

## “The Gospel of Christ”

Today, I want us to spend our time talking about the gospel. Of course, every time we're together, it is to preach and study the gospel, but today, I want us to look at what exactly the gospel *is*. The Bible *reveals* the gospel of Christ, evangelists are charged with *preaching* the gospel, Christians are expected to live in such a way that '*becometh*' the gospel and the church is to *strive for*, or *guard* the gospel. The word *gospel* is used all throughout the New Testament, but what does it mean? What are we to preach? What are we to strive for? What IS the gospel?

**II Corinthians 4:1-4** “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

In this passage, Paul is specifically talking about the apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit and used by God to dispense the light of the saving gospel to a lost world. Without their work in the first century--as they testified of seeing the risen Christ, and by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, perfectly revealing to us the message of Jesus Christ and the will of God—without that, we would all remain in darkness and be lost. But, by them and by the New Testament scriptures that they left us, we can now live in the light of God's revelation. We can be saved. We can enjoy the things promised by God from the very beginning of time. They came bringing the glad tidings of the gospel. But, is what we hear in modern pulpits really the gospel? Let's see what the Bible has to say.

In the first few chapters of the **Roman** letter, the apostle Paul describes the undone and lost state of the world. In **chapter 1**, he traces the history of the pagan or Gentile world, showing that without God, they became steeped in idolatry and humanism. In **chapter 2**, the religious world fared no better. He showed how they as well were full of hypocrisy and that they too were lost and had fallen far short of the mark. His conclusion is found in the next chapter:

**Romans 3:23** “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

That was our lost state: Jew, Gentile, religious, heathen. *ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*. The basis of that discussion is found in **chapter 1, verse 16**.

**Romans 1:16** “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

The gospel is God's power to save us from our lost and undone condition. Friend, that makes the gospel *good news*. That's what the gospel is all about. You can listen to men who claim to be preaching the gospel today, and you may come away with a different idea than how the Bible characterizes the gospel. The gospel is not the prosperity doctrine that you hear today: the promise of earthly wealth or health or fame or success. The Bible promises none of those things for the disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, it teaches that we will have tribulation as long as we live in the world. The gospel is not all for social justice, as important as that may be in our civil society. That's not what the gospel is all about. The

gospel is not a political agenda or platform either. The word comes from the Greek word *euaggelion*, which means *a good message*, or in other words, *good news*. So when Jesus commissioned the apostles to *Go (ye) into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15)*, He was telling them to go forth and tell or publish the *good news*.

Well, what is the *good news*? It is that salvation had finally come, that the promise was finally being fulfilled, that the Messiah had arrived and brought deliverance to a people bound in sin since the dawn of time and humanity, in fact. You see, we don't really come to see the gospel as *good news* until we really understand what the gospel is and what it came to do. Until we understand the destructive power of sin and the awfulness, helplessness and hopelessness of our lost state without Jesus Christ.

In **Ephesians 2**, the apostle Paul describes how and what we were before the *good news* of Jesus, before He came and died for our sins.

**Ephesians 2:1** **"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;"** (We were dead in our sins.)

**Ephesians 2:8** **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:"** (We were unable to save ourselves. We were hopeless.)

**Ephesians 2:12** **"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:"** (We were excluded from any covenant with God and had no fellowship with Him.)

**Ephesians 2:13** **"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."** (We were far away from God, but Christ's blood allows us to be brought near to Him.)

**Ephesians 2:15** **"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;"** (We were enemies of God and His people, but Christ broke down that middle wall of partition.)

That was our lost and undone state, but the gospel came to undo all of that. It is the BEST news you'll ever receive! It is better news than any news a doctor will ever bring you. Better than any you might receive from an investment banker or lawyer, any politician or newscaster. They may bring news that affects the here and now, and news that is good within its own right, and it may affect a small portion of our future. But Jesus sent His apostles out with *good news* that affects not only the here and now; it affects the rest of our lives here and it affects our eternity. So, you'll never receive any greater news than what the Savior brought to earth from heaven in the scheme of redemption.

But there is much confusion today about the gospel: what it contains, what it requires, what it promises. The scriptures, however, reveal at least four things that are contained within the gospel. When we consider these four things, we'll see that many preachers who claim to preach the gospel aren't preaching the whole gospel, if they're even preaching it at all.

## **I. The gospel contains facts that are to be believed.**

**I Corinthians 15:1-4 “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:”**

My dear friend, that’s good news! We were lost. We owed a debt to God that we could not pay. In fact, we were all sentenced and doomed to die because of sin.

**Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

But Paul said that he came to those at Corinth preaching the gospel; that is, the good news that Christ died for our sins, in our place, and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and rose again the third day, breaking the bonds of death, and came walking out of that tomb triumphant! He released us from the hold that death and sin had upon us. Those are the facts of the gospel that we are to believe. And if we are to believe that Christ died for our sins, that necessitates that we believe that He was God in the flesh. We must believe the claims that He made about Himself: that He was not just a man, just a teacher, just a prophet. He was sent from God and He is the Son of God.

You may recall in **Acts 8** that the evangelist Philip was out preaching the gospel. He had been to Samaria and preached, then the Lord sent him down to this deserted area where there was a dignitary, a nobleman from the land of Ethiopia, who had gone up to Jerusalem to worship God and was returning home. God knew he was down there reading from the prophesy of Isaiah. He had a scroll of Isaiah’s prophecy that he had probably obtained there in Jerusalem, and he was specifically reading what we know as **Isaiah 53**, where Isaiah prophesies of Jesus’ vicarious suffering and His crucifixion. But this nobleman didn’t understand what the prophet was talking about. It was a mystery to him. So, Philip encounters him and gets up in the chariot with him and the Bible says that Philip “*preached unto him Jesus.*”

**Acts 8:35 “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”**

So, this man learned about Christ. He heard the gospel. He heard the facts of the gospel because he wanted to be saved.

**Acts 8:36-37 “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”**

You see, he had to accept and embrace the facts of the gospel before Jesus would save him. Salvation isn’t received by pedigree or birth; it’s received by the *new* birth. You can’t improve yourself enough to be right with God. You must believe and trust the Lord Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made for your sins to be saved.

**John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

We may be saved by grace, and we are (**Ephesians 2:8**), but listen: it’s through faith. It’s not universal salvation. It’s to those who receive the grace of God by faith.

## **II. The gospel contains commands that are to be obeyed.**

We see this in the very case of the Ethiopian nobleman we just noticed. Here’s where the train runs off the track with a lot of people’s theology. The gospel not only has facts to be believed, it has commands that are to be obeyed. Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian nobleman (**Acts 8:35**), and what happened after that? Let’s read it again.

**Acts 8:36 “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”**

So he heard about Jesus and the result was that he wanted to be baptized. That tells me that when Philip preached Jesus to him, when he preached the gospel to him, it included the commandment of baptism. Baptism didn’t come later; it was a part of the gospel that was preached to him.

**Acts 8:37-38 “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”**

Now, why was he baptized? Not only that, but why was baptism such an urgent and immediate step? Remember when Jesus commissioned His disciples as follows:

**Mark 16:15 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”**

“*All the world*” included that little Gaza road that this nobleman was traveling and “*to every creature*” included that Ethiopian nobleman. That’s what Philip was doing in this passage. But let’s read what Jesus told His disciples to preach:

**Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”**

So, he who believes the facts of the gospel and obeys the commands of the gospel is who will be saved, according to Jesus. When the eunuch hears the gospel, it prompts him to obey the gospel. A lot of people will say, *you can’t obey the gospel—you just believe and accept and receive it. You don’t have to obey the gospel to be saved. You just obey the Lord as a Christian.* That is not how Paul characterized it.

**Romans 10:13 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”**

Incidentally, how does one “*call upon the name of the Lord?*”

**Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”**

So, we “*call upon the name of the Lord*” when, in faith, we rise up and obey the commands of the gospel. Let’s go back to **Romans 10** now.

**Romans 10:13-16** “**For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?**”

The gospel had gone out, but they had not all obeyed it, Paul said. The gospel is to be believed and obeyed. And Paul shows us here that to truly *believe the gospel* is to *obey the gospel*. That’s why in **Mark 16:16**, which we noted above, baptism is stated positively and not negatively. Some will try to say *Jesus didn’t say ‘he that IS NOT BAPTIZED will be lost.’* Jesus didn’t have to say that, because the person who doesn’t believe wouldn’t be baptized anyway. Baptism is the response of faith and belief, you see. Therefore, it doesn’t need to be stated negatively. To believe the report that has been sent—the gospel—means to follow through and obey the gospel.

Some will argue that Paul was all about preaching the gospel, and the gospel had nothing to do with baptism, using the following passage to make their point:

**I Corinthians 1:17** “**For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...**”

That’s not at all what Paul was saying. In fact, in the same context, he says that he DID baptize some of them. He was glad that he didn’t baptize ALL of them. He let others baptize the rest. It’s not that they weren’t baptized; it’s that Paul did not *personally* baptize them. That’s not because baptism was not a part of the gospel, but was because of their immaturity in the gospel. You see, they were aligning themselves after the men who baptized them, as opposed to aligning themselves after the Christ in whom they were baptized. That’s the difference. The scriptures plainly illustrate that the gospel not only has facts to believe, but also has commands to be obeyed.

### **III. The gospel contains promises to be received.**

Let’s read how Jesus worded this:

**Luke 24:45-47** “**Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**”

When Jesus’ apostles went out to preach the gospel, not only would they preach the facts of the gospel, and the commands of the gospel (including repentance, here), but they would also preach the promises of the gospel: *the remission or forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*. We see that unfold in **Acts 2**, when the apostle Peter preached the very first gospel sermon after the cross.

**Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”**

The *remission and forgiveness of sins* grants to us the hope of eternal life. Yes, the gospel contains promises to be received upon the obedience of the commands given, based upon the facts of the gospel that we are to believe.

#### **IV. The gospel contains warnings to be heeded.**

There are many people who will present the gospel as being full of promises, but they'll practically ignore its warnings. One such warning is given in **Galatians 1**.

**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: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 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.”**

Here, Paul pronounces a curse on the person who perverts the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, what does it mean to *pervert* something? It means *to add something to it, to take something away from it, to change it*. There were those who were of great concern to the apostle Paul as he writes to the church at Galatia in this passage, who were perverting the gospel by *adding* to it. They were known as the Judaizers. They were mingling the gospel of Jesus Christ with the requirements of the law of Moses, claiming that it was alright to follow Jesus, but that one had to obey Moses, too, in order to be saved. Paul says that they were perverting the gospel.

Then there are those who *take away* from the gospel. We see that today with modern preachers who don't preach all of the gospel. That is seen in nationwide, even worldwide evangelists, who will fill stadiums full of people and preach to people during the course of their lifetime by the multiplied MILLIONS—what a splendid opportunity! --But seldom do they open their mouths to ever mention that people ought to be baptized for the remission of their sins. In fact, they never preach such. But Jesus did.

**Mark 16:15-16 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”**

When was the last time you heard one of these nationally known evangelists tell people to believe and be baptized in order to be saved? That's what Jesus said to preach. You see, they're *taking away* from the gospel, and there is a solemn warning about doing so.

Finally, there is a warning about *failing to obey* the gospel. I'll close with these words:

**II Thessalonians 1:7-8 “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:”**

I hope you will obey the gospel today.