

Theology 101 Part 1

What Is the Gospel?

The word “gospel” can be often used in Christian circles without much explanation, so it can be easy for it to become a word we use without actually knowing what we are referring to. When we seek to understand what the gospel is, we need to first clarify what the word “gospel” actually means. The word “gospel” simply means good news. A friend of mine helpfully explained it this way:

There are two ways Christians use the word ‘gospel’:

1. Gospel as in a kind of biography of Jesus the Messiah, the purpose of which is to help us understand why Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection are important. So, as one author, John Dickson stated, we use the word gospel to refer to the four gospels of the New Testament: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*.
2. Gospel as in the Good News, what we commonly refer to as the Gospel message. John Dickson also states that the word “gospel” in the first century was an announcement of victory. In the first century context, these words referred to the announcement of happy, or important events, the announcement of victory in a battle.¹

For our time together today, when we are referring to the gospel, we are referring to that second sense of the word, the message of good news that God has reconciled sinners to Himself through the person and work of His Son, Jesus.

Creation: *Here we start with God, who He is, and what He did in the beginning.*

- There is only one Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the Creator and source of everything (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 46:10; Genesis 1:1; Revelation 4:11).
- God’s greatness is limitless and He is worthy of our obedience and affection (Psalm 145:3).
- God is perfect in all His attributes, such as His holiness, justice, and love (Exodus 15:11, Psalm 145:8-9).
- In the beginning, God created everything “very good” (Gen. 1:31). There was no evil, disease, suffering, or death.

Fall: *Here we learn who we are, the bad news of sin and its consequences, and how we have broken relationship with God.*

- God created people to reflect, know, and serve Him, and yet we are guilty of rejecting Him (Genesis 3:6-7).
- We have all sinned and have ignored God’s rightful place of authority and lived in defiance of His commands. We have placed our priorities and pleasure above

¹ “What Does the Word “Gospel” Mean in the New Testament?” Ligonier Ministries, updated May 25, 2016, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-word-gospel-mean-new-testament/>

His (Romans 3:19, 23). God is our King, and yet we have chosen to rebel against his kingdom and seek to establish our own.

- Sin is not merely a set of actions or words. It is the basic orientation of our heart. We have rejected God (Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19). Sin is rejection and rebellion against Him, choosing instead to worship and serve created things (Romans 1).
- Sin against our wonderful Creator is worthy of eternal punishment (Matthew 25:30, 46; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

Redemption: *Here we learn about what the work of Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners like you and me.*

- God the Father graciously sent God the Son, Jesus, to take on flesh. He joyfully and willingly came to do that which was required of us. We could not obey the will of God perfectly, but He did. (John 1:14; Romans 8:3-4; Hebrews 2:14-18).
- Jesus suffered a death that He did not deserve and took our sins upon Himself. God's anger and wrath towards sin, our sin, was poured out on Jesus (1 John 4:10; 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:4-6).
- He willingly died as a substitute for those who would trust in Him. God the Father accepted the punishment of Jesus for those who would trust in Him and applies His obedience to them as well (Romans 2:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13-14). **This truth speaks to an important doctrine: justification by faith**

¹⁵“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in [Christ](#) and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-16)

- Jesus rose from the dead on the third day showing His victory over sin, Satan, and death. This validated everything Jesus said and did. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 55-57).
- Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, in the highest place of authority as the one true King, and represents His people in the presence of God (Romans 8:35; Hebrews 1:1-4; 7:25)

New Creation: *Here we learn about what God will do at the return of Christ and the hope that is in Him.*

- God has promised that He will right every wrong, and no injustice will go unpunished (Romans 12:17-21; Revelation 21:8).
- Jesus promised that He would come back for us, and one day He will return to bring final judgement, to establish His kingdom in full, and make everything new (John 14:3; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Rev. 19-22).

- God has promised that those who believe in Christ will have eternal life in Him, both now and forever (John 3:16, 17:3; Revelation 21:1-7).

Response: *Repentance and Faith*

- Restored relationship with God, forgiveness of sins, and an abundant life in Him are available (John 10:10). How do we receive it?
- We can never merit, earn, or deserve the acceptance of God. Remember, our hearts, not our actions, are the root of the problem (Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:16, 21).
- We must trust completely in the value of Christ's perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. At the same time, we must turn from those things which enslave us. Our allegiance must turn from ourselves to God. Faith and repentance are the proper response to the Gospel (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). Those that receive Jesus receive eternal relationship with God, forgiveness of sin, renewed purpose, and eternal hope.
- Our lives are to be lived as He designed: for His glory (Ephesians 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 10:31). Thankfully, He has given us His Spirit to make this possible (Eph. 1:13-14).

What is the gospel?

“The gospel is about Jesus – what he did, his life of perfect obedience, his atoning death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, and his outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church. We call those crucial elements the objective aspects of the New Testament gospel of Christ.”² – R.C. Sproul

Recommended Resources for further study:

- [What is the Gospel?](#) by Greg Gilbert
- [Gospel Fluency](#) by Jeff Vanderstelt
- [The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission](#) by John Dickson
- [A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love](#) by Milton Vincent
- [Galatians For You](#) by Tim Keller
- [Gentle and Lowly](#) by Dane Ortlund

² Ligonier Ministries, “What Does the Word “Gospel” Mean in the New Testament?”