

THE GOSPEL

NAVIGATORS
— LEAD ON —

WHATEVER HE ASKS. WHEREVER HE LEADS.

THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

The word '*euangellion*' in the original language of the New Testament (Greek) is translated 'gospel' in English. It originally meant the reward given a messenger who brought good news—of military victory or of escape from danger or something like that. By an obvious transfer, it came to refer to the good news itself. Indeed, there is an inscription about the birthday of the emperor Augustus in 9 BC which is said to be 'good news (*euangelia*) for the world'.

The gospel is good news about what God has done, is doing and will do. It is about what God has done in Christ, supremely focused on Jesus' death and resurrection which will be 'the what' this study concentrates on.

The gospel is integrally tied to the Bible's story-line. Indeed, it is incomprehensible without understanding that story-line. So, let's begin at the beginning and see why we need a message of good news.

THE NEED FOR THE GOSPEL

1. The Bible calls God holy more than anything else. Holy is the epithet most often affixed to His name. Holy in the Hebrew means marked off or withdrawn from common use in order to be sacred. The sacredness of God is often conveyed to objects and places associated with Him. But holiness also has the idea of moral purity associated with it. Read the following verses and note down what stands out to you about God's holiness:

- a. Exodus 15:11
- b. Psalm 99
- c. Hebrews 7:26; 12:14
- d. 1 Peter 1:13-17
- e. 1 John 1:5



2. This holy God creates us. Reflect on Genesis 1. What one recurring word describes what God thought of His creation?

3. What happens in Genesis 3:1-10 (often called the fall) that changes this? What three reactions to sin are seen here?

4. What three relationships are damaged by the fall?
 - a. Genesis 3:8-10; 19b

 - b. Genesis 3:7,12,16; 4:8

 - c. Genesis 3:17-19

5. What are the consequences of the fall for every person (except Jesus 😊) according to Romans 5:12,19 and Romans 3:23?

God's Wrath

6. This is an unpleasant and difficult topic. Today many people, even Christians, avoid it. It seems so harsh, or a throwback to "an Old Testament God". Shouldn't we concentrate on the loving Jesus? So this aspect of the gospel requires deeper reflection, but it is what the Bible says and we dare not neglect it. Indeed it is a curious fact that Jesus speaks about hell, the punishment for all unrepentant sinners, more than anyone else in the Bible.
 - a. Just as an example review what Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 7:13-23; 8:11,12; 13:30, 39-42, 49-50; 18:7-9, 34,35; 22:13-14; 24:48-51; 25:41, 46.

 - b. Read Numbers 16:46, John 3:36, Romans 1:18 and Colossians 3:6.

 - c. Summarise how God feels about sin and what He will do to unrepentant sinners?



THE SOLUTION OF THE GOSPEL

God's Love

7. The backdrop the wrath of God serves to deepen our appreciation for the love of God. Indeed it can seem incongruous that despite our sin and the righteous wrath of God that He can love us. And this is heightened when we realise just how much He does love us! See how God is described and what He feels about us according to

- a. Exodus 34:6,7a
- b. Ezekiel 33:10,11
- c. John 3:16
- d. Romans 5:8
- e. 1 John 4:8-10, 16

The Elements of "First Importance"

8. What are core elements of the gospel according to

- a. 1 Corinthians 2:2
- b. 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
- c. Galatians 6:14

9. **Jesus' Death.** Dealing with God's wrath is a very important part of the gospel and one of the key reasons for Jesus death. It is a core of the gospel. What do these texts tell us about this? (The key word is '*hilasterion*' best translated "*propitiation*", which means to turn aside or exhaust wrath. Note the ESV uses propitiation but the NIV uses "sacrifice of atonement")

- a. Romans 3:21-26



b. 1 John 2:2

c. 1 John 4:10

10. What does it mean that Jesus exhausted God's wrath?

11. **Deepening our understanding of Jesus Death in our place.** Several images are used to deepen our understanding of this core element of the gospel, substitutionary atonement. Let's think about these:

a. The image of justification is far and away the most prevalent image of salvation in the New Testament. Reconciliation is used five times, redemption four or five times, victory a couple of times, but justification some 229 times!¹ (Note: righteousness and justification and their cognates are used to translate the same Greek word group.) What does Romans 3:21 – 5:11 tell us about righteousness and justification?

b. What do the images of reconciliation, adoption, redemption, cleansing and victory add to the dominant picture of justification as part of the good news?

(1) Reconciliation – Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

(2) Redemption – Ephesians 1:3-14 – and Ransom – Mark 10:45 – which are closely linked.

(3) Adoption – 1 John 3:1,2 and Galatians 4:4-7

¹ Morris The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, p251.



(4) Victory – Luke 11:14-23 and Colossians 2:13-15

(5) Consider passages like Colossians 1:13-23 where reconciliation and redemption are used together and Hebrews 9:11-10:18 where redemption, ransom (note ‘redeem’ and ‘ransom’ are so closely related that in Hebrews 9:15 the ESV uses ‘redeems’ and the NIV uses ‘ransom’!) and cleansing are all used.

Each of these ways of speaking about the atonement is inspired Scripture and each highlight particular aspects about our salvation. Some today want to shy away from justification, but you just can’t do that and be biblical. It is the dominant imagery used in Scripture in relation to our salvation. But this does not mean you have to start evangelism with this image, but it does mean that you have to get to it.

‘But perhaps the single most consoling and appealing theme is what theologian Roger Nicole has called the one, irreducible theme that runs through every single one of these models – the idea of substitution. Dr Nicole taught that ... the essence of the atonement is always Jesus acting as our substitute. Jesus fights the powers, pays the price, bears the exile, makes the sacrifice, and bears the punishment for us, in our place on our behalf ... Jesus does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He accomplishes salvation. We do nothing at all. And therefore the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus is at the heart of everything.’²

Jesus’ death in our place on the cross, as a substitute for us, is called substitutionary atonement and is the heart of the gospel.

12. **The Resurrection.** How important is the resurrection according to the following texts:

- a. 1 Corinthians 15
- b. Romans 1:1-5
- c. 2 Timothy 2:8

² Tim Keller, Center Church, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2012 p 181



13. Why is the resurrection so important?

DEEPENING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

14. Can a holy and just God simply overlook sin?

15. How is God's wrath different to human wrath?

16. Explain how the love of God and the wrath of God fit together?

17. How does Jesus death in our place and His resurrection deal with these three primary reactions to sin?

a. Guilt

b. Shame

c. Fear



SUMMARY

Sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden and we see in Genesis 3 the three primary human reactions to sin: guilt, shame and fear. These reactions to sin form the basis of three worldviews – Guilt/innocence³ (often dominant in the west); Shame/honour⁴ (often dominant in the east); and Fear/power⁵ (often dominant in animist cultures).

Of course no society or culture has a pure guilt/innocent, shame/honour or fear/power worldview. Each has all three mixed in in varying amounts. Increasingly there are people from different cultures living next door to each other and, as globalisation continues, our worldviews are becoming less pure. For instance, many in the west are adopting shame/honour thinking as post modernism takes more and more hold. Additionally, there is an increase in thinking about the supernatural as evidenced by the growing number of movies and television shows that include witches, angels, demons, vampires, zombies and ghosts.

The gospel deals with each of these reactions to sin. Guilt is dealt with by Jesus death in our place. We are no longer guilty as the penalty has been paid. Further, we are righteous as God credits Jesus' righteousness to our account. Indeed we are not merely "not guilty" in terms of the law, we are righteous. It is just as if we have always obeyed the law. For example, it is not just that we did not lie or cheat or steal, but that we were always kind, gentle and loving.

The gospel deals with shame in that in Christ you move from defiled to clean, naked to clothed (ultimately clothed in righteous garments), abandoned/enslaved to adopted and honoured child of God and more.

The gospel deals with fear as the punishment has been paid. Jesus has paid it for us and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Additionally, the power of

³ In guilt/innocence based cultures the primary motive is centred around right and wrong. If one breaks the law or the rules they are guilty. Children are taught to feel guilty when they break the rules. The focus is on the fact that *I did* something wrong, regardless of whether others know or not (and if they think I did but I didn't, I'll protest my innocence!). My internal and individualistic judgement is what counts. So, by the same token, I may be wracked with secret guilt if I did do it even if the world believes me innocent. In the west ethics is trying to determine if things are right or wrong.

⁴ The word shame or ashamed occurs 225 times in the Old and New Testaments and honour 170 times. This is a major theme of Scripture. In shame/honour based cultures relationships are the key as shame and honour always attached to something greater than the individual. Honour is almost always placed on a group like the family or the tribe or even the nation. It is the social reward a community gives to a person because of actions approved by the community. The result is a higher position and a closer relationship. Honour is about the preservation of social status, and respect and respectability. An action is honourable if it is praiseworthy. In honour cultures a person's sense of self is heavily dependent on how they are perceived by others. The focus is not on what you have done, but how (or if) others see what I have done. In the west telling the truth is right and telling lies is wrong, but in shame/honour cultures people don't think of lies as being right or wrong. The question is "Is what is being said honourable?" If a lie protects the honour of a tribe or nation, then it is fine. If a lie is told purely for selfish reasons, then it is shameful. If I didn't do something wrong but others think I did, then I am shamed. People are honoured when others are discreet, when we keep silent about their dirty linen, unless there is an overriding reason to wash it in public. The amazing thing about the Christian message is that God, who sees us as we really are, still deals with us mercifully.

Shame is the social punishment a community gives a person because of actions disapproved by the community resulting in lower status and a distant relationship. The key ideas with regard to shame are disgrace and exposure. Disgrace is the loss of approval, of status and of respect. Some things were not meant for public display. Such was the utter disgrace which Jesus endured when crucified naked on a Roman cross. He endured the shame of the cross and was honoured by God raising Him from the dead and exalting Him.

⁵ In fear/power based cultures people view the universe as a place filled with gods, demons, spirits, ghosts, and ancestors. Humankind needs to live at peace with all these powers and often they are fearful because they believe that everything in life is determined by the supernatural, like sickness, death, crop failure and victory in battle. Witchcraft and magic are very real for them. In order to appease the powers of the universe systems of appeasement are worked out. They vary from burning incense to human sacrifice.



evil has been overcome. The Holy Spirit is much more powerful than any and all evil spirits. Satan and his demons are created beings and the Holy Spirit is God.

The gospel deals with all of these. It is about saving us from God's judgment, restoring our relationship with God, and rebuilding trust and putting power back into the hands of God by submitting to His rule.

THE RESPONSE REQUIRED BY THE GOSPEL

Sometimes we can confuse our response to the gospel with the gospel itself. The gospel is news, and therefore it is announced or proclaimed. The gospel is the good news about what God has done, supremely in Jesus, BUT it does require a response.

Now it is best to be clear about the difference because if you run them together there is a real danger that the gospel that is shared turns into mere moralism. The emphasis can subtly change to what we have to do, our responsibility. What is particularly dangerous is that this is exactly how the world works – if you do well at school you get into your course at University, if you perform well at work you get a promotion. Therefore, it is very easy for the non-believer, and even for those who are believers, to fall into works thinking, into thinking that you are acceptable through what you do, into moralism.

Having said that, the other error to avoid is not being clear on the response required and therefore falling into “cheap grace” as Bonhoeffer called it, that is, trusting in God's grace but not living a transformed life which is commanded by God. We will consider this in our gospel study in Critical Factor III – Discipling our Generation.

18. What response is required to the gospel message according to
 - a. Mark 1:15
 - b. John 1:12
 - c. John 3:16-21, 36
 - d. Romans 10:8-17

19. What response to the gospel do these verses indicate is required?
 - a. Matthew 7:21-27
 - b. John 14:21-24
 - c. Romans 1:5, 16:25-27
 - d. Ephesians 2:8-10
 - e. Titus 2:11-14
 - f. James 2:14-26



20. Can you separate belief and obedience? Why or why not? Does what you do matter for your salvation?

SUMMARY

The announcement of the gospel must also include the response of repentance and obedience that is required of us. Repentance and belief aren't part of the gospel, BUT must inevitably be part of what we share as we proclaim the gospel.

DEEPENING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

21. How does the grace of God underpin every aspect of the gospel?

22. How are you currently presenting the Gospel? Are you neglecting anything?

23. What are unbelievers seeing as they listen to our Gospel? Which message is more powerful?

24. We don't always have to start sharing the gospel with the wrath of God (even though we have to get there at some point). What are the entry points for the Gospel among the people groups to whom you minister? How would you get to the wrath of God? How would you share about God's wrath?

