

The Gospel

Baxter T. Exum (#1513)
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As we drive around the city of Madison, we don't necessarily need to know that George Washington was the first president of the United States before we drive down East or West Washington Avenue or before we navigate our way around the city. We don't need to know that Baldwin Street was named after Abraham Baldwin from Georgia, the son of a blacksmith, graduate of Yale, and chaplain in the Continental Army, a signer of the constitution. We don't need to know that Broom Street was named after Jacob Broom of Delaware, a mapmaker for George Washington during the war. We don't necessarily need to know that Mifflin Street was named for Thomas Mifflin, a Pennsylvania Quaker who served as Quartermaster General of the Continental Army. We don't need to know that Willy Street was named for Hugh Williamson from North Carolina, a licensed Presbyterian preacher and math professor.

However, as we discuss the Bible, there are terms that need to be defined, that need to be studied, that need to be understood. And one of those words we use quite often is the word GOSPEL. All throughout scripture, we see this word used in various ways. We see references to preaching the gospel. We see it referred to as ***"the gospel of Christ, the gospel of God, the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of God's Son, the gospel of your salvation, the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of peace, the gospel of our Lord Jesus,"*** and so on. The word ***"gospel,"*** in fact, is found around 100 times in the New Testament, and it comes from a word that means "good news" or "good message." And the New Testament is, in fact, a good message. And it's good, because the gospel is God's answer to some very bad news. The bad news is: We have sinned, and as a result of our sin, we have been separated from God. We are lost and without God. But the good news is: God has announced a plan to save us. And so today, I'd like for us to take a few moments to study the good news. And this will be somewhat different from the way we usually study. Usually we take a paragraph of scripture and stick with it. Today, though, we are looking at one word. And to understand that word a little better, we need to back up a little bit and explore a number of passages where this word is used.

However, so that you don't just take my word for it, I won't be putting the actual text on the wall up here, but as we move through the lesson, I will put the references up here. And I would encourage you to turn with me to each passage. I'll make sure all of us have time to get to each one. I will also try to put several up here at a time, to give you some advance notice concerning where we are heading. But the value of doing it this way is 1.) So that you can see each passage in your own Bible, and 2.) So that you can examine the context a bit. The

danger of looking at a topic like this is that we might miss the context. So, whether you are using your phone, or a tablet, or an actual book, or maybe a scroll or papyrus of some kind, you can look around and notice the verses around the shorter references. And instead of looking at single verses here and there, I will also try to include some of the larger context as we study. Today, then, we are looking at some basic facts concerning the gospel.

I. And we start with Galatians 1:6-9, and the fact that THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL, AND NO OTHER.

In our pew Bibles, Galatians 1 is found on page 1819. Galatians was written by the apostle Paul to the churches of Galatia. Galatia was a Roman province in what is basically now the nation of Turkey. And the churches of Galatia were facing a challenge: Some people were coming in and were trying to change the gospel message. They were adding to it. They were corrupting it by trying to add in some of the requirements of Judaism. And this is where we come to Galatians 1:6-9. Notice Paul's warning,

⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

So, in this passage, Paul reminds us that for good news to truly be good, it must primarily be TRUE, because if good news is not true, then it is not good news at all. In fact, it is bad news. If I tell somebody that their loved one has survived a terrible accident, or if their test results came back favorable, or if their loved one lost in the woods has been found, or that they have inherited a million dollars, but if that news is not TRUE, then the news (no matter how good it might sound) is really not good at all. And the same goes for the gospel. Some people were coming in among the churches of Galatia, and they were changing the message from God. They were adding to it. They were adjusting it just a bit. And by changing the message, they had turned it from good news into terrible news.

Paul, then, is very clear: To change the gospel is to leave God, and those who change the gospel are to be accursed. As we noted before, the gospel is often referred to as ***"the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ,"*** and so on. Since it is God's gospel, since it is His good news, we as mere mortals have no right to change it. And so, as we look into these facts about the gospel, the first foundational fact is that there is only one gospel; there is no other. And we share it, not just because it is good news, but we share it because it is true. If we label something as ***"gospel"*** without it matching exactly what we find in scripture, then whatever it is we are sharing is wrong. So, first of all, there is one gospel, and it is not to be changed.

II. The second foundational truth I want us to notice concerning the gospel is that THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S POWER TO SALVATION.

The gospel is powerful. The gospel has the power to save us. And we read about this in Romans 1 (p. 1758). The book of Romans, of course, was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. We just finished studying Romans in our Sunday morning adult class. We are heading for Romans 1:14-17, but by way of background, notice, please, Romans 1:1-7, and notice Paul's emphasis on the gospel, from the very beginning - Romans 1:1-7,

¹ *Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,* ² *which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,* ³ *concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,* ⁴ *who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,* ⁵ *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,* ⁶ *among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;* ⁷ *to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Just in this passage alone, we find that Paul was set apart ***“for the gospel of God,”*** and then he identifies this gospel as being ***“promised beforehand”*** through the ***“prophets in the holy Scriptures.”*** We find that the gospel is about God’s Son who came to this earth in human form, he died, and he was resurrected from the dead. We also find that this message led to ***“the obedience of faith among the Gentiles.”*** There is so much we can learn from this passage alone, but I want us to skip down to verses 14-17, another reference to the gospel,

¹⁴ *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.*
¹⁵ *So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.* ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* ¹⁷ *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”*

So, in this passage, we have the gospel described - it is the ***“power of God to salvation.”*** The gospel is powerful. Some have pointed out that the word translated here as ***“power”*** is the basis of our English word “dynamite.” Not that the gospel is explosive in any way. We need to be careful how we look at words like that. It’s also the basis of words like “dynamic,” and “dynasty,” and so on. The word means “power.” The gospel is powerful. The gospel is ***“the power of God to salvation.”*** The gospel’s power is that it saves. The gospel has the power to save us. We were lost in sin, we were separated from God, and the gospel has the power to bridge that gap. The gospel has the power to bring us back. But, the gospel does not save everybody. We have the first hint of a limitation of the gospel’s power right in the middle of verse 16. It is God’s power to salvation, ***“to everyone who believes.”*** The gospel saves, but it doesn’t save everybody; instead, it saves those who believe. And so there is a limitation on it. And certainly, this fits in with what we learn in other passages - the importance of believing. God demands that we believe the gospel; otherwise, we remain lost. We are lost because of sin. We are lost because our sins have separated us from God. The gospel is God’s power of salvation, but we have to believe it. And it is believable. God is not asking us to suspend rational thought. Instead, we have eyewitness testimony. We have evidence of God’s existence. We have a series of historical facts. But the big idea here is: The gospel is powerful. The gospel is important. And our salvation depends, in part, on us believing it. If we refuse to believe it, we will be lost. This is according to Jesus in Mark 16:15-16, when he said to his disciples, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*** Our salvation is conditional on believing the gospel. It is powerful, but it will only save those who believe.

- III. Up to this point, we haven’t really defined the gospel yet, so as we continue investigating the gospel, we come to another key passage in 1 Corinthians 15 as we have the gospel defined for us, because in 1 Corinthians 15, we find that **THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.**

1 Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, a city built on an isthmus, not unlike the city of Madison. We have that in common. We have some other things in common as well. In 1 Corinthians, Paul seems to be answering a series of questions that were sent to him by the congregation, and he answers these questions one after the other. In Chapter 15 he gets to what seems to be some kind of question about the resurrection, and as he sets up the answer, he defines the gospel. He tells us what the good news really is. Notice, please, 1 Corinthians 15:1-9,

¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

So, in verses 3-4, we have the gospel defined for us. We know that the gospel is the good news, we know that it cannot be changed, we know that the gospel has the power to save us. but now we have the gospel defined for us. The gospel is the good news that Jesus died, that he was buried, and that he was raised. The gospel, then, is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And what makes it good news for us comes in verse 3 as Paul says that Christ ***“died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”*** This is what makes it personal. Jesus’ death on the cross was the fulfillment of prophecy, and he died ***“for our sins.”*** He died for us. In a sense, he died in our place. He took on the guilt of our sin. He took the punishment we deserved. This is what makes the gospel good news for us. This is the basis of the Lord’s Supper that we as Christians partake of on the first day of every week. We remember the Lord’s death for us. We remember his suffering. We remember the blood that he shed.

But this is the gospel: The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And we must believe this in order to be saved. And this is where many of our friends in the religious world will leave it: We believe, we mentally agree that Jesus died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised up, and our sins are forgiven. They leave it at this. However, there is more to it than that...

IV. ...because the scriptures also teach that THE GOSPEL MUST BE OBEYED.

Many will take a few verses out of context, they will take these verses about believing in Jesus, and they will isolate those verses from the whole of Biblical teaching, and they will argue that we only need to believe to be saved. But there is an important step we cannot miss, because the gospel isn’t just facts to be believed, but it is also a message that must be obeyed. And our salvation (our forgiveness) is conditional upon our obedience to the gospel. The first reference here is to 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 (p. 1851). Paul is writing to the church in Thessalonica, a city in Greece, and he is writing about the persecution they are going through. And in this context, notice what he says in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10,

⁶ For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from

heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

We don't have time to look at this in depth, but notice who gets the **"retribution."** Paul refers **"to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."** So, the gospel involves some facts to be believed, but the gospel is also a message that must be obeyed. A second reference comes in 1 Peter 4, as Peter also addresses the challenge of persecution (p. 1898). He's encouraging these people to stay strong, and in that context, let's notice the words of 1 Peter 4:15-19,

¹⁵ Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;¹⁶ but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?¹⁸ And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?¹⁹ Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Again, we don't have time to look at this in depth, but I hope all of us caught Peter's reasoning in verse 17. He wants his first readers to stay strong, and he basically gives a warning: If judgment will start with us as Christians, imagine how much more severe it will be **"for those who do not obey the gospel of God."** So, on one hand, we have Christians, the saved, the righteous, and on the other hand, we have those who have not obeyed the gospel.

It is important, then, that we obey the gospel. But the question is: Since Paul has defined the gospel as a set of facts about Jesus (his death, burial, and resurrection), how do we obey a set of facts? It is a fact that we are on a hardwood floor right now, but how do we obey that? We cannot obey a piece of information. How do we obey Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection? To fill in the gap here, I would invite you to turn with me to Romans 6, and we will start toward the end of the chapter, with Romans 6:17-18 (p. 1766). Romans is a book about the gospel. We've already looked at several verses from Chapter 1. But now, notice, please, Romans 6:17-18. Paul says, **"But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."** The Christians in Rome, then, were slaves of sin. At one point, they were lost in sin, they were separated from God. However, they were freed from sin, when they **"became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which [they] were committed."** So, they obeyed a **"form of teaching."** The word **"form"** refers to the mark made by a blow, the impression made by a stamp. It's the basis of our English word **"type."** Some of us remember typing on a typewriter. We would hit a key, some stuff would happen deep inside that typewriter, and a little arm would fly up and hit a ribbon held just above the paper, and the image or little engraving of the letter would leave an imprint on the document. That's the word Paul uses here: The Christians in Rome had obeyed a **"form of teaching."** They had obeyed an **"imprint"** or an **"impression"** of the gospel message. In response to a command from God, they had done something resembling the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. They had obeyed a likeness or a form of the death, burial, and resurrection. So the question is: What had they done?

And for that, we go to the first part of Romans 6. Notice, please, Romans 6:3-7,

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.

So, Paul refers to baptism as being ***“buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead...so we too might walk in newness of life.”*** And what I want us to notice here is the comparison. This is a simile. Notice the word ***“as”*** (in verse 4). Paul is making a comparison: Just as Christ died, and was buried, and was raised from the dead, so also we do what he did when we become obedient to the ***“form”*** of the gospel message. We obey the gospel when we are buried with Christ in baptism and raised up to live the Christian life. So again, we cannot obey facts, but we can obey a ***“form”*** of those facts. And to emphasize when the change takes place, notice Romans 6:17 again. The change from being slaves to sin to being free from sin takes place when we ***“...became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.”*** We are released from sin at the moment we obey the gospel - not when we first hear it, not just when we believe it, but when we obey it. We are baptized into Christ, and as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***“...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”*** Baptism is that dividing line between the old and the new.

And this certainly fits in with the rest of what the Bible teaches about the importance of baptism. It has absolutely been commanded. It was commanded in Acts 2:38. The people who murdered Jesus wanted to know what they had to do to be saved, and Peter commanded them, ***“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*** Saul (before his name was changed to Paul) had seen Jesus in a vision on the road to Damascus, he had prayed and fasted for three days, and yet he was still in his sins, and I say that because of what Ananias tells him at the end of those three days (in Acts 22:16), ***“Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”*** And this certainly fits so well with what Jesus himself commissioned his disciples to do in Mark 16:15-16, when he said to them, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*** This fits with what Peter will go on to say in 1 Peter 3:21, where he said, ***“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”***

Conclusion:

We obey the gospel, then, when we re-enact the good news in our own lives. We die to sin (that is, we surrender to the word of God on any sin we are actively committing), we are buried with Christ in baptism (immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins), and then we are raised up to live the Christian life. If you have not yet obeyed the gospel, we are inviting you to take this step of obedience today. If baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (as the Bible teaches), and if baptism is how we are buried with Christ and into Christ (as Paul explains in Romans 6), and if baptism saves us (as Peter explains in 1 Peter 3:21), then this is something we really need to do as soon as we understand how important it is. If you have any questions, if you are

interested in studying further, we invite you to investigate, we invite you to learn more. But if you are ready to take this step right now, we can fill up the baptistery we have downstairs, and you can obey the gospel within the hour. If you understand how important it is, you can let us know right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

As an inspiration for this lesson, I am especially thankful for Alan Highers and his good words at the Sevierville Church of Christ during Polishing the Pulpit on August 18, 2019.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com