

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C0546 – 12/7/2005 – The Terms of Salvation
What Is the Gospel?

It might almost seem that the question “What is the gospel?” is superfluous. Surely all Christians at least know what the gospel is. However, even a glance at “gospel tracts” shows that there are many different ways people have stated the gospel. Before we state what the gospel is, we will state what the gospel is not.

I. **What the Gospel is Not**

A. **The Bible**

It is often stated that “The Bible is the gospel and the Bible is God’s word.” Truly the Bible is God’s word but there is much in the Bible that is not “gospel”.

Matthew 13:41-42 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴² and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Revelation 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Both of these things are taught in the Bible and are true but they are hardly “gospel”. The word “gospel” means “good news”. Our English word “evangel” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*. The gospel is good news for sinners. It is often stated that the first good news is found in Gen 3:15.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

This is the first announcement of “good news” because it is God’s promise that sin and evil will be conquered by the seed of a woman. This first announcement of “good news” was fulfilled in the virgin born Jesus Christ who conquered Satan at the cross. So, the Bible contains the gospel but there is a great deal in the Bible which is true but not gospel.

B. The Commandments of the Law

When I ask someone “what must you do to be saved?” the most common response I get is “obey God”. Many people think if they obey the Ten Commandments or follow Christ’s instructions in the Sermon on the Mount then they will be saved. Surely the standard set in both of these is high. Yet has any man ever lived up to those standards? Surely if any man did, they would be all right yet no man ever has. The purpose of the Law and the Sermon on the Mount was *not* to produce a righteousness that would fit them for the kingdom of heaven. It was for the express purpose of showing men their need for a righteousness that comes by faith in the Messiah! The righteousness of the Messiah alone fits one for the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Law is not the gospel; it was rather a tutor to lead men to see their need for Christ!

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

C. Reformation of Life

The gospel is not the call to “commitment of life”, to surrender all to Christ, to promise obedience, to make restitution for past sins, or to promise to do better. These things have their proper place but they are not what makes up the gospel. It is a mistake to think that the gospel is a call to reform one’s life, a call to do one’s duty, a call to better your behavior. The gospel is no such thing. It is rather good news to be believed.

D. Giving Up the World

Nor is the gospel a demand that you give up the world, that you give up your sins, that you quit bad habits and replace them with good habits. A person can do all these things and yet never believe the gospel. A person may better themselves, relatively speaking, and yet never be saved at all.

II. There is But One Gospel

There are many religions in the world and thus people assume that there are many gospels. Because there are so many religions it is impossible to know which one is true and so we should study them all and take the best things from each one and put them all in one bag. This is called syncretism or eclecticism. In this way we can achieve worldwide brotherhood and unity.

There is one crucial thing that separates all the world's religions from biblical Christianity. And that is that all the world's religions tell man he must earn his salvation while biblical Christianity says that there is nothing a man can do to earn his salvation so God supplied what we were unable in His Son Jesus Christ. Even "our righteousnesses are filthy rags" (Isa 64:6). Christianity is not what you can do for God but what God has done for you in His Unique Son. Paul said there are not many gospels but only one gospel.

Galatians 1:6-8 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷ Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

It is not good news that man must earn his salvation, that we must earn favor with God. It is good news that Christ has earned favor with God and that by faith alone in Christ we stand in His favor. We supply nothing because we have nothing to supply. Christ is all in all to the glory of the Father.

III. NINE DESIGNATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

A. The Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mk. 1:15; Lk. 16:16)

The “gospel of the kingdom” reveals the **destiny** of all who are born again by believing the gospel.

John 3:3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The gospel of the kingdom is preached whenever the kingdom of God is at hand. Thus, it was preached in Jesus' day

Matthew 9:35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the *gospel of the kingdom*,

and will be preached again during the Tribulation.

Matthew 24:14 "This *gospel* of the *kingdom* shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

The “gospel of the kingdom” does not exclude the cross message.

B. The Gospel of God (Mk. 1:14; Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Co. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2, 8f; 1 Pet. 4:17)

The “gospel of God” refers to the **source** of the gospel as the Triune God.

Mark 1:14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the *gospel of God*,

Jesus came preaching the gospel that was sourced in God. It is not a human message but a divine one.

C. The Gospel of His Son

The gospel which has as its **content** God's own Son.

Romans 1:9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the gospel* of His Son,

The content of the gospel is none other than God's own Son and not another Son. Jesus Christ is eternally the Son of God in His divine nature (eternal sonship).

D. The Gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph 3:6)

The **object** of the gospel is Jesus Christ. The whole thing is centered on His person and His work. Thus, the Bible speaks of "the gospel of Jesus Christ".

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, the *Son* of God

E. The Gospel of the Grace of God

Acts 20:24 "But I do not consider my life *of* any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly *of* the *gospel of* the grace *of* God.

This is my favorite verse in the Bible. The **basis** of the gospel message is the grace of God. This grace gospel is contrary to works and only in accordance with faith (Rom 4:16). It is a by grace through faith message that results in salvation.

F. The Gospel of Salvation (Rom 1:16)

The first **result** of the gospel is salvation. Believing the gospel of Christ seals our salvation.

Ephesians 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message *of* truth, the *gospel of* your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit *of* promise,

G. The Gospel of Peace

A second **result** of the gospel is peace. When one believes the gospel, he has peace with God, meaning he and God are bound together. Assurance of this peace is necessary to have stability in the Christian life.

Ephesians 6:15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION *OF* THE *GOSPEL OF* PEACE;

H. The Gospel of the Glory of Christ

The final **result** of salvation is gaining the glory of Christ. And thus, the Bible speaks of the “gospel of the glory of Christ” because it comes from the place where Jesus entered. He entered the holy of holies once for all and ripped the veil from top to bottom. The gospel is the declaration of God’s glory in Christ. He is the everlasting God.

2 Corinthians 4:4 in whose case the god *of* this world has blinded the minds *of* the unbelieving so that they might not see the light *of* the *gospel of* the glory *of* Christ, who is the image *of* God.

It is this same glory that one will assuredly gain if he simply believes in Christ (2 Thes. 2:14).

I. The Everlasting Gospel

The everlasting **nature** of the gospel is mentioned in

Revelation 14:6 And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an *eternal gospel* to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;

These nine gospel designations reveal nine relationships of the gospel. Its...

- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. destiny | kingdom of heaven |
| 2. source | Triune God |
| 3. content | The Son |
| 4. object | Jesus Christ |
| 5. basis | grace |
| 6. results | salvation |
| 7. | peace |
| 8. | glory |
| 9. nature | everlasting |

IV. THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel that I myself preached (aorist middle) to you, which also you received (aorist active), in which you stand (perfect active)

2 by which also you are being saved (present passive), if you hold fast (present active) the word which I myself preached (aorist middle) to you, unless you believed (aorist active) in vain.

The verse at first read may cause confusion thinking that verse 2 warns that you may lose your salvation. The sequence is clear when we take a look at the grammar which is vital to a proper understanding. “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel that I myself preached”; aorist middle. Paul himself had preached the gospel to the Corinthians while he was with them. Here he is about to make know that gospel to them again. That gospel “which also you received”; aorist active. The Corinthian’s received Paul’s gospel and it is in that gospel “which you stand”; perfect active. The Corinthian’s, upon hearing the gospel Paul preached received the gospel at that time at which point they began to stand and continue to stand. Thus, the topic here is justification by faith alone, of which receive is a synonym. The sequence so far is

Paul Preached-->Corinthian's Received-->Corinthian's Standing

Verse 2 “by which also you are being saved”; present tense. This is the present aspect of the Corinthian’s salvation, what we often call sanctification. They will be sanctified “if you hold fast” (present active) the word which Paul preached, that is “the gospel” which he is about to proclaim (vv. 3ff). “if you hold fast” is a 1st class conditional, thus Paul is assuming that they are holding fast. The Corinthian’s present salvation is conditioned upon their present holding fast to the essentials of the gospel. That is, “unless you believed in vain.” Perhaps some of them never believed in the gospel to begin with, in which case they never entered into the chain of events that followed Paul’s preaching. They simply heard the word but never truly believed the gospel.

Thus, verse 1 is interested in the gospel’s relationship to justification (aorist and perfect tenses) and verse 2 is interested in the gospel’s relationship to sanctification (present tenses). The final sequence for all who genuinely believed is...

Paul Preached-->Corinthian's Received-->Corinthian's Standing-->

If Corinthian's Hold Fast-->Corinthians Will Be Saved.

For those who believed in vain the sequence is simply...

Paul Preached

There is no justification or sanctification for those who have believed in vain. Sanctification presupposes justification but the essentials of the gospel are related to both!

1. Believing the essentials of the gospel results in "standing" (justification)
2. Holding fast to the essentials of the gospel results in "being saved" (sanctification)

All salvation is by grace through faith. Justification is by grace through faith. Sanctification is by grace through faith. Indeed, Paul said it was by faith from beginning to end (Rom 1:16-17).

If the Corinthian believers deny the resurrection then this is going to stunt their sanctification (see 15:12, 34). He is not saying they can lose their standing (justification) if they don't hold to the word which he preached. They already received the gospel essentials and stand, but a departure from the gospel essentials would greatly stunt their sanctification. This illustrates the principle of how closely related right doctrine is to right practice. A departure from sound doctrine will result in a departure from sound living (see 15:12 & 34). Adherence to sound doctrine will result in adherence to sound living.

2 Timothy 2:16-18 But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ *men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

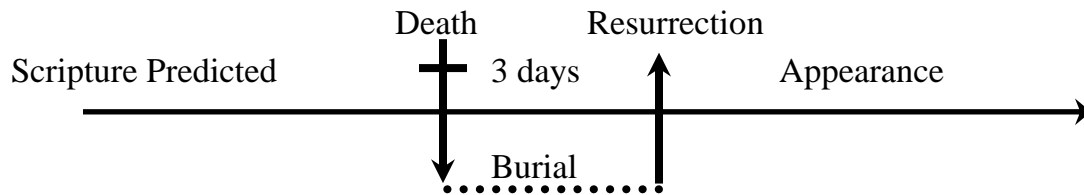
Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that the resurrection was in the past and this kind of worldly and empty chatter leads to ungodliness, the opposite of sanctification! Thus, the gospel essentials are now proclaimed by Paul in verses 3-5.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 For I delivered (aorist active) to you first, what I also received (aorist active), that Christ died (aorist active) for our sins according to the Scriptures 4 and that he was buried (aorist passive) and that he is raised (perfect passive) the third day according to the Scriptures 5 and that he appeared (aorist passive) to Kephas and then to the twelve;

Notice the structure in verses 3-4.

1. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures
 - that He was buried
2. that He is raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
 - that He appeared

The phrase “according to the Scriptures” is only attached to two of the four phrases. This indicates that Paul’s gospel had two essential elements: 1) that Christ died and 2) that He was raised.ⁱ After each of these Paul gives a historical evidence. The historical evidence of His death was “that He was buried”. The historic evidence of His resurrection was “that He appeared”.



PREDICTED	HISTORICAL EVIDENCE
Christ’s Death	Burial
Christ’s Resurrection	Appearance

Thus, the first essential of the gospel message is that Christ died. The historical evidence of this is that he was buried in a tomb. No matter how kind or enthusiastic the preacher may be, no matter how many nice things he may say about Jesus, if the substitutionary death of Christ is not preached then the gospel has not been proclaimed. Since the substitutionary death of Christ is *essential* to the gospel message it must be believed in order to be justified and must continue to be believed in order for the believer to be sanctified.

The second essential of the gospel message is that Christ was raised. The historical evidence of this is that he appeared to more than 500 people. If someone teaches that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb (i.e., Theft Theory), or that the apostles merely thought they saw Jesus (i.e., the Hallucination Theory), or that Jesus’ body was removed according to a pre-arranged plan and that a conspiracy was arranged to simulate resurrection appearances (i.e., the Swoon-Plot Theory), then they are denying an essential of the gospel message. No matter what other nice things they may say about Jesus or God such a message cannot save. Since the bodily resurrection of Christ is *essential* to the gospel

message it must be believed in order to be justified and must continue to be believed in order for the believer to be sanctified.

Thus, the gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In such a presentation I would suggest the following elements.

1. all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (the predicament)
2. Christ died for our sins and was resurrected on the third day (the gospel)
3. believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (the human requirement)

V. THE INVITATION

At the conclusion of a gospel message, it is crucial that the listeners understand what the Bible says they must do in order to be saved. Following are some frequent invitations given at the conclusion of a gospel message. Mark them as either true (T) or false (F).

1. ___ Will you come and “pray through” to Christ?
2. ___ Right now, will you ask Jesus to come into your heart?
3. ___ Will you repent of your sins to get saved?
4. ___ Will you surrender your life to Christ?
5. ___ Are you willing to forsake all your sins to obtain salvation?
6. ___ Will you confess your sins and ask the Lord to forgive you?
7. ___ Will you make Jesus Lord of your life?
8. ___ Are you willing to forsake all your sins to obtain salvation?
9. ___ Just believe now and allow Jesus to touch you.
10. ___ Will you give your heart to Christ?
11. ___ Will you turn from your sins and personally invite Jesus Christ to become Lord of your life?
12. ___ Will you invite Jesus into your heart?
13. ___ Will you make your commitment for Christ tonight?
14. ___ Will you promise to serve Christ from now on?
15. ___ Will you accept the Lord Jesus as your own personal Savior?
16. ___ Christ died for your sins. Believe it personally. That’s all you need to get saved.
17. ___ You can be saved right now by believing that Christ died for your sins.
18. ___ Will you believe Christ died for you?
19. ___ Right now, believe that Christ paid the price in full for your sins.
20. ___ To as many as receive Christ, He gives the right to become children of God.
21. ___ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.
22. ___ Will you have a repentant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which results in forgiveness of sin and salvation?

ⁱ His death and resurrection were predicted by the OT Scriptures (e.g., Ps 16:10; Isa 53:8-10).

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