

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is a story. It is God's story. **Mark 1:14** tells us that Jesus came forth from His temptation in the Wilderness, "preaching the Gospel of God"

Matthew 4:23 tells us Jesus came proclaiming the "Gospel of the Kingdom." See also **Matt. 9:35**; & **Matt. 24:14**. Thus we see the story (gospel) is about God and his kingdom.

1. What is the True Gospel?

Explain: In **1st Corinthians 15:1-4** Paul defines the "Gospel." He says the Gospel is the story of Jesus- Who He is, why He came to earth, what He did for us, and how we must respond to it. The gospel story centers on God's Son-His Person and Work. It then is followed by a call to repent and believe the story. The Gospel is the work of the Father- it is a Grace work the Father has accomplished for mankind. It is all of God, all of Grace. It has nothing to do with religion, human merit or works.

When the Gospel is preached, adding nothing to it, subtracting nothing from it; the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all you believe it. (**Romans 1:16**)

II. When did the Gospel story begin?

Explain: the gospel began not with the birth of Christ the Messiah, but rather it began in Genesis with God's purpose in Creation. He created mankind in his image with the purpose that mankind might fulfill its destiny by spreading the Father's image throughout the whole earth. The story of the "fall" of man into sin, man's rebellion, and God's efforts to rescue, redeem, and restore what was lost in the Garden are all little dramas in the bigger story of the Gospel. The entire Old Testament is an unfolding of the narrative of the gospel. The Old Testament is a testimony to Jesus telling us a savior is coming, will come, and He will save, renew and restore his new people. The gospel story in the New Testament is about fulfillment even as the Old Testament stories are shadows and promises pointing to the fulfillment in Christ and His Church.

Observation: There are today many religions distortions of the true Gospel. Much of the New Testament is comprised of apostolic letters to correct these distortions. One of the best ways to learn what a thing really is would be to define what it is NOT. I can think of no better example of what the Gospel is not, than the Galatian heresy.

The Galatian letter:

The background of Galatians is found in the book of Acts. Paul comes to Galatia which today is modern day Turkey. Paul preached a pure Gospel of God's grace to them, accomplished through the free gift of his holy Son Jesus. For Paul, Christ's life, death, and resurrection accepted by faith & repentance; are all that God requires for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus life, death, resurrection are the finished work of God- this is the story- the gospel.

Soon after Paul left Galatia, Christian Jews from Jerusalem followed Paul to these new churches, telling them they must obey all the man-made "rules" of their religion. They insisted that the new male converts must be circumcised. In so doing, they added to the gospel story. They added Jewish Kosher rules, Jewish holy days and seasons. The Apostle was amazed they had done this. Paul calls their teaching, "a different Gospel" (1:6). The entire Galatian letter is a refutation of this teaching and a defense of the true Gospel of Grace.

Apply: This same distortion of the Gospel is still going on today. Most churches & denominations have in some way distorted the true Gospel. Grace verses works is the repeated theme of the Galatian letter. Paul wrote this letter to refute the 'false brethren' of Gal. 2:4, and the different Gospel they preached, (see 1:6)

It was a different Gospel because it distorted Grace= 1:7

It was a different Gospel because it killed Grace= 2:21

It was a different Gospel because it abandoned the Christ=1:6

It was a different Gospel because it abused Grace= 6:13; Romans 6:1, 2

Explain: Paul, who had been a devout Jew understood how easy it is to mix religion and the Gospel. It seems we humans desperately need to justify ourselves before the face of God. All religion is the result of that need to impress God with good behaviors, performance, and religious deeds.

Paul's past life as a devout Jew- see Gal. 1:10-14

Note: Rabbi Saul was extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions. (See Gal.1:14)

This means he had a long list of do's and don'ts trying to please God! His former life was lived as a rule keeper and rule breaker. His ancestors had added 613 rules (traditions) to the Ten Commandments given to Moses. These 613 traditions formed the core of Jewish pharisaical religion known as the Mishnah or Talmud.

Apply: Modern day Christians also have their lists of do's and don'ts. Christianity began as a relationship in the Garden of Eden; became a rule book in Israel, an idea in Greece, an institution in Rome; and finally an enterprise in America! The institutional Church is characterized by this accursed "different Gospel."

II. What the Gospel is not

1. The Gospel is not a philosophy that makes you a better person.

Explain: The Gospel is not a self-improvement program. The Gospel is NOT about you! It does not improve you, but it will transform you! See **2nd Cor. 5:17**, this transformation makes you like Him.

Apply: Beware a distorted gospel that "adds" to your life anything other than Jesus Himself! Our old self cannot be reformed, improved, or even killed. Only the power of the Gospel can transform us into Christ's likeness.

Illustration: Beware of those who preach a "Joel Osteen" feel good about yourself message, telling you it is the Gospel. It is not. You haven't preached the "good" news until you tell the bad news, which is that we are lost sinners in need of saving Grace. The Gospel convicts us that we are lost without Christ, so that we can repent and be found by Christ. The Gospel will not improve what God condemns-that is our sin nature. Being a Christian is not about improved morals but rather it is about the Spirit of Jesus being lived out in us and through us. (See **2nd Cor. 5:17**)

2. The Gospel is not just an entry point (a ticket to Heaven)

Explain: Many have "accepted Jesus" in a prayer of belief, like at a Billy Graham crusade, thinking that is the sum of the Gospel. "I prayed it, now forget it." Some prayed a sinner's prayer thinking it is a ticket to heaven. Let's be clear about this-salvation does begin with a decision to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, however, there is much more to it than that entry point. The Gospel call to sinners is not just to believe, but to believe and "follow me" as Jesus repeatedly said to his men.

Apply: The Gospel is much more than just a ticket to heaven; it is an invasion of the King and His Kingdom into your life. You are a new person, with new citizenship, and a new power for living out the Gospel mandate. When Jesus is your Lord, he then becomes your Savior. Your new birth is a new beginning, but it is not the journey of discipleship. God has purposes he wants to fulfill through your obedient walk with Him. There is work to be done here on earth. The Father wants to continue the life of his Son by his Son living in and through us His people.

3. The Gospel is not Prosperity- (it does not make you materially rich)

Explain; many misguided Bible interpreters make a mistake in taking old covenant teachings about blessings and curses and applying them to the new covenant church. As Christ followers we do not live under blessings and curses any longer. Christ has become "cursed" for us on the Cross (see **Gal.3:13, 14**) the result is that you are blessed abundantly in Christ (see **Eph. 1:18** and **Eph. 2:20, 21**). You may become prosperous but it is not a

promise made to all believers who profess Christ. He has promised to be with us no matter our circumstances. He has promised that if we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified with him. (Romans 8:17).

Apply: Do you think if you are good, or better, you merit blessing, and if you are bad, you merit curses? This is NOT the Gospel message. In Christ you are blessed beyond measure. In Him you have every blessing God can give. This blessing is not dependent upon YOU, but upon His sovereign will for you. When you are in Christ and Christ is in you-there are no curses upon us-ever again.

Illustration: there is in the modern Church a “give to get” theology which is a false distortion of the gospel. Giving to God in order to get more from God is not the Gospel. We are to give to God and his work out of a generous spirit, not to bribe God to prosper us. Never! That teaching is a “different gospel.”

4. The Gospel is not Later- (for the next life only)

Explain: Many professed believers have no expectations of present power or privilege from being saved. For them the Gospel is future only. It is only Heaven by and by-oh my! Some foolishly believe salvation is only for the next life. Not so! The Gospel brings with it the power of God. It is power for the present as well as prospect for the future. You don't have to die to go to heaven, you can live out heaven in the here and now, by the power and presence of Christ in your daily life. In Christ the Father provides privilege, provision, protection, power, and purpose for us. The Gospel is for NOW, not just THEN!

Apply: The Gospel is about God and His Kingdom. We are in Christ and His rule, reign, and restoration are at work in us NOW. We can through faith in this Gospel pray, “Thy kingdom come” and see the kingdom lived out in us and through us. We as Christ-followers are to live lives of dominion here on earth to establish the rule of King Jesus.

5. The Gospel is not Love (thy Neighbor)

Explain: The institutional church is alive with this false Gospel of Love only. Some teach that if you just love God and love your neighbor that is what following Jesus is all about. This false gospel tells us that by loving our neighbor we are fulfilling the Gospel message. Well, the Gospel IS about God's love in us, but it is not about us loving our neighbor. This is a different Gospel because it is impossible to do! Only Jesus can love His enemies! All the loving we might do for others must proceed from the Gospel –Christ Himself manifesting the fruit of His Spirit in us. We in our flesh cannot love our enemies. However, Christ's love in us, released thru us can love a world back to God.

Apply: Multitudes of Christian denominations have made their central ministry the doing of good deeds. They call it the social application of the gospel-a social gospel! Never! It may be social, but it is not the Gospel. These good deeds may be beneficial to the poor and downtrodden, but if not accompanied by the “*in Jesus name*” it is only temporary and not of Kingdom permanence. We are to do loving deeds because He first loved us. This means we are forever telling the story as we pour out the soup in the soup line! The greatest love I can give another man is to tell him of the love of Christ.