What is the Gospel?

Salvation & the Gospel · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/what-is-the-gospel-2/

The gospel is the “good news” (Greek: *euangelion*) that God has acted in Jesus Christ to save sinners. Jesus lived a sinless life, died for our sins, and rose bodily from the dead (1 Cor 15:3–4), accomplishing forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation with God. This salvation is given by grace and received through faith—not earned by works (Eph 2:8–9; Rom 3:28).

To understand why this is “good news,” we need to begin with the problem the gospel addresses. Scripture teaches that all people are sinners by nature and by action (Rom 3:23), and that sin brings judgment and death (Rom 6:23). Humanity is not merely flawed but separated from a holy God. Yet from the earliest pages of Scripture, Yahweh promised redemption—most clearly in His covenant with Abraham, that through his offspring “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3; cf. Gal 3:8). The gospel is the fulfillment of that promise.

The New Testament presents Jesus as the culmination of this redemptive plan. He fulfills the law perfectly (Matt 5:17), lives without sin (Heb 4:15), and dies as a substitutionary atonement—bearing the penalty that sinners deserve (Isa 53:5–6; 2 Cor 5:21). His resurrection is not an isolated miracle but the divine vindication of His person and work (Rom 4:25). When Paul summarizes the gospel, he does so in historical terms: “Christ died for our sins… He was buried… He was raised on the third day” (1 Cor 15:3–4). This is not advice or moral instruction; it is an announcement of what God has done.

The benefits of Christ’s work are received through faith. In the Greek New Testament, *pistis* (faith) carries the sense of trust and reliance—not mere intellectual assent. To believe the gospel is to entrust oneself to Christ and His finished work. Scripture is clear that justification—being declared righteous before God—is by faith apart from works of the law (Rom 3:28; Phil 3:9). Good works follow as the fruit of that faith (Eph 2:10; Jas 2:17), but they do not contribute to our standing before God. In historic Christian theology, this distinction is essential: we are saved *by* grace *through* faith, and therefore we live lives of obedience *because* of that salvation, not in order to achieve it.

Across Christian traditions, there is broad agreement on the core events of the gospel—Christ’s death and resurrection for sinners. Differences arise, however, in how the benefits of salvation are

applied. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions emphasize sacramental participation and transformation, while Protestant traditions emphasize justification by faith alone. Even so, all affirm that salvation is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, not in human merit.

Key Scriptures to Study

Core teaching passages

- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 — The gospel defined: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day
- Romans 1:16–17 — The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes
- John 3:16–18 — God's love expressed in giving His Son so that believers have eternal life
- Mark 1:14–15 — Jesus proclaims the gospel and calls for repentance and faith

Supporting theological framework

- Romans 3:21–26 — Justification by grace through faith, grounded in Christ's atoning work
- Ephesians 2:8–10 — Salvation is by grace through faith, not a result of works
- Isaiah 52:7 — The "good news" (gospel) of God's saving reign anticipated in the Old Testament

Clarifying or balancing passages

- Galatians 1:6–9 — A warning against distorting the true gospel
- Romans 10:9–13 — The gospel response: confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in His resurrection

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: "Is the gospel just about living a better life or following Jesus' teachings?"
Response: No. While the gospel produces transformed living, it is not primarily about moral improvement. It is the announcement that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). The change in our lives flows from that reality; it is not the gospel itself.

Common Objection: "Aren't we saved by faith and works together?"
Response: Scripture consistently teaches that we are justified by faith apart from works (Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16). Works are the necessary fruit of genuine faith (Jas 2:17), but they are not the basis of our justification before God.

Common Objection: “Why did Jesus have to die?”

Response: Because God is just, sin must be judged (Rom 6:23). In His mercy, God sent His Son to bear that judgment in our place (1 Pet 2:24), so that He might be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Why This Matters

The gospel is the foundation of the Christian faith (1 Cor 15:1–2). It determines how a person is saved, where assurance is found, and how we understand grace. Practically, it frees believers from trying to earn God’s favor and anchors their confidence in Christ’s finished work. It also shapes the Christian life—producing humility, repentance, and love for others (Gal 5:6).

Recommended Resources

- *What Is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert
- *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott
- *The Freedom of a Christian* – Martin Luther
- *Center Church* – Timothy Keller