

The Gospel – The Message of Jesus Christ

The Gospel Defined – What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is a Message

The word “*gospel*” comes from the Greek word “*evangelion*” ...2098 meaning “a good message, i.e. the gospel,” or “the good news.” This is where we derive our word “*evangel*” and also “*evangelical*,” two words which are commonly used in Christianity to speak of “the Gospel” or of “being Gospel believing.” When we use the word “Gospel” in Christianity it takes on a very specific and defined meaning which has its origin in the Bible, and more specifically in the New Testament (even though the Old Testament pointed to it frequently). It is in fact “the message of the good news” of Jesus Christ and the free offer of salvation from sin and reconciliation to God through Him. So to define the Gospel in a brief statement it would look something like this.....

The *message* or “*good news*” of the person and work of Jesus Christ, God the Son, come to the earth to fulfill God’s eternal plan of salvation. The message carries within it the power to transform the sinner by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, into a child of God and grant them eternal life. It furthermore includes the proclamation of all of God’s promises to mankind in Christ, as well as His threatenings to those who continue in their sin and rejection of God’s way of salvation provided “freely” through Jesus Christ. Primarily, mankind has been separated from God by willfully sinning against Him, is subject to His wrath, but that *mankind can be saved from God’s wrath by repentance from sins and faith in Jesus Christ*. This faith is defined as “trusting in and relying upon the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, receiving Him as both Savior and Lord.” It also announces the Kingdom of God, come to the earth now, under the rule of the King, Jesus Christ, and that He will soon return to the earth to destroy sin and evil forever, and renew all things in creation to God’s intended state of glory. Secondly, that this gospel message is to be preached among the nations, so that mankind can be saved from sin and death and reconciled to God through adhering to it. (Romans 1:16-17, 3:19-28, 5:19-21, 10:9-10,17, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Acts 17:24-31, John 3:16-18, 1 John 5:11-13)

This message of the Gospel is at its core rather simple, and yet at the same time has many complex elements and nuances that are very important to understand.

The Gospel is Simple

When we consider the basic elements of the Gospel it is really rather simple. 9Marks.org has classified them in these four basic categories.....

- **God** – It is a message about the One true and living God and His claim on our lives as our Sovereign Creator and Righteous Judge.
- **Man** – Man was created by God, in God's image, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But man sinned against God by disobeying His holy law. Man therefore separated himself from God's holy and satisfying presence, and incurred His wrathful displeasure.
- **Christ** – Christ’s death was the substitute payment for the penalty that we deserved for our sin. His death is God's only provision for the forgiveness of man's sin and the appeasement of God's wrath against him. His life provides a perfect righteousness for us in the sight of God.

- **Response** - We are called to respond to this good news in repentance and belief - turning away from our sin and self-sufficiency toward God, and trusting in the shed blood of Jesus Christ as the substitute penalty that we deserved for our sin.

In these basic elements the Gospel is rather **simple**. In one sentence, *“Man has been separated from God because of sin, and Christ is God’s provision to atone for man’s sins, and man can simply receive God’s provision through repentance and faith.”* This is the good news about Jesus Christ that historic Christianity has always proclaimed and this is the *essential* message that we still proclaim today. The message is timeless and not subject to modernity, or culture or any other influence that would change its meaning until Christ returns in power to establish His Kingdom physically upon the earth.

The Gospel is Complex

Although the essential message of the Gospel is rather simple, it has many details and related matters that cause it to blossom and bloom into a very complex and beautiful saga of immense proportions. In fact, the Gospel is the central theme in History and the crowning achievement of God’s work in creation. The creation was created so that the Gospel story could be accomplished by God and this is what we call Redemptive History. The entire Bible is devoted to revealing this Gospel to us as the central focus of all of the History of mankind, both now and forever. In fact, Heaven is now and will be filled with high praises of the Lamb of God for His very loving and gracious sacrifice at Calvary!

Revelation 5:8-14 - 8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, **“Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”** 10 “And Thou hast made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” 11 And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, **“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”** 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, **“To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”** 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped. NASB

Therefore, the essential message of the Gospel is simple and clear, but the ramifications behind what it is proclaiming is complex and involved in a very awesome way. For example *the Gospel confers on us a KING and a KINGDOM* which has **now** broken into time and space in a certain spiritual way, but has **not yet** reached its fulfillment. Jesus reigns as KING from the right hand of God and is awaiting His enemies to be put under His feet. The Lamb of God has come and given His life as a sacrifice for sins to offer us forgiveness, and He calls us to willingly repent and follow Him. But this same Jesus, the suffering Lamb, is also portrayed in the Bible as the Lion of Judah who is a soon coming King who is coming to conquer and take His Kingdom by force, and warns all who do not obey Him willingly, that rejection of His Kingship will result in the worst possible consequences of all, eternal damnation. (**John 3:36, 2 Thes 1:7-10**) The KINGDOM has come in a very real way, but it has a “NOW” but “NOT YET” characteristic to it.

1 Corinthians 15:22-28 - 22 For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each in his own order:** Christ the first fruits, **after that** those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 **then comes the end**, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, **when** He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 **For He must reign until** He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in

subjection to Him. 28 And when **all things are subjected to Him, then** the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all. NASB

Notice the terms used in this passage, ...order....after that....the....when....until...etc. Thus the Kingdom of God has "stages of fulfillment" which have "NOT YET" reached their climax. All of this is conferred upon us in the Gospel message because in the Gospel we proclaim Jesus as King, and Judge of the living and the dead. All men will face King Jesus in judgment, at death, and will be judged by Him for the "**deeds done in the body.**" The Gospel calls us to obedience to Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord, a Lord who rules over us as our King as well as a Priest who intercedes between us and God.

Acts 10:42-43 - 42 "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that **this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.** 43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that **through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**" NASB

Romans 2:5-6 - 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in **the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to every man according to his deeds:**16 on the day when, **according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.** NASB

Notice how both Peter and Paul tell us that the message or Gospel they are preaching contains this element of judgment to come as well as forgiveness of sins. Or another example of elements in the Gospel is that **the Gospel proclaims to us the One true and living God who is the Creator of all things.** Christianity is *monotheistic*, as there is only one God and there is no other. (Isa 45:5-6) This is a fundamental part of the Gospel message. Without it, the Gospel makes no sense at all.

Acts 14:14-16 - 14 But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and **preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.** NASB

Acts 17:24-28 - 24 "**The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth,** does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, **since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;** 26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 **for in Him we live and move and exist,** as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' NASB

It was important when Paul was preaching to the pagan *polytheistic* (many Gods) people in Lystra and again in Athens, for Him to lay the foundation of monotheism before He could proclaim the entire Gospel to them. This is not unlike the pagan pluralistic culture we find ourselves in here in *postmodern* America. Many people do not have a *monotheistic* worldview, so we must lay that foundation in their understanding so as to make sense out of; - God, Man/Sin, Christ, Response. These things show us how the Gospel is also a complex message made up of many different elements that all work together to display the glory of God and His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul and the other Apostles, were preaching the full Gospel, which included all of God's manifold blessings, threatenings and promises as He brings the creation to its ultimate fulfillment when His Kingdom is established and all His enemies, including death, are destroyed and forever removed, and all things are made new.

Ephesians 3:8-12 - 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, **to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,** 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places.* 11 **This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,** 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. NASB

This is another important aspect of the Gospel. The Kingdom will soon reach its fulfillment and all things will be made new, death and hell no more shall awe us, the old creation will be destroyed and God's people will forever enter His rest, and He will dwell among them!

Revelation 21:1-5 – 1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for **the first heaven and the first earth passed away**, and there is no longer *any* sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and **He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them**, 4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "**Behold, I am making all things new.**" And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." NASB

In fact, all of the categories of doctrine in the Christian faith are inseparably tied to the Gospel and provide for it a foundation and support. All of these great doctrines have important ramifications to the support of the Gospel and work together to weave the tapestry of God's amazing redemptive purpose as He unfolds it in the History of the world.

- **Authority of Scripture** – Apart from the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture the Gospel has little credibility.
- **Theology** – The Gospel proclaims the existence of God and His claim upon mankind as His creatures.
- **Salvation** – The Gospel presents fallen man with the only way to be saved from God's wrath and given eternal life with Him forever through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.
- **Ecclesiology** – The Gospel calls out a people from the darkness of sin and the world to become the people of God through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. All of these redeemed people comprise the Church.
- **Eschatology** – The Gospel proclaims the Kingdom of God and His rule, coming to lay claim to His creation and banish His enemies forever.

And this is not all. The Gospel has other important ramifications as well. Consider this brief outline given by DA Carson in his sermon, "What is the Gospel?"

8 defining words

- **Christological** – A message about Christ, incarnate God, Lord and Savior.
- **Theological** – A message about God and His relations with mankind.
- **Biblical** – A message thoroughly defined by the Bible.
- **Apostolic** – A message preached and established by the Apostles.
- **Historical** – A message based on historical facts.
- **Personal** – A message for paramount importance for every single individual .
- **Universal** – A message to be preached to the entire world.
- **Eschatological** – A message which reveals the purpose and fulfillment of all things and the ultimate ends of the world.

5 clarifying sentences

- The Gospel is heralded through proclamation.
- The Gospel is received in authentic persevering faith.
- The Gospel is disclosed in personal self humiliation.
- The Gospel is the central confession of the whole Church.
- The Gospel is boldly advancing under the contested reign and inevitable victory of King Jesus.

Or consider these elements added to the list by Tim Keller's survey of the Gospel in His sermon "Gospel Centered Ministry."

- **Doxological** – The Gospel is a message that teaches us to glorify, enjoy and worship God and His Christ as the great purpose of all of life.

- **Cultural** - The Gospel is a message that has power to transform the moral fiber of a culture. It cuts to the heart of how people relate to one another with conviction.
- **Transformational** – The Gospel transforms us into new creations in Christ as it is God’s very power to save and transform.
- **Wonderful** – The Gospel is a glorious display of the character and nature of the wonderful God.

All of these things show us clearly that **the Gospel is complex and multifaceted message** about God and His eternal purpose accomplished through Jesus Christ, which encompasses the entire record of human history and the fulfillment of the ages.

Jesus is the Gospel

But in its most basic element it is a message about Christ. Jesus Himself is the beginning and the end of the Gospel. Paul when writing to the Corinthians tells us.....

1 Corinthians 1:20-24 - 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know God*, **God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.** 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but **we preach Christ crucified**, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** NASB

1 Corinthians 1:30-2:2 - 30 But by His doing you are in **Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.** 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." 2:1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 **For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** NASB

Here Paul says Jesus is the power of God and He is the wisdom of God. What Paul is communicating is that we cannot experience the power or wisdom of God apart from the person of Christ because He is the central theme of God’s wisdom and power. We see the power and the wisdom of God through the Gospel, as it explains to us God’s amazing love expressed through Jesus and His passion on the Cross. **“We preach Christ crucified”** says Paul. His message is one about how the death of a certain man can redeem the entire creation from death and decay! This he says is a **“foolish”** message to the Greeks and a **“stumbling block”** to the Jews, but to those whom God has called, **“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”** He goes on to tell us that Jesus has become for us....wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption. Not that Jesus gives us these things, but that He, His person, is those things for us. Now dear friends, here is true freedom....Jesus IS my wisdom....Jesus IS my rightstanding with God....Jesus IS my holiness before God....and Jesus IS my redemption, my personal payment for my personal horrendous sins! Christ IS these things for me, because I am unable to be these things on my own! Oh what a Savior! Jesus’ very name means “The Lord saves!” Jesus is the Gospel! This reminds me of a word from the man of God John Newton..... *“My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.”*

The gospel never changes

What we preach is a very old, old story. The message about Christ and His death, burial and resurrection is fixed historical fact. Further, God sent Him to accomplish redemption for us and it was therefore planned and accomplished by God Himself. It is therefore the fulfillment of the exact requirements of God to meet the demands of His own justice, and Christ performed that perfectly. It ever remains therefore, the unchanging power of God for all who receive it with authentic, persevering faith.

Romans 1:16-17 - 16 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. 17 For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous *man* shall live by faith." NASB