

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we receive this great salvation in our lives today?

This handout has been prepared to show you how much we need the Gospel, why it is such good news, how we receive it and how we respond to it.

Why do we need the Gospel?

We cannot really understand how good the message of the Gospel is until we understand how bad our situation is without it. We are poor miserable sinners. We sin daily and deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment.

Without Jesus Christ, our situation would be totally hopeless. The Scriptures describe human beings as dead in trespasses and sin. Without the mercy and cleansing of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, there awaits for us only everlasting punishment in hell. Thus, we need the Gospel—desperately!

What is the Gospel?

The word "gospel" is a translation of a Greek word that means, "an announcement of good news." The Gospel is the good news that God the Holy Trinity decided not to abandon humanity when Adam and Eve first fell into sin. God decided then and there that sin and death would not have the last word. He promised to send a Savior.

When the time was right, God sent His Son into our world to be born of the Virgin Mary. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfect life for us. On the cross, He received the penalty and punishment for the sins of the whole world, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus rose from the dead, victorious over our ancient enemies: sin, death and the devil.

Therefore, each Christian is able with great joy and confidence to declare before the whole world: "My Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

What glorious good news! The one, true eternal and all-powerful God came into our world to live, suffer, die and rise again for us. We, who are unholy and unrighteous, receive the forgiveness of all our sins and thus receive the perfect holiness and righteousness of Christ our Savior—as a free gift—purely because of His love for us. That is good news! That is the Gospel!

How do we receive this great salvation in our lives today?

How do we personally receive the forgiveness Christ won for the entire world? How does what happened on the cross nearly 2,000 years ago flow into our lives today?

Here too there is very good news. God, through His Gospel, offers us forgiveness and help against sin in more than one way. God is surpassingly rich in His grace. He gives His Gospel to us through His Word, through Baptism, through the Sacrament of the Altar (Lord's Supper), and through confession and absolution. These are the ways God enters our lives today to apply to us personally the great salvation Christ won for the world.

The Holy Spirit works through the Word of the Gospel to create and sustain faith in our heart that Christ is the Savior of the world, and thus our Savior too. The Bible is the Word of God, written down for our learning and edification. The Scriptures are filled with the good news of Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us. Through the almighty, Spirit-filled Word, God gathers us into His church, which is truly the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is present, effective and active through the Word when it is proclaimed, heard and meditated upon.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is water included in God's command and combined with God's Word; or as St. Paul says in Holy Scripture, "The washing of water with the word." Through Baptism, we are made partakers of Christ's death and resurrection. Therefore, we know that Baptism works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal life to all who believe. Since Baptism is connected to the Word and promise of God, it is truly a life-giving water, rich in grace—a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.

Christ has provided a special application of the Gospel through confession and absolution. Confession is admitting our sins to God and receiving His forgiveness from our pastor, as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. Thus, by divine ordinance, Christ Himself has entrusted absolution to his Christian church and commanded us to absolve one another from sins.

The Lord's Supper is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink. In the Lord's Supper, Christ's body and blood are given to us as our treasure and gift which sustains our faith and life in

Him. If you are heavy-laden and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the Sacrament and receive refreshment, comfort and strength.

Those who want to be forgiven by God and who want to enjoy His presence in their lives, hunger and thirst for the Word and Sacraments. With the Psalmist we say, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" God has provided the means to receive Him. So, Christians hunger and thirst for God's Word, absolution, the Sacrament, etc. We have the certainty that God meets us and gives us what we need in His means of grace. The forgiveness Christ won for the world on the cross is applied to us personally by God through His Word and Sacraments. What a joy for us to know that where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Thus, we believe that we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith. In the same way, He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all of our sins, and the sins of all believers.

How does God cause us to respond to His Gospel?

We love God because He first loved us. Our Lord is at work in us both to will and to do what is pleasing to Him. Christians look to the Ten Commandments to know what is pleasing to God and wish to serve Him in gratitude for the great salvation that is theirs in Christ.

From the Word of God we learn that God wants us to put Him first, above any other person or thing, to respect His name and not misuse it, to hear and obey His Word. Children are to honor and obey their parents and others in authority. We are to look out for the welfare of others, doing nothing to hurt or harm our neighbor. We are to live sexually pure and decent lives, with husbands and wives loving and honoring each another. In looking out for our neighbor's welfare and helping him to improve and protect his property and business, we are also to take care not to lie about our neighbor, but to help, support and defend him in every need, and, finally, we are to be content with what we have been given, and not want what is not ours.

What a joyful privilege we have to serve God and others! He gives us the opportunity to bear witness to our faith through both our words and our deeds.

How is the Gospel obscured?

The Gospel is obscured by well-intentioned people who want to encourage a life of good works, and end

up making Christians think that it is by their works that they are saved. This is a great danger. Through His Word and Sacraments, Jesus is constantly working in our lives to forgive our sins and strengthen our relationship with God. God always receives the credit for our salvation. He is the one working in us. This is not something we can do. Our good works are the result of God's love in our hearts and lives. Our good works in this life do not save us, only Christ saves us. Works serve our neighbor and show to the world that we are grateful for God's mercy in our lives.

Another way the Gospel can be obscured is when too much emphasis is put on an emotional response to the Gospel. Some Christians believe that unless they have some sort of ecstatic, charismatic experience, or feel some sort of "spiritual high," they are not really Christians. It is truly sad that some people look into their own hearts for the security that they are children of God, instead of putting their hope and trust in the objective work of Christ for them, and in the means God uses to come to them—His Word and Sacraments.

If we find ourselves beginning to ask, "Am I doing enough?" or thinking, "It doesn't matter what I do, for God will forgive me anyway," then we are at risk of losing Christ and His forgiveness. We look always to Jesus and put our hope and trust in Him. He is our Savior. And, that's good news!

All blessing, honor, thanks and praise to Father, Son and Spirit, the God who saved us by His grace. All glory to His merit! O triune God in heaven above, you have revealed your saving love. Your blessed name we hallow.

— Dr. A.L. Barry
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