

Foundations I, Part 3: The Gospel

Gospel: Literally the “Good News” that presupposes the bad news of our sin

Review

Mankind: Made in God’s image, but separated from God because of sin

Jesus: God’s Son who was sent as a Prophet, Priest and King to save His people from their sins

What Jesus Christ did:

1 Peter 3:18, *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”*

1. Jesus suffered once for sins

Remember that sin is what separates me from God. My biggest need is for the debt owed for my sin be paid. Isaiah 59:2, *“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.”* If it were not for this action of Jesus Christ I would have had to suffer for my sins! But Jesus died “for sins.” This is the greatest thing in the world. I do not have to die in my sins. There is forgiveness.

2. The righteous for the unrighteous

Here we learn his death was substitutionary. He took my place. He stood under the wrath and penalty that I deserved and bore it for me. His death was utterly innocent. It was all for others' sins, and not his own.

3. Christ died “once for all”

That is to say his death was final and all-sufficient to accomplish the forgiveness of all who believe on him. He does not have to ever offer another sacrifice. It was finished. It was all that was necessary to take away the guilt of my sins. The debt is paid in full.

4. To bring us to God

The result is that we are no longer separated from our God but rather now reunited with Him through His Son Jesus.

Key Terms:

Salvation: to be rescued. 1 Thessalonians 1:10

When asked, “Are you saved?” The natural response could be “Saved from what?”

The term “save” means “to be rescued from a dangerous or threatening situation.” The Bible announces that there will be a day of judgment in which all human beings will be held accountable before the tribunal of God. The ultimate salvation is accomplished by Jesus who *“delivers us from the wrath to come.”* 1 Thessalonians 1:10

Redemption: to be bought back. Romans 3:24

The word redeem means “to buy out.” The term was used specifically in reference to the purchase of a slave’s freedom. If we are “redeemed,” then our prior condition was one of slavery. God has purchased our freedom, and we are no longer in bondage to sin.

Our natural condition was characterized by guilt: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Christ’s redemption has freed us from guilt, being “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

Atonement: to be made right with another. 2 Corinthians 5:21

To atone means to make amends, to set things right. In the Bible, atonement involves substitution and satisfaction. Jesus is the substitute, and his death satisfied the price that had to be paid, for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life. 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

What we must do: God requires of us faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and repentance.

What is faith in Jesus Christ?

Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace by which we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

Ephesians 2:1–9, “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*”

Philippians 3:3–11, “*For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—[4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*”

2 Timothy 1:12

“But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.”

Saving Faith Is Personal: “I”

In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul declares he has no regrets as he is about to die for Christ. Why? The words to the Philippian church from his first imprisonment ring forth: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). In 2 Timothy 1:12, he repeats the *I* six times, saying, “I suffer,” “I am not ashamed,” “I know,” “I believe,” “I am convinced,” and “I entrusted.” Paul’s relationship with Christ was personal. God’s grace had brought him to faith, so he personally believed in the person and saving work of Christ. To be saved, you must know Christ by faith personally. No one else can believe for you.

Saving Faith Is Rational: “know”

To be saved, you must “know” you are a sinner and need a Savior, that you cannot save yourself, and that God graciously sent His Son to save sinners. Paul declared “I know” because God had laid hold of him. The religious terrorist who killed Christians now became one, and the Lord used him to win untold numbers to Christ. The one who desired to destroy the church became the greatest church planter in history. He had no secondhand faith—it was personal and it was rational: “I know.” While you can never know Christ exhaustively, you can know Him accurately.

Saving Faith Is Emotional: “persuaded”

When people come to Christ, they know the truth of Christ passionately, that is, with “conviction.” Paul’s last words state emphatically that he was “convinced” of what he knew. The passion of the

Apostle Paul's heart and life illustrate how he grasped the knowledge of Christ wholly. Not only must we know Christ personally and knowledgeably, we must embrace Him with conviction. He is not only the Lord of glory, He is also our Lord and Savior. This knowledge must fill our minds and command our hearts.

Saving Faith Is Volitional: “trust/entrusted”

Saving faith is not only personal (I), rational (knowledge), and emotional (conviction), it is also volitional (trust). It is an act of the liberated will. The authenticity of true believers is marked by fully entrusting themselves to Christ as Lord and Savior. Let me illustrate. I can see a chair and “know” it is a chair. I can be emotionally transparent and vulnerable by publicly declaring it a chair with full conviction. Yet, the moment that you know I truly believe it is a chair is when I entrust myself to it by sitting upon it. I may know that I am a sinner and cannot save myself and that Christ is the Son of God and Savior of sinners. I can be emotionally drawn to such a message with a certain passion and conviction. Yet, the singular evidence that I personally know and that I am surely convinced that Christ is my Lord and Savior is when I rest upon Him and trust Him alone as He is offered to me in the gospel.

Saving Faith Is Directional: “whom”

Paul doesn't direct his faith to his conversion experience (I know when I believe), his theological knowledge (I know what I believe), or even faith itself (I know that I believe). Paul's relationship with Christ is person to person, and he declares, “I know whom I have believed” and “He is able.” Christianity will always lead us to a religious way of life, but it is not the religion that leads us to Christ. It is the relationship with Christ that leads us to live a sacred life *coram Deo*—before the face of God.

What is repentance unto life?

Repentance leading to life is a saving grace, by which a sinner having truly realized his sin and grasped the mercy of God in Christ, turns from his sin with grief and hatred and turns to God with full resolve and effort after new obedience.

Acts 11:18, “*When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”*”

Psalms 51:1–4, “*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. [2] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! [3] For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. [4] Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.*”

2 Corinthians 7:10, “*For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*”

Charles Spurgeon writes:

Repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved.

J. I. Packer writes:

Repentance means turning from as much as you know of your sin to give as much as you know of yourself to as much as you know of your God, and as our knowledge grows at these three points so our practice of repentance has to be enlarged.

Repentance involves:

1. Fully Acknowledge the Weight of Your Sin.

Before David asks for joy in Psalm 51:8 and 51:12, he acknowledges the weight of his sin: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (Psalm 51:4). The joy of repentance flows directly out of its grief; there is no path to Sunday morning except through Friday afternoon. Thus in repentance, we must fully acknowledge the weight of our sin; we must own the staggering cost that held Christ on that cross; we must face squarely, without excuse or evasion, the depths of our guilt before a holy God.

2. Boldly Claim the Promises of Grace.

In the gospel, the sins we repent of are already forgiven before we even repent. We might still have to bear the consequences of our sins for a time, and perhaps even the Lord’s gracious discipline. But because of the justifying blood of Christ, our status in the eyes of heaven never waxes and wanes with the ups and downs of our sanctification. When Christ comes into our lives, we are fully, eternally, and unchangeably forgiven. This enables us to repent with a kind of glad abandon. Repentance is like saying you’re sorry to a friend after he has already run to you, embraced you, kissed you, and clung to you. There is nothing to hide, and nothing to fear. The gospel also enables us to lay hold of God’s promises for forgiveness and change while we are repenting. David’s prayer, “let me hear joy and gladness” in Psalm 51:8 is of one piece with his prayer, “wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” in Psalm 51:7.

3. Involve Other People as Appropriate.

Repentance is first and foremost a vertical matter coram Deo (before the face of God). But sincere repentance cannot help but spill out onto the horizontal plane as well. James 5:16 envisions one way it could happen: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

When we repent before others — in an appropriate context, and in a non-showy way — James says it brings healing. It frees us from our pride, it edifies others, and it puts the power of the gospel on public display.

If you are battling a habitual sin and you have not held yourself accountable in any way, be honest with yourself: You might feel badly about your sin, but you are not actually repenting of it. Repentance is more than remorse — it means change. Raise the stake in your repentance by involving others. Risk the bone-crushing humiliation of total honesty. It may be your path to freedom and joy.

Faith and Repentance go together

Suppose a child goes beyond the safety mark when swimming to reach a brightly coloured piece of wood, gets into difficulties, and is about to drown – despite desperately clinging to the wood. About to sink, the child hears its father’s voice, ‘Let go [of] that toy, hold tight to me, and I will save you.’ The child does so, and is saved. This story can illustrate repentance and faith. We have been put into this world to serve God, but we have gone beyond the limits set for us after other things that are no true help to us. In fact, if we hold on to them we will be lost. We must give up the ways God has forbidden – we call this repentance, and we must truly rely upon Christ to save us – we call this faith. Although explained separately in the catechism, repentance and faith cannot be separated in our experience, for each is involved in the other. Whoever truly repents, believes; and whoever truly believes, repents.

What is justification?

Justification is an act of God’s free grace in which he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight for the sake of the righteousness of Christ alone, which is credited to us and received by faith alone.

Romans 3:9–28, “[9] *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written:*

“None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” [14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” [15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [17] and the way of peace they have not known.” [18] There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
[19] Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. [20] For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
[27] Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. [28] For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Justification is a term from the law courts. It means pronouncing a person righteous or not guilty; it is the opposite of condemnation or the sentence of ‘guilty’. It is an act, and thus occurs once. We do not deserve this treatment. The cause is Christ, whose righteousness is credited to us through faith. Faith has no merit in it to gain a right standing with God, but is the means by which we take to ourselves God’s free gift. Works flowing from faith are fruits of a right relationship, not means of establishing it.

The removal of sin. Romans 3:10-12

The granting of Jesus’ perfect record (righteousness) Romans 3:20-21

Received by faith alone. Romans 3:22-24

What is adoption?

Adoption is an act of God’s free grace by which we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

John 1:12–13 *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

1 John 3:1 *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”*

We know move from the language of the courtroom to the language of the family. The believer is not only declared righteous; he is also brought into God’s family, and once so brought by God’s grace he is there for ever.

Those privileges include:

- Have God’s name put upon them. John 1:12**
- Receive the Spirit of adoption. Romans 8:15**
- Have access to the throne of grace with boldness.**
- Are enabled to cry, Abba, Father. Galatians 4:6**
- Are pitied. Psalm 103:13**
- Protected. Proverbs 14:26**

Provided for. Matthew 6:30, 32

Disciplined by God as by a Father. Hebrews 12:6

Yet never cast off. Lamentations 3:31

Sealed to the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30

Inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation. Hebrews 6:12

The Gospel

Gospel: Literally the “Good News” that presupposes the bad news of our sin

What Jesus Christ did:

1 Peter 3:18, *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”*

1. **Jesus suffered for sins**
2. **The righteous for the unrighteous**
3. **Christ died "once for all"**
4. **To bring us to God**

Key Terms:

Salvation: to be rescued. **1 Thessalonians 1:10**

Redemption: to be bought back. **Romans 3:23-24**

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