

“What is the Gospel”
Colossians 1:5
(Preached at Trinity, November 12, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. After greeting the Colossian Christians, whom he describes as holy and faithful, Paul reveals his heart for them. **Verses 3-8** are a single sentence in which Paul expresses his gratitude to God for His work of grace upon the Colossian Christians. Although Paul probably hadn't met most of them, he loved them as brothers and sisters in Christ. He prayed for them and praised God for His marvelous work in them.
Colossians 1:3 NAU - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you"
2. In **Verse 4** Paul begins to share the substance of those things that have filled his heart with thanksgiving. He is using the familiar triad graces of faith, hope, and love.
Colossians 1:4-5 NAU - "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven"
3. Paul began with expressing gratitude for their faith. The Colossian Christians had embraced the truths of the Gospel, resting upon Christ alone.
Colossians 1:4 NAU - "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus"
4. Then he expressed his gratitude for their love, the outward expression of their faith.
5. In **Verse 5** Paul brought out the third facet of the triad – hope. Christian hope is a tangible reality. Notice Paul describes it as something “laid up” for us in heaven. It is something that is ours; something we receive by faith.
6. Now, as we come to the second half of **Verse 5** Paul states that the hope upon which they believed came to them by way of the Word of truth. The foundation of our hope is the Gospel. It is the substance upon which we believe.
Colossians 1:5-6 NAU - "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you . . ."
7. Paul says in **Verse 7** that this is the Gospel that had been preached to them by Epaphras. Through his faithfulness the Church of Colossae had been planted. The Gospel was effectual unto their salvation.
8. Paul refers to the Gospel as the Word of Truth. It is instrument through which God saves.
Romans 10:17 NAU - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."
9. The things hoped for were revealed to us by way of Divine instruction, God's revelation of Divine truth. It has been handed down to us progressively, first through the covenant heads, Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Then through the prophets, all of which find their fulfillment in Christ. This body of truth is contained in the Gospel.

10. This Gospel is the substance of our faith, that which must be believed in order to be saved. The simple question I want to set before you this morning is this: “What is the Gospel?” It is basic and yet, it is a matter of eternal importance. It is a basic question, yet many Christians today would be hard-pressed to answer it. How you answer this question and what you do with the Gospel will determine where you will spend eternity.
11. The Gospel has four basic elements. These elements must be an integral part of our evangelism. It is insufficient to simply tell people to believe in Jesus. What are the four elements of the Gospel?
 - I. The Gospel begins with God the Creator.

Too often well-meaning Christians wanting to be faithful in evangelism begin with Jesus. They’ll ask, “Do you believe in Jesus?” or “Do you know Jesus?” or “Have you accepted Jesus?” The Gospel doesn’t begin with Jesus as Savior. It begins with God.

 - A. God is supreme
 1. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable—the source of all things.
 2. Our Confession reads: *LBC, Chapter 2 – Of God and the Holy Trinity* “The Lord our God is but one living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself; infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and more righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.”
 3. In short, God is beyond compare
 - B. All things find their origin in God
 1. God owns all things, governs all things, determines all things. God possesses all authority and dominion.
 2. We were created to find our greatest joy in Him.
 - C. God, the Creator, has the right to receive all honor from His creatures.
 1. God has given us His Law and demands perfect obedience and submission
 2. God declares His supremacy in the First Commandment “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
 3. Spurgeon’s Catechism:

Question 43: What is required in the first commandment?
Answer: The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God and to worship and glorify Him accordingly.
 4. Upon this commandment all others rest. It is the very heart of religion and the very basis of our duty to God. There is one God and all men owe supreme allegiance to Him.
 5. To God alone belongs all glory. He will not share His glory with any other object or being.

6. This is the beginning of the Gospel. It begins with God the Creator, the Source of all things before whom all men must bow. The Gospel begins with God and His purposes.

II. The second element of the Gospel is the reality of sin

A. As our Creator, God demands absolute faithfulness to Him

1. The problem with fallen humanity is they will not give Him the glory due to His name. This is a universal problem. All of us are born rebels.
Romans 1:21 NAU - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."
Romans 1:25 NAU - "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. "
2. As our Creator, God gave us His righteous law in the form of Ten Commandments and demanded of us perfect obedience. Therein lies the problem. We have not kept His holy law
3. Sin is a very unpopular subject today. Most people consider themselves good people. This is because they use a faulty standard. They compare themselves with other men and measure their actions according to their own sense of right and wrong.
4. Because the subject of sin is taboo in our generation, many try to preach a sinless gospel. A gospel that doesn't deal with the problem of sin is a false gospel.

B. What is sin?

1. Sin is breaking God's Law. God's Law is His standard of judgment and we have all failed to perfectly obey. Sin is a state of rebellion against God.
2. Our sin has separated us from our Creator and has brought us under God's condemnation. God's wrath is kindled towards us.
Romans 1:18 NAU - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"
3. The issue between heaven and hell is the issue of guilt versus innocence. As we stand before the Judge of all the earth the verdict is a resounding, "GUILTY!"
4. God would be perfectly just and righteous to leave us in our guilt and condemnation. We would live our lives, die, and spend eternity separated from Him in hell.

III. Only after we've presented God as Creator and Law-giver and our guilt and condemnation can we find the good news of redemption

Jesus Christ, God's Only Way of Reconciliation

A. God demonstrated infinite mercy in sending His Son to save us from our sin.

John 3:16 NAU - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

1. Jesus came to reconcile us to God. He came to remove our guilt and satisfy God's justice.
2. How did Jesus accomplish this?
3. Jesus became man. He entered into our condition, becoming in every way like us—except without sin.
4. As God's only Savior, Jesus entered into our condition in order to take our place. He became our substitute.

B. God's gift of justification through imputation

1. Imputation is a term that describes a transaction of transfer. Something placed to our account.
2. The Law demands perfect obedience and Jesus fulfilled the demands of the Law. He lived a perfect, sinless life of obedience to the Father. His righteousness is imputed to us—His righteousness becomes our righteousness.
3. God's perfect justice demands that He punish sin. Since God is infinitely holy we have offended an infinitely holy God. His punishment must also be infinite. This describes hell—punishment of an infinite duration. Jesus Christ bore our sins upon the cross. Our sins were imputed, or transferred to Him. He suffered in our place and God's wrath was poured out upon Him. Through the Cross our guilt has been taken away. God's wrath has been satisfied.

IV. The fourth element of the Gospel is faith and repentance.

How do we become partakers of Christ's work as Redeemer?

A. Repentance

1. You must be convinced of your guilt and condemnation. Your response to your guilt is more than just the fear of God's wrath. Your sin must cause within you sorrow and grief because you have offended your Creator.
2. Repentance reflects this sorrow for sin. Repentance causes a self-detestation because we have offended our good God.
3. Being sorry for our sin, we turn away from it with a resolve to live in a manner that is pleasing to God.
4. Repentance demands recognizing the Lordship of Christ and a willingness to bow down before Him in submission.

B. Faith

1. Faith is a full comprehension of the Gospel and full agreement with it. Faith demands a knowledge of the truth which comes from the hearing of the Word of God.
2. Faith is believing the Gospel and resting upon Christ alone to satisfy God's demands for reconciliation. Jesus Christ is God's only way of forgiveness. He is God's only way of salvation.

John 14:6 NAU - "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

3. For those who turn away from their sin and trust Jesus Christ alone God has promised eternal life

Conclusion:

1. The Gospel contains objective truth; things that must be believed in order to be saved.
 - a. Paul refers to it here as "the word of truth." He declares it as that which must be heard and believed.
 - b. These are things that must be learned.
Colossians 1:6-7 NAU - "you heard of *it* and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷ just as you learned *it* from Epaphras"
2. The Gospel is preached outwardly by man but is testified inwardly through the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. Both are essential. Faith comes through the instrument of hearing the Gospel as it is preached, but only the Holy Spirit can make it effectual unto salvation.
 Augustine – "Think not that man can learn anything from man: if there be no teacher within, all our babbling is in vain. There are certain outward assistant teachers and admonitions: he who teacheth the heart hath his seat in heaven." ¹
3. The Gospel must be protected from those who would seek to reduce these essential elements of truth.
 - A. We live in a thoroughly secularized nation. People refuse to recognize the rights of our Sovereign Creator. This is where we must begin with the Gospel.
 - B. Most people today see sin as an archaic relic of the past. Few acknowledge that they have offended God and are under His wrath and condemnation. The Gospel must declare the reality of sin.
 - C. Jesus Christ is God's only Savior. He is the King before whom all must bow. We must turn away from our sin and trust Him as God's only solution to sin.

¹ Davenant, John, *Colossians, Geneva Series of Commentaries*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009) page 67.