



## 1: The Heart Of The Gospel

What is the gospel? You would think that would be an easy question to answer. The fact is, getting Christians to agree on an answer is not as straight forward as you might imagine. Most will come up with something that falls far short of what the Bible holds out as “the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

What are some of the answers you would expect people to give to the question “What is the gospel?”

Where do you think those ideas have come from?

What is your answer to the same question? Make a note of your answer so you can see if it has changed by the time we come to the end of these studies.

The aim of these studies is to make sure you have a clear and full answer, one that is based on what the Bible itself teaches about the gospel. They aim to give you an understanding of the gospel that will cause your heart to overflow with such joy and praise in response to the gospel's message that you will delight to share it with everyone and anyone and share it with confidence and boldness.

### Good News

We'll start with the word itself. The word for gospel in the New Testament is *euangelion*. It is built out of two words: one means good or joyful; the other means news. *Euangelion* is not just a word you find in the Bible. In the days when the New Testament was being written it was used very widely. It described any message that brought joy. Messengers who brought good news delivered it in person, it was spoken as an announcement and the messenger exulted over the news he had to bring. *Euangelion* always had a celebrative feel to it — like the announcement of Jesus arrival in the world (Luke 2:9 – 14).

Think back to some of the “gospel” messages you have heard. Have they sounded like good news? If not, why do you think that was the case?

### But What Is The News?

So the gospel is good news. Proclaiming the gospel ought to begin with something along the lines of, “Have I got good news for you!” But what is this news that Christians get so excited about?”

We look, of course, to the Bible for our answer, but where in the Bible should we look for the Bible never gives anything like a concise definition of the gospel. What it does do is it describes different aspects of the gospel in different places and it gives us examples of the gospel being proclaimed. What we have to do then is gather those descriptions together, look at the examples and assemble the big picture for ourselves.

Why do you think it might be that the Bible doesn't give us a concise definition of the gospel?

## Paul's Gospel

One of the best places to start looking for the ideas to help us build our understanding of what the gospel is is Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans is Paul's deliberate, step-by-step explanation of the good news. After a brief introduction, he gets down to business with:

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed..."

Romans 1:16 – 17

And from there, especially in the first four chapters, he explains in detail what he means when he says the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.

First, Paul makes it clear that everyone is accountable to God, because God created us and He has the right to demand that we worship Him (Romans 1:18 – 21).

Next, Paul tells us we have a problem because we have not honoured Him — we have put other things in His place (Romans 1:18, 23 and 2:5 – 11). In fact, Paul presses that point for another two chapters so that by the middle of chapter 3 he is able to conclude that we have all sinned (Romans 3:10 – 18).

Is there any sense in which Paul's message so far is good news?

Then Paul reveals that the solution to man's sin problem lies in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21) and he makes it clear that it is by God's grace that our problem is dealt with.

Finally, he explains that the salvation available through Jesus is for everyone who believes (Romans 3:22).

## Four Essentials

So, at the heart of Paul's gospel there are four essential points:

- God: there is a God and we are accountable to Him.
- Man: we have sinned against God and deserve His judgement.
- Jesus: we can be saved by Jesus.
- Response: that way of salvation is open to anyone who trusts Him.

Greg Gilbert<sup>1</sup> argues that those four points lie at the heart of every presentation of the gospel in the New Testament. Contexts, words and emphases change but somehow each of these four issues is always brought in at some point.

Do you agree with Greg Gilbert? Look at these examples. Is each of those four elements present in some way?

- 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 5
- Acts 3:18 – 19
- Acts 10:39 – 43
- Acts 13: 38 – 39

You can see that this is not a formula to be followed slavishly. In the examples you have looked at the four points are explained at various lengths and in some of the examples one or more of the points is merely suggested rather than directly expressed.

Paul's sermon in Acts 17:22 – 31 is often held up as an example of the gospel being proclaimed to pagan people. In the light of what we have just said, does Paul actually preach the gospel in Acts 17?

## That's Just The Start

Of course chapter 3 is not the end of Paul's letter to the Romans. There is lots more explanation, there are lots more promises and there is a lot more good news. The gospel is much, much more than these four points but, as we shall see, the good news begins — it must begin — with these things because all the promises — everything that is good — are only for those whose sin is forgiven through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> **What Is The Gospel by Greg Gilbert, published by Crossway.** A good read if you want to study the issues touched on in this study further.