

What is the Gospel?

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1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶ After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. ⁸ Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*. ¹¹ Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed. NKJV

This is the first Sunday of the Year of Our Lord 2010 and it occurred to me that the best way to start a new year would be to preach the Gospel. Now let me quickly acknowledge that all of the elders of this local church preach the Gospel every time we stand here, or sit here as in the case of Brother Walter. If what we preach, no matter the subject, does not have the Gospel in it we have failed and are wasting your time and we shouldn't have gotten up here to start with.

What I want to do in this message is to preach the Gospel so help me God.

So if you think, "O Jim, we have heard everything that you are going to say many times before," I would say, "Good, but let's be reminded again and again of the Gospel."

So then, what is the Gospel?

In a few words, the Gospel is: **Christ died to save sinners.**

But you can't just say those words to a person who is spiritually dead in trespasses and sin and expect that person to understand what they mean.

And neither can you expect a person to be persuaded by logic and argument into believing the Gospel. The Gospel is not an agreement to a proposition or set of so-called steps; be they four or five, or the so-called Roman Road.

That is why we are entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit to take the words we speak, the Gospel, and give them life and power.

Who is Jesus Christ?

Is He God?

Is He the promised Messiah?

Is He the "Seed of the woman?"

Why did Jesus of Nazareth die?

What does His death have to do with anyone besides Jesus Himself?

What is sin?

What does it mean to be a sinner?

What does it mean to be saved, justified, declared "not Guilty?"

What must I do to be saved?

What can I do to be saved?

All of those questions make up the Gospel and the Gospel answers all of those questions and the only correct answers must come from a correct interpretation of the Word of God. And for every correct answer from God's Word there are many opposing answers that are said to come from God's Word.

A few weeks ago I found my notes from August 24, 1969, the first sermon I ever preached, and on October 4, 2009 I preached it again in this church.

Then just a few days ago I was looking through that same stack of old sermon notes and found the notes that I took on June 10, 1969 at Calvary Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, Arkansas and the preacher was E. W. Johnson who was the pastor of that local church. Brother Johnson's title was "What is the Gospel."

So while acknowledging that my motivation to preach this message is borrowed from Brother Johnson, this message is from my own heart and experience.

About 30 years ago there was a conservative movement in the Southern Baptist Convention to recapture the leadership of the SBC and the seminaries from the liberals who had “crept in unawares” and had slowly taken over the leadership.

The issue then, in the late 1970s was the **Inerrancy of the Scriptures**. Inerrancy means that the original manuscripts and scrolls of the Scriptures are without error.

You might be surprised to know that the leadership and many professors in the seminaries at that time **did not** believe that the Bible was without error. It was an historical event in that no denomination had ever recovered from liberalism once it had taken root.

Soon after the conservative take-over had succeeded we had a guest speaker here at Vineland Park and it was Dr. Tom Nettles who is presently a professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY. He put the liberal / conservative struggle in perspective when he said that the issue is not the Inerrancy of the Scriptures, but “What is the Gospel?”

The depth of Dr. Nettle’s insight did not really register with me until quite sometime later I listened to two leaders of the conservative movement each preach sermons **against** God’s sovereign choice in election. As respected as these two preachers were they denied the Gospel; their sermons proved that they did not know the Gospel! Even though they were champions for Inerrancy.

Jim, are you saying that a person who denies God’s sovereign choice in election doesn’t know the Gospel? That is exactly what I am saying!

It is possible that such a person may be saved but they don’t know how they got saved. Justification, being saved, means that you repent and trust Jesus Christ alone for righteousness whether or not you understand how that came to be. A child can have genuine faith.

In other words you don’t have to be a theologian in order to have genuine faith in Christ and in His righteousness alone to be saved.

But it is a very different matter for a man who is supposed to know and preach the Gospel to attack God on His throne.

Although this message is not a lesson on the doctrine of election it is necessary that I back up what I just said with the Bible.

What did I say?

A person who denies God’s sovereign choice in election doesn’t know the Gospel!

Mr. Charles Spurgeon in his sermon on 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 said that if this were the only passage in the Bible on election it would be enough to settle the issue.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

One of the best illustrations of God's sovereign choice in election comes from an incident involving Mr. Spurgeon and a lady who did not believe in God's sovereign choice.

Spurgeon: Madam, are you saved?

Lady: Yes, I believe that I am saved.

Spurgeon: Well, did you save yourself or did God save you?

Lady: Of course, God saved me.

Spurgeon: Well, did God save you by accident or on purpose?

Lady: God saved me on purpose!

Spurgeon: That, dear lady, is the doctrine of election.

See Romans 8:28 **PURPOSE!**

How serious is it to preach another gospel than the Gospel preached by Paul and the other apostles?

Galatians 1:6-9

⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. NKJV

Now let's see what the Apostle Paul says is the Gospel:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

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³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶ After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

⁸ Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*. ¹¹ Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

The inspired apostle says that the Gospel is what he preached. He also said that if you believe anything else as the Gospel you have believed in vain. In Galatians Paul writes that if anyone preaches another Gospel let him be accursed!

You can read what Paul preached in the New Testament:

Romans; 1 & 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 & 2 Thessalonians; 1 & 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon; and yes, even Hebrews. As I have said before, I am not “sophisticated and educated” enough to doubt that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

So does Paul preach God's sovereign choice in election?

If you can read and understand words you must conclude from all that Paul wrote that Paul preached election. Then it follows that if a preacher denies election he is not preaching the same Gospel that Paul preached. And if whatever is preached is not consistent with what Paul preached it is not the Gospel!

We who preach God's sovereign choice in election are often misunderstood and even despised by men. Some time ago a lady told me that her husband said that I was a "hyper - Calvinist." A "hyper - Calvinist" claims to believe in election but they deny the use of the means of the Gospel to call dead sinners to come to Christ in faith. My response to this dear lady was to inform her husband that either he did not know what a "hyper - Calvinist" was, or he did not know what I preached; either way he was simply ignorant.

Where are we?

There is something called the Gospel and there are false gospels.

The Apostle Paul links the Gospel to God's sovereign choice in election.

Now election itself is not salvation; that is the error of the "hyper - Calvinist".

Election is not the Gospel but there is no Gospel apart from the sovereignty of God; Election is **unto** salvation.

Now let's look at Brother E. W. Johnson's message on "What is the Gospel?"

Johnson: Mr. Johnson's words.

Gunn: My insertions.

Mr. Johnson's message had three points and then asked five questions:

Johnson:

Point One: The gospel a man preaches is whatever is foremost in his preaching, whether what he preaches is the true gospel or not.

Are we preaching the Gospel? What are our great concerns?

A man's chief glory will determine his chief concern.

Some have their denomination as their chief concern.

Gunn:

While I am not a defender of any denomination, and will quickly tell you that multitudes of Baptists have gone to hell, and many more are on their way to hell, there are certain articles of faith that matter a great deal.

There are certain beliefs and principles that may be called the **Baptist Distinctive** and I am a Baptist because I believe the Baptist Distinctive is the closest set of tenets to the Scriptures.

There are at least nine things that identify a person as a Baptist. There are, of course, other denominations and faiths that hold to one or more of these same tenets, but to hold to all of them makes you, by definition, a Baptist.

1. tenet: {Latin - he holds} An opinion, doctrine, or principle considered as being true by an individual or especially an organization.

Consider the inevitable result of compromising any one of these nine tenets and also what it means to hold to these tenets in word only and not in fact or practice. What do each of the following distinctive tenets mean or do not mean?

Without much elaboration the following tenets are the Baptist Distinctive:

1. The Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ is not everything, He is nothing. If a sinful man or group of men takes the place of Christ as head of the body, even if he is called the Pope, then Christ is not truly the head of that body.

Colossians 1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Ephesians 1:22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

2. The authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

If another authority, e.g. the Book of Mormon, a personal revelation, a Confession of Faith, Creeds, etc. are needed to make the Bible complete then the Bible becomes secondary and is not the authority and is not sufficient.

Confessions of Faith and Creedal statements have their place but they are all merely human efforts and are subject to change.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

1 Peter 1:25: But the word of the Lord endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

3. The requirement for a regenerate church membership.

The true Church is Christ's body and does not include unregenerate people. Of course there may be unregenerate people in most local churches but at least the members of the local body profess faith in Christ.

Acts 2:47: ...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

John 3:3: Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4. Individual discipleship.

If a person is disobedient to the One they claim to love then there can be no assurance of a saving interest in Jesus Christ.

John 14:15: If you love Me keep My commandments.

Galatians 5:25: If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Romans 6:4: Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5. The priesthood of all believers.

All believers have access to God through Jesus Christ [Romans 5:1-2]; not through Mary, "saints," or "priests." Priesthood of the believer does not mean private [individual] interpretation of the Bible; it means access to God.

1 Peter 2:5: ...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Revelation 1:6: ...and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:10: And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

6. Baptism is for believers [disciples] only, by immersion, upon confession of faith.

There is no Scriptural precedent or support to baptize unbelievers, viz. infants.

Mark 16:16: He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Matthew 28:19, 20: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Acts 8:36, 37” Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

7. The Lord’s Supper is a memorial for baptized believers upon self-examination.

Examine self and Remember Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

8. Autonomous church government with a God-called pastor(s).

Acts 15 was a one time apostolic conference.

The NT Scripture was not yet complete.

Acts 15 is not a model for church polity.

Forms of church government:

Episcopal = hierarchy of men.

Presbyterian = hierarchy of churches.

Congregational = autonomous churches.

9. The separation of church and state as defined in the United States Constitution.

No government control over the local church and no “official” state church.

Matthew 22:21: They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Mr. Johnson said: “Some have their denomination as their chief concern.”

Let me assure you that the Baptist denomination is not my chief concern but neither is it unimportant that you understand the Baptist Distinctive.

Back to Johnson:

Johnson: We can’t let our doctrinal system be our chief concern.

It is Christ who must be our Gospel.

Gunn: As for me I am an unashamed and unapologetic Calvinist as far as the Doctrines of Grace are concerned. But Calvinism is not my chief concern.

Besides I do not agree with Calvin on Paedobaptism as I am hold to Credobaptism; I do not agree with Calvin on the Presbyterian model of church government; not do I agree with Calvin on a state-church.

The way I use the label “Calvinist” is in opposition to what is called “Arminianism” which makes man’s so-called free-will an idol and denies God’s sovereignty.

Johnson: A system of prophecy can become our chief concern.

Gunn: Because the New Testament must interpret the Old Testament and Christ and His Church are the focus of the entire Bible my system of interpretation of prophecy is called Realized Millennialism. But that is not my chief concern.

Johnson:

Point Two: Whatever an individual takes as his stand is his hope.

The ancient Jews had hope that they were the children of Abraham.

The Moralist hopes in his morality; never done anything very bad; nobody could go to hell if he never did anything very bad.

The problem is that all sin is very bad!

Some have their hope in Mormonism, some the in Jehovah's Witness, and all others who deny the deity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Some hope in their experience. The Pentecostals trust in the experience of speaking in tongues and extra-biblical visions and revelations.

But you must trust Jesus Christ!

Johnson:

Point Three: The true Gospel is Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is a Person: not a denomination; not a doctrinal system, nor an ecclesiastical group.

Gunn:

What did Paul mean when he emphasized?

... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,....

Paul was telling us that the Gospel is not a New Testament invention. The Gospel is not God's "Plan B." The Gospel was not introduced because God's plan for the Jews failed. The Gospel is according to the Old Testament because that was the only Bible that Paul and the other apostles had.

That is what Jesus meant when He told the doubting Pharisees that the only sign they would receive would be the sign of the prophet Jonah.

That is what Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 is all about: the Death, the Burial, and the Resurrection of the Christ! That is what the prophets were about, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy - Rev 19:10"

Then Mr. Johnson asked five questions:

Question One:

Why do you not focus on His burial? Some only stress His death and resurrection. When a man is buried he is dead! So His burial is **essential** to the Gospel.

Question Two:

What meanings do men put on His death?

Aristotelian: “Tragedy is good for the soul.” Pragmatic.

Martyrdom: Roman misrule and injustice.

As in Mel Gibson’s “Passion of the Christ.

Great Prophet: To show others how to die.

Question Three:

What is the Bible meaning of Christ’s death?

a) Christ died that God might be just. Cf. Romans 3:21-26

b) Christ died to justify His people of all things.

c) Christ died to bring His people to God.

Question Four:

What is the Bible meaning of Christ’s resurrection?

a) Great evidence of a full atonement.

b) Great proof that the Bible is historically true.

c) We have a living Lord.

Question Five:

What does it mean to take our stand in this Gospel?

a) We take our stand in nothing else.

b) We take our stand in the living God.

c) We close with Christ.

What is the Gospel?

We are all sinners under the wrath of God and condemned to hell unless and until the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus is revealed to us and we are brought by grace through faith alone to see the beauty, the necessity, and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the only way to be saved from the wrath of God!

Our invitation is for you to repent and believe the Gospel.

If you are troubled and have doubts about the genuineness of your faith please seek counsel with one of the elders who will guide you from the Scriptures.