

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

by David A. Huston

This paper is presented as a response to those who preach any gospel other than the gospel preached by the apostles of Jesus Christ.

*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
He who believes and is baptized will be saved;
but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

Mark 16:15-16

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN IS FULL of bad news: shootings, rapes, murders, wars, evil of every kind. But, thank the Lord, there is some good news too! It's called the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul called it “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13). In Romans 1:16 he declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”

Jesus brought good news to Nicodemus when He told him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Peter explained that believers are “born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” He described this experience as “obeying the truth,” concluding, “Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:22-25).

The Bible tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). What is the Word of God that a man or woman must hear for faith to come? What is the truth that must be obeyed? What is the incorruptible seed through which we are born again? Clearly it is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is but one gospel.

Paul marveled that some of the Galatian believers had turned away so soon from the One who had called them to a “different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). He warned them that there were men who wanted to “pervert the gospel of Christ” (v.7). He then declared, “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” (v.8). And in case they hadn't heard him clearly the first time, he reiterated his warning saying, “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” (v.9).

Paul then vouched for the gospel he preached by declaring, “The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ (v.12). Paul’s gospel was not concocted in the mind of man, but came to him directly from Jesus Christ by divine revelation. Paul’s gospel is the true and only gospel.

What is the gospel Paul preached?

The gospel preached by Paul is summarized in the following passage:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you; unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Paul’s gospel consisted of three elements:

- 1. Jesus Christ died for our sins.**
- 2. Jesus Christ was buried.**
- 3. Jesus Christ rose again the third day.**

Paul’s gospel shows us that since Jesus died for *our* sins, we are all sinners in need of a Savior. It also shows us that since Jesus did not sin, He was more than an ordinary man; He was “God manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). Some have asked if Jesus could have sinned if He had wanted to. The answer is this: If Jesus couldn’t have sinned, He wasn’t a real man; if He had sinned, He wasn’t really God. Jesus was both God and man. This is the only way He could have lived without sin yet died for our sins.

According to the passage above, we must receive this gospel, we must stand in it, and we must hold fast to it. If we do not, we have believed for nothing.

Paul also wrote that “God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:16). This means that at the final judgment, every rationalization and justification for not obeying Jesus Christ will be exposed. Many people have made excuses for not surrendering their lives to Jesus, but the Lord knows all things, even the secrets things of men’s hearts. We may be able to hide our true thoughts and intents from other people, but we cannot hide them from the Lord. And according to the gospel, they will all be brought out into the light to be judged by God.

How does a person believe the gospel?

In the following passage, Paul shows that we cannot believe and respond to the gospel until we first hear it:

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 unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” Romans 10:14-16

This passage tells us that believing the gospel and obeying the gospel are equivalent phrases. Only those who obey God’s Word can be said to truly believe it. James wrote that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). This is another way of saying that believing without obeying is dead. As Jesus said, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but you won’t do the things that I say?” (Luke 6:46). No one who has failed to obey the gospel can say that they have believed it.

According to the Bible, every failure to obey the gospel will bring severe consequences. As Peter wrote, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17).

What will happen to those who do not obey the gospel?

Paul answered this question in the following passage:

Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

God’s vengeance is not just against those who do not know God, but also against everyone who does not obey the gospel. This is because the only way anyone can enter into the full knowledge of the true God is by obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who do not do so will be destroyed forever.

How does a person obey the gospel?

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached the gospel to the assembled crowd. He declared to them:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Acts 2:22-24

The Scripture goes on to say:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. Acts 2:37-41

The people Peter preached to heard the gospel, believed the gospel, and obeyed the gospel.

What was it that they heard?

The message that Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead.

What was it they believed?

That Jesus died for them and that they must repent and be baptized.

How did they obey the gospel?

By repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

We see the same response taking place in Samaria when Philip preached the gospel:

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice,

came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Acts 8:5-12

Again, they heard, they believed, and they obeyed by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. But Paul wasn't there either on the Day of Pentecost or when Philip preached in Samaria. What about his gospel? How did people respond when he preached? We can read about it in the following passage:

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John's baptism.” Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Acts 19:1-6

When these people heard what Paul had to say, they responded by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. God's response to their obedient faith was to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. We know this because they spoke in tongues just like on the Day of Pentecost.

A Different Gospel

Paul was concerned that some of the people he had preached the gospel to would, like the Galatians, be turned away to another gospel. For example, Paul was the first to preach the gospel in Corinth. After hearing his good news, the Bible says, “And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” Again we see that people heard, believed, and obeyed by being baptized. But a while later Paul wrote to these same people the following concern:

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit

which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted; you may well put up with it! 2 Corinthians 11:2-4

Paul was concerned that some were preaching a gospel that was different from the one he preached. Today there are many “gospels” in the world. There is the gospel of “just accept the Lord as your personal Savior.” There is the gospel of “just believe in Jesus and you’re saved.” There is the gospel of “just recite the sinners prayer and you’re saved.” In the Pentecostal world, there is the gospel of “repent and receive the Holy Spirit.” But any gospel that is not identical to the gospel preached by Paul must be identified and marked as a false gospel.

There is only one true gospel.

It is the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. This gospel must be heard, believed, and obeyed by repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

There is only one true Spirit.

When you are filled with the Spirit you will speak in other tongues just as they did on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts 10, and in Acts 19.

There is only one true Jesus.

Jesus is not the second person in the Godhead, He is....

the First and the Last
the Alpha and Omega
the Beginning and the End
the Holy One of Israel
the Mighty God
the Everlasting Father
the King of kings, Lord of lords, God of gods.

In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and we are complete in Him. For in all things He has the preeminence!

When John saw Jesus on the Isle of Patmos, the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (Revelation 1:17-18).

There is good news for our world today! Jesus Christ is alive forevermore! We should therefore obey the command of the Lord, who tells us, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

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