

713 What Is The Gospel?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Today we're asking the question, "What is the gospel?" Paul answers this question in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. Paul said, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." The story of the death, burial, and resurrection, as we will see, is truly good news.

The word "gospel" as Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 15 means "good news." The gospel is not merely good news, my friends; it is the best news you will ever hear. Perhaps you got some good news at some point recently. You heard the word "yes" when you asked your wife to marry you; you got accepted to college; you were granted a loan for a new house; you found out you were going to win an award; or perhaps you learned that you are going to be a parent or a grandparent. All of these things are good news indeed; but the best news you'll ever hear is about your salvation in Christ Jesus the Lord.

The good news of Paul was the news that he "preached," a story he told of an event that happened many years before. Paul did not just announce it; **he preached it**, because he knew the power of preaching. He said earlier in Romans 1:16, "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." The gospel is a message from God, so powerful that it has the ability to bring about our salvation. Paul rejoiced that **the Corinthians "received" the gospel**. You see, not everyone receives or welcomes the good news of Christ. Some hear and ignore it; some hear it and rejoice over it but quickly forget it; and some don't want to hear it at all. Jesus said in John 1:11-13 that Jesus "came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." The gospel is good news, but you must welcome it into your heart and your life if it is to do you any good. I hope you will do that.

Next, we need to know that the Corinthians not only heard and received the gospel but **took a stand on it**. They believed it so strongly that they committed their lives to the Lord Jesus. In becoming a Christian, they left their old lives of paganism and idolatry. They took up their crosses at a time when authorities punished people for being Christians. They put their trust in God to bless and take care of them. Because they took their stand on the gospel, **the gospel saved them**. Man cannot save himself; he needs God and His wisdom. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, "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." The message of the gospel can make all the difference in your world, if you will believe and take your stand upon it.

The Corinthians did not just take a stand on the gospel. They knew they would only be saved by it, if **they held fast to it**. The gospel is not something for a day; it is a belief for a lifetime. Jesus said about his teaching in Matthew 10:21-

22, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." There simply is no retirement plan in this life for the Christian. One who becomes a Christian does so, even if his whole family doesn't like it. One who becomes a real Christian will do so no matter what others think or say or do. They are going to put Jesus first no matter what.

Now there is some that you must realize, if you are to get the most out of the gospel. You have to realize that you have three very real problems. First, **you have a problem with sin**. The Bible says in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Your sins separate you from God and will bring about a punishment upon you. Paul also said in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." If you sin, the Bible says in Romans 8:13 "you must die." The death that you die will not be physical but spiritual, which is far worse. The person who dies spiritually without God will be lost eternally. He will not be able to go to heaven but in the end will be punished by being cast into outer darkness, a place of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. To be delivered from such a place is genuinely good news. God's salvation is just such a gift; it is life instead of death, joy instead of sorrow, comfort instead of torment, and hope instead of hopelessness.

Second, you must realize you face what all men face. **You will one day go to the grave**. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 9:27, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." No one likes to think of death, and funerals are difficult at best to attend. There comes a time, however, when it is not someone else's funeral; it's yours. You will have to face God and judgment. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." Death is frightening because we are leaving what we know to enter a realm that we know little or nothing about. Our destiny will be determined by the life we have lived on earth. Jesus said in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Physical death for evil people will lead to a place of punishment and sorrow. In our hearts we all know that we have sinned and need forgiveness and grace. Death without God is certainly bad news.

Third, **you have a problem with life and temptation**. The problem we face is we are all weak to sin. We wished we weren't; we wish we'd never sin again; but the truth is that no matter how hard we try, we find ourselves committing sins. When the apostle John wrote to younger *Christians*, he said in 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Even the best Christians find themselves doing the most regrettable things and in need of forgiveness and help. Paul described his life in Romans 7:15-17, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me." We all have to face

the ugly desires inside of us throughout life. Is there are help for that?

The word gospel means “good news”; and the good news is that Christ helps us with all three of these problems. Let's look again at 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Paul said, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” The gospel is foremost the story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each of these things were actual events. Jesus really died, really was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and really did rise from the dead. But it is what they mean to us that makes them all the more important! Nothing in your life is more important to your eternal destiny than the story of the gospel.

The death of Jesus as an event is very sad news—a righteous and innocent man being crucified unjustly and suffering great agony. But the point of his death, as a sacrifice for your sins is good news. He died for your sins, so that you could be forgiven and not have to pay the penalty of separation from God for eternity. Paul said in 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.” Jesus bore the punishment we should have borne. Because he died, we can live in righteousness, being washed in his blood. His blood has the ability to cleanse us from all sin. My friend, that's good news!

The resurrection of Jesus was an amazing event. Because Jesus arose from the dead, we can know there is life after death. We can also find hope of life beyond the grave. Paul gave this reassuring promise in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” And it is encouraging to know that there is a wonderful great eternity awaiting us in heaven!

The fact that Jesus has gone back to the Father and sits at His right hand in heaven is important for our third problem, our weakness to temptation. Jesus is there interceding for us (according to Hebrews 7:24). John wrote to Christians in 1 John 2:1-2, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Jesus is interceding with the Father as our advocate, pleading our case for continued cleansing and forgiveness. John also wrote in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Christians can have hope and can find total forgiveness because of Jesus, even though they are imperfect.

Now, how can we benefit from the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? The good news is that when we believe in Jesus, repent of our sins, confess our faith, and are baptized, we become united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Paul said in Romans 6:3-7, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.” Freedom from sin, eternal life beyond the grave, and daily help to live the Christian life is great news. God is so good to us.

If a penitent believer is united with Christ in baptism, my friend, what is hindering you from being baptized? If Jesus had new life when he was raised, and you have newness of life when you are raised up with him in baptism, my friend, what is hindering you from obeying the gospel? It is not enough just to say you believe; your faith ought to lead you to respond to God's saving news, the gospel. Just like medicine will do you no good until you take it, the gospel is only news until you respond to it. The gospel tells of God's grace and love and gift available from His heart to yours. This life is the free gift of God through Christ Jesus, but you cannot have it until you receive it into your life and take your stand on it. It is only when you do this, that you will find your salvation. God has done everything possible to make this gift available to you. He sent His Son Jesus to this earth to die for your sins to redeem you and me from sin and death. Won't you, now, love and trust Jesus enough to respond to His marvelous grace. My friend, I think it would be the most foolish thing in the world to have the opportunity to have eternal life but pass it up. Without the blood of Jesus, there is no hope in your future. But with the blood of Christ to cleanse you and the help of Christ as your advocate each day, you can live eternally with God in heaven. You can live an abundant life here on earth and have the joy of heaven forever. Won't you seek out one of the churches of Christ near you, and tell the folks there you want to obey the gospel. Won't you tell them that you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and you want to leave the old life of sin and become a new person? Won't you be baptized into Christ, united with Him in his death and resurrection, so that your sins can be removed and you can be born again? Your friends at the church of Christ would love to help you in this matter, and they want to be your church family as you hold fast to the Lord and His gospel. A great new life awaits you, take hold of life. My friend, won't you do that today?

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