15

Here we are told that the Offspring of the woman, who is Christ, will prevail against the serpent, Satan, through Christ’s suffering. As we can see this first mention only reveals a part of the Gospel, that is that Jesus as Messiah would conquer Satan the adversary.

Some Old Testament Hebrew Words for Good News

As the good news of the Gospel began to be unfolded in the O.T., certain Hebrew words expressed the idea of proclaiming good news, such as the noun *besora* and the verb *mebasser*. The Greek translation of the O.T., known as the Septuagint or LXX, which was translated as tradition tells us by seventy scholars in approx. the late third century B.C., uses the Greek word *euangelion* and related words to translate these Hebrew words. ...in passages such as Ps. 68:11, 19; 96:2; Isaiah 52:7; 61:1, the words emphasize good news concerning salvation or the coming of God’s kingdom.

New Dictionary of Biblical Theology p 510.

Isaiah uses the term “good news” in the following passages:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Isaiah 52:7

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.” Isaiah 61:1-3

Jesus quoted this very passage when He read in the synagogue in Nazareth. After reading it, He declared, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:21**

In Nahum we read:

“Behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Nahum 1:15

The Apostle Paul alludes to Nahum in Romans where he writes:

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” Romans 10:14, 15

What then is the specific content of the Gospel found in the OT? We could summarize it as:

***The coming of the kingdom of God**

***The redemption of the people of God from judgment and death**

***The restoration of the fallen world**

***All awaiting fulfillment in the coming of Messiah**

G. Goldsworthy in his article on the Gospel in the New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, writes:

“The OT revelation of the Gospel is incomplete, for it merely anticipates the true salvation and kingdom, and the means of that kingdom’s coming is not yet fully revealed. The problem of human sin has yet to be properly resolved. Until it is, the people of God are sustained by prophetic promises of the coming day of the Lord when salvation will come fully and gloriously. When Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad’ (John 8:56), he indicated that, in God’s eyes, for an OT believer to grasp the shadow by faith was to grasp the reality of Christ. The promises and

acts of God for Israel's salvation link the OT believer to the effective basis of salvation, Jesus' death and resurrection." *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* p. 521, 522

So, God declared the Gospel to Abraham in passages such as Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:5-6, and continued to reveal it slowly and progressively through the O.T. prophets. In effect then, in the O.T. era for a person to genuinely trust in the "type" or "shadow" as did Abraham, it was to trust in the "coming" Messiah and was to be accounted right with God.

The Development of the Gospel in the New Testament

Because of the arrangement of the books and letters in the New Testament, it is not automatically apparent that the Four Gospels were actually recorded after most of the letters were written. So what the letters present as accomplished and fulfilled, the Gospel accounts develop from beginning of Jesus' Incarnation to end of His earthly ministry. Mark starts his account of the Gospel writing, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," Mark 1:1. Then he immediately writes of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord.



The Gospel includes the proclamation that the long awaited Messiah has come and the Kingdom of God and that His salvation is at hand. Jesus' own teaching demonstrates this.

Right after Jesus' baptism and temptation, Mark writes:

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, ...the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.'" Mark 1:14, 15

Matthew writes, that He began to preach:

"Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 4:17

"And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." Matthew 4:23

Luke records the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth in this way:

"And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" Luke 4:16-21

John quotes Jesus' teaching concerning the Gospel in chapter 3:

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.'" John 3:14-18

We could continue quoting Jesus' teaching on and on in the Gospels, but it is important to see that in certain ways, Jesus' preaching of the Gospel at the beginning of His ministry is similar to the prophetic message in the O.T., an anticipation of the fullness of the message, yet Jesus clearly begins revealing Himself as the fulfiller. As the Gospels develop, Jesus' messiah-ship is demonstrated through His Incarnation, Person, His teaching and His works in the fulfillment of Scripture. All four Gospels then emphasize the last days of His ministry leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus interprets His coming suffering and death as the necessary atoning sacrifice (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:45, Luke 22:15). In the resurrection and ascension, Christ completes the historical fulfillment of the Gospel.

Mission Accomplished!

Apostolic Preaching of the Gospel

Immediately after the crucifixion, we know that the Apostles and disciples were gripped with fear, yet once they saw the risen Christ they were emboldened. The Lord sent them with the Great Commission and when the Spirit fell upon them on Pentecost, they were enabled to preach the Gospel of the risen Savior with boldness and power. From the Apostle Peter's Pentecost sermon, the

Apostle's preaching in the Temple, Peter and John's arrest and testimony before the authorities, Stephen's martyrdom testimony, to the dispersed disciple's faithful testimony of the crucified and risen Christ among the cities of Judea and Samaria, to the Apostle Paul's preaching from town to town in the synagogues, then to the gentiles and to Aeropagus in Athens, throughout the whole book of Acts, the Apostles faithfully and boldly proclaimed Christ as that Prophet whom Moses foretold and the crucified and risen Messiah promised from the Old Testament prophets, and He who fulfilled the promises given to Abraham beforehand Acts 3:22-26.

“Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” Acts 3:22-26

Theologian C.H. Dodd pointed out that a consistent pattern emerged in Apostolic preaching:

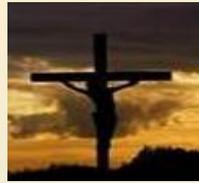
1. **The fulfillment of the OT promises.**
2. **The ministry of Jesus culminating in death.**
3. **His resurrection and exaltation.**
4. **The gift of the Spirit.**
5. **Call to repentance and faith.**

And so the Apostles took the commission of preaching the good news passed to them by the Lord and proclaimed it as a completed and fulfilled Gospel.

The Gospel is Christological

The Gospel basically, fundamentally and at its core is Christological! It is Christo-centric, that is, Christ centered. It is about Christ, His Incarnation, Person, earthly life, death, resurrection and current reign. Even the very name Jesus is rich with the good news of salvation. The name Jesus means, YHWH is salvation. Matthew recorded,

“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21



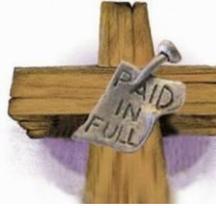
If Christ is not preached, the Gospel is not Preached!

The Person and work of Christ is the essential truth of the Gospel. If Christ is not preached, the Gospel is not preached. In our times, it has become popular to talk of living the Gospel or declaring the Gospel by example. The historic Roman Catholic saint, Francis of Assisi, is quoted as saying, “Preach the Gospel Always: When Necessary, Use Words”. We have to be very careful with this because we need to maintain consistency with the message and approach of Jesus and the Apostles. Whether in our evangelism, our missions outreach trips or in perceived “social justice” concerns, the historical Gospel is not really proclaimed strictly by our godliness, compassion or good deeds. It can be accompanied by these, but our actions are not the Gospel. Jesus must be proclaimed. Repentance and faith in Him must be communicated. Our personal godliness, faith or generosity will not save. These can lend tangible evidence to our message that it can transform guilty sinners into devoted disciples, but the Gospel is not preached if Christ is not preached. That being said, there is one notable way in which the Lord's death is proclaimed symbolically alongside verbal communication. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:26, “as often as we partake of the Lord's Table, we proclaim the Lord's death until he returns.” In Communion then, we proclaim the word of the cross both verbally and emblematically in the ordinance of the Lord's Table.

Christ is Not Truly Preached if the Cross is Not Preached!

Why the cross? Death by crucifixion was extremely cruel and likely seen as the most humiliating and shameful ways to be executed in those times. Invented by the Persians, it was practiced by other ancient groups on up to the Romans. Criminals, insurrectionists, etc., condemned to death, generally

beaten to within inches of their lives, were then paraded before the crowds, then strapped, if not nailed, usually completely naked upon crosses to be made public examples and spectacles of. God in His wisdom chose crucifixion as its offense and shock. He purposed to show how terrible death is and the crucifixion demonstration of it. Scripture foretold Deuteronomy 21:23 says that a person hanged on a tree is cursed by God. Galatians 3:13 says, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." Yet notice the attitude of our Savior, in Hebrews 12:2 we are told that the Lord Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him, despising the shame of it. It is important for us to realize that the most intense suffering for Christ was not the physical beatings and physical suffering of crucifixion as painful as it had to be, but the sacrifice of atonement, the bearing of the full unmitigated wrath of God for the sin of His people. On the cross, having borne the wrath of God for sin, having been forsaken by the Father, He uttered the following, "It is finished." This was recorded in the NT using the Greek word *tetelestai*, meaning "paid in full".



the way of death for His Son because of show how wicked sin is in His sight and the crucifixion of Christ was a graphic and bloody demonstration that Jesus would be "hanged on a tree." hanged on a tree is cursed by God. who is hanged on a tree." Yet notice the

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself ..." 2 Cor. 5:19

The cross that is foolishness to the lost is the power of God to us who are being saved. The Apostle Paul again writes:

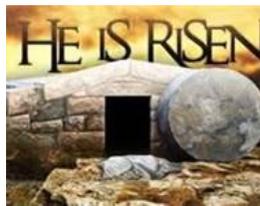
"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18

The way of the cross was essential to God's plan, as it was foretold in the Scriptures. The preaching of the cross is essential to preaching Christ in the Gospel.

Christ is Not Truly Preached if the Resurrection is Not Preached!

The resurrection is also essential to the Gospel. And like the cross, the message of the resurrection is also foolishness to the world, but reassurance to believers. In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul reasoned with, and then confronted the philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens:

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."



Upon hearing the preaching of the resurrection, some of them mocked Paul, after having called him a "babbler". Yet, others believed and joined with him, by the grace of God. Through the resurrection of Christ, it was demonstrated that Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be and that His life and sacrificial death for atonement was accepted by God. Scripture promised that God would not leave Messiah in Sheol to experience the

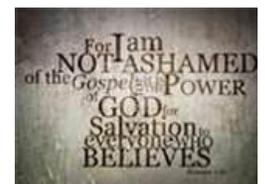
corruption of His body, Psalm 16:10. Paul was adamant when he argued the absolute necessity of the physical bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead:

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead..." 1 Corinthians 15:13-20

The physical bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead is essential to preaching Christ in the Gospel. It is essential to our right standing with God and it is essential to our salvation. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is compelling! A great promise of the Gospel is that just as Christ rose from the dead, we too will be raised or transformed and will enjoy eternal life with God in eternity.

The Gospel is God's Ordained Message and is the Power of God for Salvation!

The Apostle Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes." Romans 1:16 Why would he write this? In the ancient world, the message of the cross was an offense and was foolishness to the world.



The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. The word power in Greek is *dunamis*, we get our English word “dynamite” from this word. We could say that the Gospel is God’s “dynamic energy or force” for salvation. God has determined in His wisdom that the preaching and communicating of the Gospel would be His ordained means or power for bringing sinners to faith and salvation. Therefore it must be proclaimed.

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:13-17

Faith, then comes by hearing the word of Christ. In this connection, we can say that the usage of the phrase, “Word of Christ” is synonymous with the word Gospel. The Gospel, the Word of Christ must be communicated in order to be heard, and it must be heard in order to be believed. God has placed a premium on the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. This is His appointed means. This does not mean however, that individuals cannot come to faith by reading the words of the Gospel or written explanations of it, just that verbal proclamation is God’s mode of emphasis.

“The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe!” Romans 1:16

Preaching the Gospel Consistently in its Christological, Historical-Biblical, Apostolic Content

If we are to be obedient to the Great Commission, our goal in preaching the Gospel must be to maintain its purity by declaring it consistent with its Historical, Biblical, Christological, and Apostolic content with a view to making new disciples.

Declare the Historic Message in its Purity, Don’t Mess with it!

Ultimately, we will be ashamed if we alter the message of the Gospel in order to not seem extreme or uneducated or unsophisticated. John Piper has written,

“We avoid feelings of shame by remembering that the gospel is going to be vindicated in the end. We remind ourselves that the Gospel alone brings forgiven sinners to final, everlasting joy. Nothing in the world can do this except the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam – they do not have a Savior who can solve the problem of separation from a holy God through sin, and offer sinners hope by grace and not works. Only one message saves sinners and brings them safely into the presence of God – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It alone is the power of God unto salvation.”

The Gospel is the Power of God unto Salvation, Sermon by John Piper, June 21, 1998

Gospel not Law-spel – Don’t Add to the Message!

The fundamental elements of the Gospel message are straight forward, repentance and faith in Christ, crucified and risen! No more, no less. Early on in the middle of the first century, a group of supposed Jewish converts to Jesus, strongly preached that faith in Christ was not enough, that one must also be circumcised and keep all the Law of Moses. These were named, the “Judaizers.” This message was especially threatening to the success of the Gospel among the gentiles in Galatia. The Apostle Paul stood against these individuals fiercely. In Galatians, he called their Christ-plus message a false gospel, indeed no gospel at all. When a party of these Judaizers showed up among the believers in Galatia, they even intimidated the Apostle Peter, so that he withdrew from eating with the gentile believers.



Justification by Faith Alone in Christ Alone – The Heart of the Gospel.

The Apostle Paul denounced the Apostle Peter in front of everyone, arguing that his behavior was not in accordance with the Gospel.

“I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Galatians 2:14-16

Sinners are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law. Justification has to do with being right with God. Justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone is essential to the historic Gospel. In fact it is the “heart” of the Gospel. Paul warned the Galatians that if they continued in this Christ-

plus false gospel they would be fallen from grace. In fact Paul declared that if anyone, including himself or even an angel from heaven came to them proclaiming any other so called gospel than what he had first delivered to them, that person or angel would be accursed. The purpose of the Law was to prepare God's people for faith in Christ by driving them to the realization that they could not keep the Law for right standing with God, but rather they must trust in Him alone who could do so, the Lord Jesus Christ. The message of the Judaizers was not a Gospel but it was Law-spell! The issue of justification came up again centuries later and was at the center of the Reformation against Roman Catholicism. Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is the heart of the Gospel. If adding to the Gospel is a damnable thing, how could subtracting from the Gospel be any less?

We Cannot Improve Upon the Gospel!

In our times, there has been so much pressure from the world about our message, about hell, Christ as the only way to God, repentance, faith alone. Many have attempted to make the message more palatable, reducing what they may consider offensive by avoiding the topic of hell, altogether sidestepping the concept of repentance and dancing around the truth of Christ as the only way. We see this in some of the movements of our day such as the "Seeker" movement, the "Emerging" and "Emergent" movements. In response to these aberrations, churches such as our own, have aligned with groups such as the Gospel Coalition, Together for the Gospel and Nine-Marks so that by the grace of God, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will remain central as the message of the Church and of the Great Commission. Article IX of the Together for the Gospel Affirmations says:

"We affirm that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's means of bringing salvation to His people, that sinners are commanded to believe the Gospel, and that the church is commissioned to preach and teach the Gospel to all nations. We deny that evangelism can be reduced to any program, technique, or marketing approach. We further deny that salvation can be separated from repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Together for the Gospel, Art. IX, Affirmations and Denials

Again, repentance and faith in Christ, crucified and risen! We must not subtract from the full Gospel.

The Great Commission and Evangelism

The Gospel is actually the message of the Great Commission. After our Lord rose from the dead, He called the Apostles before Him and commissioned them to go into all the world and make disciples.

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

This commission has been passed from the Apostles to each successive generation of the Church. The Gospel is the essential truth and message of this commission, without which it cannot be fulfilled according to God's will. So preaching the Gospel is the fundamental, indispensable approach to evangelizing new disciples and it is also the fundamental indispensable foundation along with the Apostle's Doctrine to the ongoing spiritual growth and perseverance of all Christ's disciples. The goal of our evangelism, in preaching the Gospel of Christ far and wide, is to call sinners to repentance and faith in Christ alone, then baptize and teach them.



Proclaiming the Gospel – The Bad News and the Good News

In communicating the Gospel to the lost, the challenge we face is that we must communicate some very serious truths to them. There is some really bad news we must confront them with, and then there is some really good news we will offer them to embrace and believe! Below is an approach to this awesome task:

- 1) Communicate the serious truth that God is completely holy and righteous and is a just judge who will have justice. **Leviticus 19:2; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; Hebrews 10:30; 1 Peter 1:16**
- 2) Communicate the really bad news that lost humans are depraved, dead in sins and trespasses, stand guilty before God, are by nature children of wrath, and cannot rescue themselves. We cannot sugar-coat this bad news. No nice "spiritual laws" will do. **Rom. 3:9-23; Eph. 2:1, 3; 2 Thess. 1:8**
- 3) Communicate the really good news that God in proactive redeeming love sent His One Unique Son to reconcile guilty sinners to Himself, and that there is complete forgiveness of sin and right standing with God available to all who believe in the Person of Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection, exhorting them to personally trust in Christ. **Jer. 31:31; John 3:16; Acts 10:43; Rom. 4:25; 5:1, 9; 10:9-13; 2 Cor. 5:19**

The loving thing to do is to say the truth with compassion. Sidestepping the hard realities is not right or loving. Milton Vincent has written:

“The more I rehearse and exult in Gospel truths, the more there develops within me a corresponding burden for non-Christians to enter into such blessings. This is also what happened to the Apostle Paul while writing the book of Romans.” Milton Vincent, A Gospel Primer, p. 25

We must trust God to help us sincerely tell the lost these realities, confront them with God’s righteous requirements and offer His saving remedy in love and compassion, while looking to God to bring them to repentance and faith.

The Brilliance of the Gospel Against the Backdrop of the Darkness of Sin



The glorious reality of the Gospel may not be realized for its beauty unless one comes to see it in comparison to the extreme wickedness of sin. Human sin is like a dark, black void. No light, no truth, no hope. The glory and preciousness of the Gospel is like a sparkling diamond, brilliantly reflecting in the light. Just like a beautiful, brilliant shining diamond appears more glorious against a black velvet backdrop, so the Gospel is all the more clear and glorious when it is understood in opposition to the darkness and wickedness of human sin, the way God sees it.

Calling Sinners to Repentance and Faith – Obedience to the Gospel

As we have said, the core of the Gospel message is a historical, Biblical, Christological series of events. In the Great Commission the Church has been called to preach this message in evangelism to make disciples. In preaching this saving message we must confront the lost with the bad news and declare the good news and call them to repentance and faith. Repentance and faith are a lost sinner’s right response to the Gospel.

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Rom. 10:16, 17

“God commands everyone everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30-31

We see Biblical examples of this beginning at Pentecost, after Peter had finished preaching, the crowd, cut to the heart, called out to him, “what must we do to be saved?” and Peter responded:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2

The passage goes on to record that in response to Peter’s preaching, three thousand souls were added to the Church.

When Paul and Silas were in the Philippian jail, after the earthquake, the jailer struck with fear appealed to them, “What must I do to be saved?” and Paul responded,

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved ...” Acts 16:31

Paul, later in the letter to the Romans, expounding on this great salvation wrote,

“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

These responses show obedience to the Gospel. To obey the Gospel is to repent and believe in Christ.

The Universal Call vs. the Effectual Call - Our Gospel is the Gospel of Sovereign Grace

Why then do so many people when told of their desperate situation reject God’s offer of forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ? We recently covered these reasons in the article The Fall of Man.

***Sinful man is dead in sins and trespasses, Ephesians 2:1.**

***Sinful man is enslaved to sin and is held under the sway of the wicked one to do his will, 2 Tim. 2:26.**

***Sinful man suppresses the truth of God in unrighteousness, Romans 1:18.**

The Bible tells us that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers:

“And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”
2 Corinthians 4:3, 4

But, the Word of God also tells us that the Lord opens the hearts of those whom He will save:

“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”
Acts 13:48

“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, ... who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized...” Acts 16:14, 15

As we have said, the Gospel is God’s appointed means for bringing sinners to Christ. We have also emphasized that God commands everyone everywhere to repent and believe. This is what is known as the universal or external call of the Gospel. Yet, the Lord Jesus Himself taught that due to humanity’s sinful condition, no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him and enables him, John 6. Furthermore, He taught that no one can either see or enter the kingdom of God unless he is first born again, John 3. So, that which God commands the sinner to do, the sinner is unable to do of his own accord. God must make the difference. This is what is called the effectual call or regeneration. When the Spirit of God attends the preaching of the Gospel with conviction of sin and regeneration, the heart of the dead sinner is made alive, is awakened to the sinfulness of sin and sweetness of the Gospel and repents and believes. For it is by grace through faith, that is Sovereign Grace, that anyone at all is saved:



“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9

Our right response to the Lord and our attitude in realization of this His amazing Sovereign Grace towards us must be a corresponding love and full allegiance from sincere hearts of gratitude.

The Gospel is for Sinners and for Saints

The Gospel is not only for sinners unto salvation but also for believers unto edification, sanctification and glorification! As Christians, we need to rehearse the Gospel to ourselves daily, to humble us to confession of our faults, to trust daily in the shed blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sin, to have our consciences cleansed of the burden of our sin and failures, to encourage us and help us persevere in our relationship with God. We can never get enough of the Gospel. We cannot maintain a healthy relationship with God based on some “law-spel” works treadmill. Rather, only by living in the light of the truths of the Gospel every day of our lives will we successfully and fruitfully persevere in faith to the glory of God. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, therefore we must deny ourselves, pick up our crosses and follow Him, Luke 9:23, reckon ourselves dead to sin, Rom. 6:11, and live in the realization that we have been raised with Him positionally, and that same power that raised Jesus from the dead works mightily in us who believe, Ephesians 1:16-20. The following words aptly describe what our relationship to the Gospel must continue to be:

“The Gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who *is believing*” – who goes on believing. It's the same as 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 where Paul says, "I preached to you [the Gospel], which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are being saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."

The Gospel is the Power of God unto Salvation, Sermon by John Piper, June 21, 1998

Tim Keller writes in light of Gal. 2:14, that we be careful to live “in line with the truth of the Gospel”.

“We see that the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our life-- spiritual, psychological, corporate, social--by thinking, hoping, and living out the “lines” or ramifications of the Gospel. The Gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving.”

[Tim Keller, The Centrality of the Gospel, Online Article](#)

Milton Vincent has written:

“The Gospel also reminds me that my righteous standing with God always holds firm regardless of my performance, because my standing is based solely on the work of Jesus and not mine. On my worst days of sin and failure, the Gospel encourages me with God’s unrelenting grace toward me. On my best days of victory and usefulness, the Gospel keeps me relating to God solely on the basis of Jesus’ righteousness and not mine.”

Milton Vincent, A Gospel Primer, p. 20

The Gospel is Intensely Personal – The New Covenant - Eternal Life to Know God

The Gospel is very personal, that is to say, we must believe it for ourselves. No one is “grandfathered” in as it were. God has no grandchildren, only sons and daughters by grace through faith in Christ by adoption. We must personally embrace the Christ of the Gospel by grace through faith and we must personally persevere in relationship with God by grace through faith and walking in His ways. It has become popular in some circles to emphasize relationship with God by saying “Christianity is not a religion, it’s a relationship!” The problem with evangelizing using trendy

sayings, is that truth generally suffers from it. In a sincere attempt to counter-act “dead” religion in a catchy phrase, this phrase is partly wrong and partly right. Many who use this catchy phrase don’t even realize where the “relationship” factor comes from in Scripture. We suggest a hopefully more Biblical phrase, **“Christianity is not mere external religion, it is knowing God!”**

As believers in the saving Gospel, we are participants in the New Covenant. We will look into God’s use of covenants in future articles, but here we want to briefly recognize that the Gospel has come to its fullest revelation and clarity under the New Covenant. Just as the Gospel is part of the Great Commission, the Great Commission is under the New Covenant era. We should always give thanks that we are under the New Covenant instead of the Old Covenant “schoolmaster”, as God’s grace in Christ is most clear and complete under the New Covenant administration. The New Covenant is also referred to as the “Eternal Covenant” and is the richest and final. In Jeremiah 31:31ff (also Heb. 8), the LORD promises among other things, that each and every one of His people will know Him personally, and that He will forgive our iniquity individually and remember our sin no more. This dovetails so wonderfully with the Gospel message itself, as eternal life is to know God, John 17:3, and complete forgiveness of sins is offered freely in the Gospel. This is intensely personal and individual. That being said, it is not ultimately individualistic but is also very corporate. Together we as individuals make up the Church, the Body of Christ. We the many make up the one body. We will explore the nature of the Church in a future article. Ephesians 5:35 says that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. We are His Bride.

The Gospel is God

The Gospel is historical, Biblical, Christological and it is intensely personal, but there is sense in which the Gospel is God Himself! We would be careful here to not violate our own cautions about using catchy phrases in our communication of the Gospel. There is no one verse in the Bible that says, “God is the Gospel.” There is a valid sense however, in which we can say that the ultimate benefit of the Gospel is God Himself! John Piper writes,

“When I say that God is the Gospel, I mean that the highest, best, final, decisive good of the Gospel, without which no other gifts would be good, is the glory of God in the face of Christ revealed for our everlasting enjoyment. The saving love of God is God’s commitment to do everything necessary to enthrall us with what is most deeply and durably satisfying, namely himself. Since we are sinners and have no right and no desire to be enthralled with God, therefore God’s love enacted a plan of redemption to provide that right and that desire. The supreme demonstration of God’s love was the sending of his Son to die for our sins and to rise again so that sinners might have the right to approach God and might have the pleasure of his presence forever...” “The Gospel is the good news of our final and full enjoyment of the glory of God in the face of Christ. That this enjoyment had to be purchased for sinners at the cost of Christ’s life makes his glory shine all the more brightly. And that this enjoyment is a free and unmerited gift makes it shine more brightly still. But the price Jesus paid for the gift and the unmerited freedom of the gift are not the gift. The gift is Christ himself as the glorious image of God—seen and savored with everlasting joy.” John Piper, God is the Gospel, Intro., p. 13, 14

Eternal life is to know God. Knowing God is a promise of the New Covenant as we have seen. So, in a real valid sense the ultimate benefit of believing the Gospel is to enjoy the Tri-Una God in all His glory as our own God. How Awesome is that? Hallelujah what a Savior!

Why the Gospel?

Why the Gospel? What would motivate a perfect, righteous, self-sufficient Being such as God is, to proactively seek and save depraved, rebellious, selfish, hell deserving sinners like ourselves? It is not because of us, even though the Lord has loved us with an eternal saving love.

Matt Chandler has written:

“From beginning to end, the Scriptures reveal that the foremost desire of God’s heart is not our salvation but rather the glory of his own name. ... The life, ministry ... and cross of Christ were for the glory of God. You and I are saved to the praise of His glorious grace.”

Matt Chandler, the Explicit Gospel, p. 33, 34

**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

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” 2 Cor. 5:19

**“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to
everyone who believes” Romans 1:16**

The Gospel, God has done it for His own glory!

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