

What the Gospel Is

When reading through the New Testament, one quickly notices the exhilaration and passion with which the apostle Paul preached the gospel (e.g. Romans 1:14-17; 1 Corinthians 9:16). Likewise, anyone in the company of Christians for some time will surely hear phrases such as “gospel ministry”, “gospel-centered”, “preach the gospel”, “believe the gospel”, and “the power of the gospel”. It is easy to see that the gospel is of utmost importance to the Christian. Why is this true? What exactly is the gospel and why does it carry so much significance?

The word “gospel”, which literally means “good news”, has traditionally been defined in three different ways. First, in the broadest sense, the gospel is the entire body of all infallible, divine truth. In this sense, everything in the Bible is considered to be gospel truth. The second use of the term is a bit narrower. The first four books of the New Testament, which chronicle the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, are commonly described as “the four gospels”. This is the sense in which the average American is typically most familiar. The third usage of the word “gospel” refers specifically to what is often called “the gospel of Jesus Christ”, “the gospel of God”, or “the gospel of salvation”. This application of the term “gospel”, which is the narrowest and most focused of all, is far and away the most prolific use in the New Testament, as well as in Christian preaching, writing, and testimony. The gospel of Jesus Christ is of tremendous importance, because it is the message to mankind of salvation from sin and reconciliation to God.

Since sacred Scriptures declares the gospel in its most narrow sense to be the most important message a person could ever know and embrace, it is essential to develop a strong understanding of “what the gospel is”. We will do this through a brief presentation of the necessity, source, function, content, uniqueness, and scope of the gospel as well as the proper response to the gospel and the results of it.

The Necessity of the Gospel

One does not have to read far into the Bible to find man’s dire need for the gospel. In the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, we see that God created humanity in His image, and man had a perfect relationship with God (Genesis 1:26-27). Despite these prime conditions, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, soon afterward sinned, that is, they disobeyed God (Genesis 3:6). Their sin became a prototype for humanity in that every person who has ever lived has likewise disobeyed God in sinful rebellion (Romans 3:23). Since God is completely holy (Psalm 5:4) and cannot tolerate sin (Habakkuk 1:13), transgression has placed man under the wrath (John 3:36), curse (Galatians 3:10), and eternal condemnation of God (Romans 5:12, 18).

To make matters worse, when Adam and Eve sinned, human nature became wicked and corrupt to the point that people no longer retain the independent ability or desire to seek, serve, worship, and love God (Ephesians 2:1; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:11). The mind of man became hostile toward God and unable to submit to or please Him (Romans 8:7). He is a self-declared enemy of God (Colossians 1:21). In this condition, a man’s efforts to please God are futile, and he has no ability to overcome sin and change his own life (John 15:5) in order to come out from under the condemnation of God and acquit himself from the sentence of eternal conscious punishment in hell (Matthew 25:46).

The Source of the Gospel

If the story ended here, it would be a sad one indeed, but God loved His creation too much to allow the entire human race to be separated from Him for all eternity. Despite the fact that there was nothing lovely in man and no ability in man to reconcile himself to God, it pleased God to express His love toward us by providing a way to be declared righteous in His sight.

In fact, God loved the world so much that He planned the redemption of man *“before the foundation of the world”* (1 Peter 1:18-21). In order to both exact His justice and exercise His mercy, there was only one way for God to provide salvation to mankind: to supply a worthy substitute who would adequately pay the penalty for sin, which is death (Romans 6:23). God did this by sacrificing His own Son, Jesus Christ, who was *“delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God...nailed to a cross...and put...to death.”* (Acts 2:23). So, the purposes of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were sure because *“His works were finished from the foundation of the world”* (Hebrews 4:3).

Furthermore, since the plan of redemption began before the foundation of the world, its subjects were chosen before the foundation of the world. *“[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity”* (2 Tim 1:9). Therefore, since all of those who will be saved were chosen *“in Him before the foundation of the world”* (Ephesians 1:4), God’s plan is as unshakable as God Himself.

One may ask, “Why does the gospel matter if God elects people to salvation from eternity past?” While it is true that the election of God is by grace, it is also through faith in Jesus Christ, who is revealed in the gospel. So, the gospel is tremendously important, since it communicates who Christ is and what He has done for sinners. After all, *“How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?”* (Romans 10:14).

Just as God wasted no time in planning for the provision of the forgiveness of sin, He likewise did not waste any time in communicating His provision to lost humanity. Soon after sin was first committed in the garden, the gospel, in its seed form, was also revealed in the same garden. The first mention of the promised Messiah came immediately after the first sin (Genesis 3:15). For the next four thousand years of history, faithful servants of God looked forward to the One who would come to save them from their sins as prophesied: *“He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.”* (Isaiah 53:5)

Finally, a little over two thousand years ago, the promise was fulfilled when the source of the gospel Himself came to save His people from their sins. *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”* (Galatians 4:4-5)

The Function of the Gospel

God desires all people everywhere to hear, receive, and submit to His great and glorious gospel. He could have chosen to divinely communicate the good news through dreams and visions. He could have decided to use majestic angels to promote His plan. He could have selected to deliver the message Himself. But He didn't. Instead, He chose ordinary human beings to be the instruments that would preach, teach, and witness the gospel to the world.

The gospel message is the divinely ordained vehicle by which God brings reconciliation and redemption to the world. It is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ...a message of hope to people without any. Jesus said that His purpose for coming to earth was *"to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). So we ask the question, "How did He save people?" From the Word of God, we know without a doubt that people are saved by grace *alone* through faith *alone*. Therefore, the next logical question we could ask is, "How do people come to faith in Christ?" The Bible states that the gospel is the vehicle by which God brings people to faith in His Son, so leading people to faith in Jesus is the very function of the gospel. Paul wrote, *"faith comes from hearing...and the message is heard through the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17).

The gospel is not just any good news, *"it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16). Notice that not everyone who hears the gospel is *automatically* saved; it is only those who embrace the gospel through faith. People must believe the gospel and consequently place their faith in Christ to be saved. So, the gospel plays a very key role in salvation. It literally brings us to a place where we can hear the truth of God and receive it by exercising faith in Christ. The apostle Paul wrote:

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Remember that God has planned the redemption of His elect and chose them to be in Christ before the foundation of the world. This fact does not in any way nullify the necessity of the gospel, which is able to bring about faith in the hearer. On the contrary, it guarantees the effectiveness of the gospel, since, without exception, God always brings about His purposes. *"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."* (Isaiah 55:11)

The Content of the Gospel

The gospel demonstrates the power of God in that, through the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit, it enables faith to be activated in the hearts of sinful, rebellious people. It is a mighty declaration of who Christ is and what He has done. It uncovers our selfishness while illuminating His perfect love. It exposes our sinfulness while magnifying His perfection. It reveals our inability to save ourselves while boldly proclaiming how He came down and fearlessly conquered death. Paul gave a brief outline of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8:

Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

As Paul has indicated, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are foundational to the gospel message. The gospel makes it abundantly clear that there can be no forgiveness of sins apart from the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul declared to the Corinthians, “*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*” (1 Corinthians 15:17). In the book of Romans, he wrote, “*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification*” (Romans 4:25).

While it is true that the death and resurrection are the critical to the gospel, there are several other important facts that must be believed in order for one to truly grasp the significance and content of the gospel. First, Jesus is God. If He was not God, He could never adequately pay the penalty for sin. The psalmist wrote, “*No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him*” (Psalm 49:7), yet Jesus came to “*give His life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). He could do this as God, since His life was of infinite value. Second, Jesus was a perfect, sinless man. He “*knew no sin*” (2 Corinthians 5:21), “*committed no sin*” (1 Peter 2:22) and had no sin in Him (1 John 3:5). This was also necessary, since He had to perfectly fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17) as a man in order to be a valid substitute (1 Peter 3:18) and acceptable sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26). Third, the most fundamental confession undergirding the gospel is “*Jesus is Lord*” (Romans 10:9). As Lord, He created all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), sustains all things (Colossians 1:17), owns all things (Acts 10:36), and rules all things (Psalm 103:19; Hebrews 2:8). Therefore, He has authority over our lives and we owe Him complete allegiance, obedience, and worship.

So, the gospel that brings salvation contains a number of key aspects of the person (God, perfect man, Lord, Savior, and substitute) and work (perfect life, death, and resurrection) of Jesus Christ.

The Uniqueness of the Gospel

In today’s pluralistic, postmodern culture, the common consensus would lead one to believe there is no such thing as absolute truth and all paths lead to the same place for those who are sincere. Unfortunately, people who do not oblige to this worldview are labeled as “intolerant”.

However, it is essential to reject any and all self-constructed worldviews and theologies crafted by mere human beings on the basis of their own desires and logic. God’s judgments are far greater than that of man. Paul writes, “*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?’*” (Romans 11:33-34).

How ignorant and arrogant it is for man to think that he can devise his own way to heaven when the God of the universe has clearly communicated His way to us in holy Scripture. In God’s economy, there is only *one* gospel and *one* Savior. Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6), so clinging to that one, true

gospel is absolutely essential. It is the power of God unto salvation! Placing trust and hope in any other so-called “gospel” is futile, hopeless, and damning to the soul. Paul stated it best when he wrote the following words:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel -- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-9)

Paul’s words to the Galatians ought to be taken seriously. His view of the gospel was extremely narrow and well-defined, and he tenaciously defended the gospel against any attempts of alteration and modification. In order to exhibit as much emphasis as possible, Paul repeated the same statement twice: anyone holding to and promoting a false gospel will be eternally condemned. Why was Paul so rigid about the gospel? Because there is only one gospel that wields the power to save people from sin, death, and hell, and there are many, many lost souls at stake. Furthermore, all other “gospels” rob God of the glory, honor, and praise that He deserves.

Romans 6:23 says, “*the wages of sin is death*”, and Christ Jesus is the only one who could and did die for the sins of the world. He is the only Savior and Lord. Only He is able to save us from our sins, because His divine life was uniquely worthy enough to pay the eternal punishment for sin. No religious figure or person could ever pay our sin debt for us. Jesus alone died for sin. He died on a cross, and three days later, rose from the dead and proved that He was who He claimed to be! Mohammad, Buddha, and all other religious figures are still in the grave, but Jesus Christ has risen and is alive! And for that reason, the Bible says, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). So, all roads do not lead to heaven. Jesus is the only way.

The Scope of the Gospel

In taking a look at the scope of the gospel, we must examine the question of whether the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. In other words, can anyone be exempt from the gospel? How about the heathen in the jungles of Africa? How about the people who lived before the birth of Christ? Is the gospel also necessary for their salvation too?

Jesus commanded His disciples to “*go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation*” (Mark 16:15). If the heathen in Africa does not need the gospel, then would it be necessary for us to fully obey Jesus’ command? As we have seen in the previous section, there is simply no other way to be saved (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The reasoning is quite straightforward; since Christ is the only one who is able to pay for our sins, everyone needs the gospel of Christ to be forgiven.

Moreover, entertaining the question of whether the gospel was necessary for people prior to the time of Christ is in essence calling the immutability and justice of God into question. Numbers

23:19 says, “*God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should change His mind.*” Additionally, Romans 2:11 states, “*God does not show favoritism,*” so could it be possible for God, who is completely just, to have different criteria for different people? Absolutely not! Paul stated:

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise...but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by the law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless...the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring... (Romans 4:13-14, 16).

Abraham is a great illustration of the fact that salvation has always been by grace through faith. This is a timeless and boundless truth. There are no limits to the gospel and no one is exempt. In fact, everyone who has ever lived or ever will live has the responsibility to believe and receive the gospel. Many people speculate that people born into Hindu families in India and Buddhist families in China, where the gospel is sparse, have much less potential for placing their faith in Christ than people born in America, where the gospel is prevalent. From a human standpoint, this conjecture sounds reasonable, but it cannot stand against Biblical testimony. On Mars Hill, Paul explained how God gives all people the best possible opportunity to be saved:

From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:26-27)

In the section above entitled “the source of the gospel”, we saw that Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world, and the elect were chosen in Him from all eternity. Those before Christ looked forward to the coming of the Messiah in faith, and those after Him, look back to His coming in faith. Either way, salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The payment He made for sin atoned for past, present, and future sins.

The Proper Response to the Gospel

Hearing and understanding the gospel does not automatically classify someone as “saved”. While it is true that Jesus “*is the atoning sacrifice...for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2), it is not true that everyone’s sins have been paid for by Christ. In other words, simply hearing the gospel does not magically erase one’s transgressions. To be efficacious, the gospel must not only be heard; it must also be received with humble, repentant faith. Otherwise, it is of no value. The writer of Hebrews said, “*For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.*” (Hebrews 4:2)

Humility is the precursor to what is known as “saving faith”. To be saved one must first realize that he is a helpless sinner who does not deserve God’s grace. This realization must lead the sinner to abandon all hope of ever saving himself. The Bible describes the unsaved man as “*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked*” (Revelation 3:17), and he must see himself as such. God requires that we come to Him humble and broken, casting ourselves solely on His mercy.

We must be humbled to the point of full submission to and dependence on Him. Only when we fall on our faces, beat our breasts, and say, “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*” (Luke 18:13) will we be in a position to really trust Christ.

The injunction of the gospel to the individual sinner is to “*repent and believe*” (Mark 1:15). But, what does it mean to believe and repent? As one would expect, the term “believe” includes the acceptance and trust of the contents of the gospel message (John 8:24). To trust Christ as Savior means to trust in His person and work, to truly believe that He is God incarnate, fully God and fully man. He came from glory, descended to earth, lived a perfect life, paid the penalty for sin with His blood through a substitutionary death on the cross, and rose victoriously from the grave. But belief is not just a simple acceptance of facts. Even demons have this type of “faith”. James wrote, “*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder*” (James 2:19). So, belief is more than mere agreement or intellectual assent to truth; it is a trust that initiates action and changes your life (James 2:17).

Next, one must understand that true faith is also repentant faith, and the gospel always calls for repentance. James wrote, “*get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you*” (James 1:21). There is no doubt that the gospel calls the sinner to surrender his life to Christ in humble repentance. This is a crucial point that needs to be emphasized strongly, since it is largely absent in today’s evangelism.

Contrary to what some may think, the command to repent does not mean that the sinner must first completely reform his life before coming to Christ. If that were the case no one would ever come to Christ. The sinner simply does not have the ability to clean himself up and the greatest amount of will power will never be enough. Through the proclamation of the gospel, God Himself gives man the gift of repentance. The fruits of repentance (i.e. forsaking of individual sins) are a result of salvation, not as a means for it (see section below on results of the gospel).

To repent means to have a change of mind and to turn around. In other words, it involves a turning from sin and a turning to God. It is, in essence, the heart’s desire to submit to Christ’s authority. So repentance is the willingness and commitment to obey God and live for His glory. In this sense, repentance is mandatory for salvation. Paul left no one exempt when he wrote, “*Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.*” (2 Timothy 2:19).

Any invitation to salvation that does not include repentance is in essence an invitation to use Christ for eternal life while continuing in sin. The gospel was never a call to half-heartedness; the proposition of Jesus Christ is always “all or nothing”. The gospel summons people to love and honor Jesus more than anything else or anyone else. Repentance requires that all interests, pleasures, and desires be subordinate to love for Him. In its truest sense, repentance is not about restricting the sinner from sin, it is about giving God, the Lord and King of the universe what He deserves, our heart-felt gratitude, our worship, our lives! So, in its essence, to surrender to Him as Lord is to humbly repent and truly submit to Christ as Sovereign King and Master. It is living for His glory in such a way that we joyfully obey Him and comply with His rule as He leads our lives and conforms our ways to His.

The Results of the Gospel

How important is the gospel and what is at stake? First and foremost, God's glory is at stake. Contrary to what many people believe and espouse, salvation is not about man. Although the gospel promises benefits for the individual, these benefits are merely the byproducts of salvation. The true heart of salvation is God receiving the glory that He deserves from man. God has purchased souls by His own blood, and the only way they could be freed from the pangs of sin, death, and hell is through the gospel. Jesus Christ loves the world so much that He has redeemed individuals by paying the ultimate ransom. He gave His life for theirs, and He deserves to receive His purchased possession. This is the primary essence of the gospel. Accordingly, Paul stated that Christ died so that *"those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again"* (2 Corinthians 5:15). In other words, our grand purpose in life is to glorify Christ. Elsewhere Paul wrote, *"If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord"* (Romans 14:8). *"So we make it our goal to please Him."* (2 Corinthians 5:9). *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31). As we saw in our section on "the necessity of the gospel", unbelievers have no ability or desire to please God (Hebrews 11:6). So, we must understand that the primary purpose for salvation, and therefore the gospel that brings salvation, is the glory of God.

As stated above, salvation does carry benefits to the individual as well. Although these benefits are secondary to the glory of God, they should not be minimized. The first obvious benefit is the gift of grace which provides the ability and desire to glorify God in all things. This transforming grace, which is given to all believers, is known as the new birth, and everyone who receives the new birth is "born again". So, what is the new birth and what does it mean to be born again?

When God effectually calls His elect through the gospel message, He gives them the gifts of faith and repentance in order for the gospel to take root. Peter illustrates this well. In his first epistle, he writes to *"God's elect"* (1 Peter 1:1), *"who have been chosen"* (v.2). He then proceeds to speak of God's grace toward them: *"In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (v.3). So, this new birth that Peter speaks of provides a living hope to the believer, but how does God accomplish this? Peter explains that God graciously gives the new birth through the gospel: *"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God"* (v.23). In the new birth, the Holy Spirit sanctifies the individual for obedience to Jesus Christ (v.2) by giving him a new heart and indwelling him forever (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul explains how belief in the gospel results in being indwelt with the Holy Spirit:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.
(Ephesians 1:13-14)

The presence of the Holy Spirit, along with the new nature given in the new birth, enables the believer to do the good works he was created to do (Ephesians 2:10). The fact that it is God who works in the believer to accomplish His purposes (Philippians 2:13) guarantees that they will bear fruit (John 15:8, 16), be progressively sanctified throughout life (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1

Peter 1:2), and endure faithfully to the end (Romans 8:29-30). John the Baptist understood this when he challenged hypocrites to “*produce fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Matthew 3:8). So, as a tree bears fruit, repentance unto salvation (i.e. total submission and surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord) yields the fruits of repentance (i.e. good works and a changed life).

When a person truly receives Christ through saving faith, many other things happen as well. Since the purpose of this essay is not to elaborate on them, we will simply provide a short list of some of them. When the gospel is believed, God applies Christ’s payment for sin (ransom) to the sinner (redemption), declares him righteous (justification), removes all eternal punishment (propitiation) and forgives/covers all sin (atonement), credits the person with the righteousness of Christ (imputation), reconciles and restores the broken relationship (reconciliation), delivers the sinner from the power of sin and Satan (deliverance), gives him a new heart (regeneration), indwells him with the Holy Spirit (baptism of the Holy Spirit), makes him a child of God (adoption), and grants him the promise of eternal life (assurance). Does that sound like a lot? There is more! At the moment of justification, He begins a life-long process called sanctification in which He refines us into the image of His Son until the day we die. On that day, we will be perfectly glorified, and meet Him face to face. What an awesome gift from an awesome God!

The gospel is indeed a message of eternal life (John 3:16; 1 John 2:24-25), but what is eternal life? Many people would describe it as living forever in heaven. Although it is true that believers will live forever in heaven, the term “eternal life” contains far more significance than the quality and quantity of our lives. The apostle John described Jesus Christ as “*the true God and eternal life...which was with the Father and has now appeared to us*” (1 John 5:20; 1:2). So, eternal life, in its purest sense is Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, anyone who has Christ has eternal life and to have eternal life is to have Christ. Furthermore, having Christ is having God the Father (1 John 2:23) and God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14).

This implies that those who truly trust in Christ as Lord and Savior enjoy a personal relationship with Him (i.e. they know Him and He knows them). In His gospel, the apostle John wrote, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent*” (John 17:3). So, Jesus Christ is eternal life and to have eternal life is to know Him.

Eternal life is far richer than simply going to heaven for eternity. It is embracing and intimately knowing the One who Himself *IS* eternal life. However, it is true that believers will inhabit heaven for eternity, since they will be with Jesus and that is where He is. Once we have the proper perspective, we can look forward to Heaven, which is a glorious place where believers will worship God for eternity in sinless perfection.

It is important to understand that true submission to Christ leads to an intimate knowledge of who He is and who we are in relation to Him. But remember, there is a big difference between knowing about somebody and knowing somebody! What is at stake if someone doesn’t know Jesus Christ? The apostle Paul answered this question with the following words: “*He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Notice how Paul equates knowing God with obeying the gospel of Jesus. The gospel is of utmost importance, since it is the gateway to knowing Christ and being in His presence. The only other alternative is everlasting destruction. Everyone who rejects the gospel of Jesus Christ will be shut out from His presence punished for all eternity.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also spoke of the consequences of rejecting the gospel. There He promised that He will proclaim the following words to anyone who has never repented and placed their faith in Him: *“I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”* (Matthew 7:23). Again, all unbelievers will be cast away from the loving presence of Jesus for all eternity, because they have not known Him. Instead of spending eternity worshipping Him in heaven, they will eternally experience the wrath of God in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-14).

Therefore, the gospel has crucially important implications. Sadly though, although many Christians claim to believe that the gospel is *“the power of God for salvation”* (Romans 1:16), they present it in a man-centered, weak, or watered down fashion. While the Bible plainly teaches that the sole requirement to be saved is to trust Christ as Lord and Savior, the “invitation” to “trust” or “accept” Him is often given in a vague manner. Christians need to take time to thoroughly explain the gospel when evangelizing, but unfortunately, many never do. If the gospel is not explained and understood, false conversions happen more frequently as a result of superficial and misinformed decisions. As a result, churches become filled with deceived but comfortable people who will one day stand at the gate of heaven saying, *“Lord, Lord, did we not...”* (Matthew 7:22) only to hear Him reply, *“I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”* (v.23). If anything in the Bible is frightening, this is it...people who claim the name of Christ, go to church, and even do ministry, all the while living their lives with a false hope, because they never really knew Jesus.

The Bible clearly indicates that God *“has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31). Although one day everyone will unmistakably see His Lordship, only those who submit to His Lordship while on earth will be saved. Everyone else will remain in their sins and suffer eternal punishment (John 8:24, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Conclusion

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of tremendous significance. It is the good news of who Christ is and what He has done...a powerful message that exposes man’s sinfulness and need for the Savior...the only message that enables people to come to true, repentant faith in Christ. The gospel is an unchanging declaration and a mighty invitation to know and embrace Jesus Christ.

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men...Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)