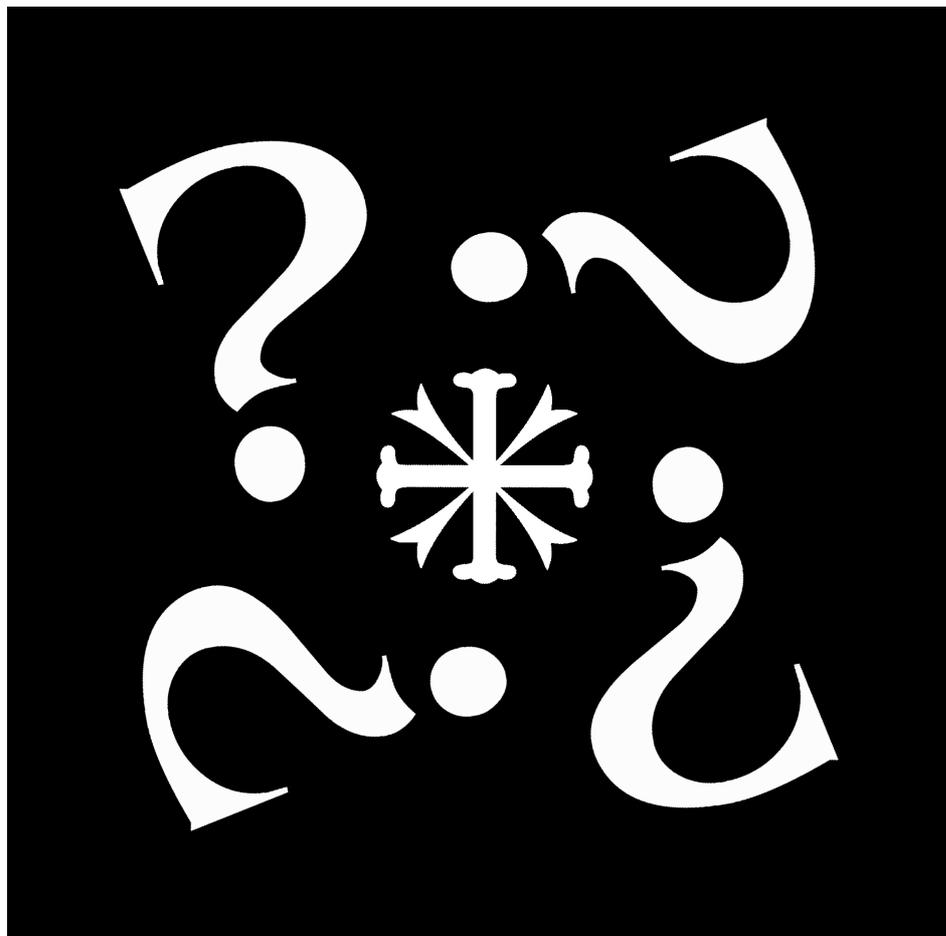


WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?



THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

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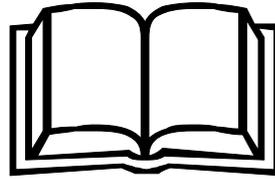
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And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

--Acts 20:32--



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KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible.

FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST:
FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO
EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH; TO THE JEW FIRST,
AND ALSO TO THE GREEK.

ROMANS 1:16

BUT THOUGH WE, OR AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN,
PREACH ANY OTHER GOSPEL UNTO YOU THAN THAT
WHICH WE HAVE PREACHED UNTO YOU, LET HIM BE
ACCURSED.

GALATIANS 1:8

The above quotes, penned by the apostle Paul, are part of the Holy Bible, the Word of God. As stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." This can be literally translated, "Every Scripture is God-breathed."

These inspired words tell us that Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), esteemed the Gospel to be the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believed it. Significantly, Paul was also inspired to pronounce a curse on anyone preaching a gospel different from the one he preached.

For God to have wanted Paul to write these words, He must consider the true Gospel to be a very specific and critically important message. Therefore, if we care about our salvation and the salvation of others, it behooves us to know what that message is and to be able to distinguish it from false gospels.

In this book, I intend to show you from the Bible what Gospel Paul preached, that it was the same Gospel preached by Jesus, that it was the same Gospel preached by the other apostles, and that it is the same Gospel you should believe today. In doing this, I will also expose some popular "gospels"—including one of the most popular and accepted "gospels" today—as not being the same message preached by Jesus and His apostles.

What Does Gospel Mean?

The Greek word translated Gospel in English language Bibles is *euangelion*. It is also sometimes translated "glad tidings" or "good tidings," and it means a good message.

The English word "gospel" developed from two Old English words: "god"—meaning good, and "spell"—meaning news or message. So, the English and Greek words are equivalent in meaning.

Considering this, it is reasonable to conclude that the Gospel is a message that is good, welcome news. This does not necessarily indicate, however, that all of its hearers would consider it good. For example, a besieged city would consider the arrival of allied reinforcements to be good news. But its enemies would see this as bad news.

So the Gospel must be considered good news by at least some, but not necessarily all, of its hearers. Since, as we just read in Romans 1:16, the Gospel is the power of God to salvation to those who believe it, those who believe it consider it good news. Those who do not believe the Gospel may consider it bad news, or at least something to scoff at.

Now that we have defined the word, let's see what the Bible says the specific message of the Gospel is.

The Gospel Paul Preached

It's not difficult to find a passage in the Bible where Paul summarizes the Gospel he preached. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:1–8.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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: and that he was seen of Cephas [Peter], then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

There is the Gospel, in at least a summary form. Notice that it is an objective message about historical events in the life of Jesus Christ. It is not a personal, subjective account about what God had done in Paul's life. Those who witness to others about what God has done in their lives are not preaching the Gospel; they are not preaching a

message that is the power of God unto salvation; their messages— although they can sometimes be helpful and encouraging— can save no one.

You can also see that the Gospel is not about expecting a miracle today, thinking positively, feeling good, raising your self-esteem, being healed of diseases, becoming prosperous, having encounters with “angels,” “after death experiences,” or “visions” of heaven or hell.

Additionally, unlike the “gospel” preached by some, the Gospel preached by Paul is not a news announcement of Jesus establishing a one-thousand-year reign over the earth. Nor is it a command to enthrone Jesus in our lives, take dominion over the earth, draw near to God, decide for Christ, or be good.

The Gospel is the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins (as elaborated in the Scriptures), that He was buried and rose the third day (as elaborated in the Scriptures), and that the resurrected Christ was seen by many. Of course, to understand the implications of this message, we must understand from the Scriptures who Jesus Christ was, why He had to die for our sins (and who “our” refers to), why He rose from the dead, and how this comes to benefit us personally. We’ll take these one at a time.

Who Was Jesus Christ?

In Matthew 16:13–17, we read of a dialogue between Jesus and His disciples about His identity. In verse 13, Jesus asks, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” In these verses, we are not only going to learn something important about Jesus’ identity, but we are going to see a big difference between what the average person thought of Jesus and what God revealed to the minds of Jesus’ disciples.

“And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias [Elijah]; and others, Jeremias [Jeremiah], or one of the prophets” (verse 14). The people speculated about Jesus, but did not know who He was.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verses 15–16). This was no mere speculation, as the following verse reveals. “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (verse 17).

God revealed to Peter Jesus’ identity as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (God did not reveal this to everyone; He treated some people differently than He treated others. We will see the importance of this fact later.)

"Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word *māšîah*, or Messiah, meaning "anointed." In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed with oil to set them apart for their special office. The Messiah, however, was not just any anointed person. He was the person whom the Old Testament prophecies revealed would be the end-time ideal king. In fact, although the Jews in their limited understanding of the Scriptures looked only for the Messiah as king, Old Testament prophecies reveal Him as also holding the offices of priest and prophet and as the Son of man, the suffering servant, and the Savior of His people.

In fact, "Jesus" means "Jehovah [the Lord] is salvation." In Matthew 1:20 and 21, we read that before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." (Later, we will see the importance upon the Gospel of the angel's announcement of Jesus as the Savior not of everyone but only of "his people.")

God also revealed to Peter that Jesus was His Son. In Luke 1:35 we read what the angel Gabriel told Mary: "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Jesus was the Son of God because He was conceived by God through the Holy Spirit. But that's not the only reason.

The Bible also teaches that Jesus has eternally been the Son of God. It was through the Son that God made the universe (Hebrews 1:2); God sent the Person who was already His Son into the world (John 3:16–17; Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:10, 14; Romans 8:3); and Jesus prayed to the Father to glorify the Son with the glory He had before the world began (John 17:1–5).

To be the Son of God from eternity implies that Jesus was Himself God. And this is just what we find in the first chapter of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (verses 1–3 and 14).

So this One who was the only begotten of the Father—the Son of God—was with God and was God from the beginning, from eternity, before anything was made (since He made everything).

It is beyond the scope of this book to show this in detail, but (despite what some sects teach) the Bible reveals that God is a triune God or Trinity; that is, He is one in substance (His God-ness), but three in Person—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the second Person of the Trinity.

In brief, Jesus was not an ordinary man. He was God. In His Person, He was the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, and He had the nature of God and the nature of man. But why did the Son of God have to come to the earth and be born a man? We saw the answer in 1 Corinthians 15:1. He had to die for our sins. But why was this necessary? and why, if anyone had to die, did it have to be the Son of God?

Sinful Humanity

In Romans 3:9–12 Paul wrote:

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Romans 3:9–12

Something that is crucial to understanding the Gospel is that everyone is a sinner; no one is good or righteous. Paul includes himself (Romans 7:18).

Now to this information, add the first part of Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death." Everyone is a sinner and everyone has earned death.

Not only that, but we are even born in sin. The Scriptures teach us that God gave Adam a command in the Garden of Eden and warned of the punishment for breaking the command: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16–17). Were Adam and Eve to eat of this tree, they would be committing a sin and would die. Apparently, if they did not eat of this tree, they would not die.

The Serpent, Satan, lied to Eve by telling her she would not die if she ate from the tree (Genesis 3:4). Adam and Eve ate the fruit (verse 6) and incurred the death sentence. This death is not just physical,

biological death. Adam and Eve eventually died physically. But they also immediately received for themselves and for their posterity spiritual death, which is separation from God. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

Adam's sin is put on the account of—imputed to—everyone, and, because the wages of sin is death, everyone enters into physical life already spiritually dead. This is because Adam was the father and representative (federal head) of the human race. His sin fell upon all of us. Also, because we were, so to speak, in Adam's loins when he sinned, we also sinned with him (this principle of being in someone's loins can be found in Hebrews 7:10).

King David understood this when he wrote: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). If David was sinful at conception, then that sin could not have been the result of his own actions.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Everyone was made a sinner and was condemned through Adam's sin: "Therefore as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Jesus Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (verses 18–19). Therefore, all humans are from birth—or even conception—spiritually dead, separated from God. Also, since only God is good and no man is good (Luke 18:19), being spiritually separated from God—being spiritually dead—explains, briefly, why no one can do any good works that can earn his own salvation. (For a better understanding of this important subject, read our book, *Man's Sinfulness, God's Sovereignty, and the New Birth*.) We are in need of having our fellowship with God restored, and the verses quoted above begin to tell us how this is to be done.

The fate of those who remain spiritually separated from God until their physical death is one of suffering for eternity in outer darkness or hell (Psalm 9:17; Matthew 11:23; 13:41–42, 49–50; 22:13–14; 25:30; Luke 16:19–31; Revelation 14:9–11; and other Scriptures). God's wrath is upon sinners: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18), and, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things

[sins] cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6).

So everyone, because of both Adam's sin and his or her personal sins, is doomed to pay the penalty for sin—the death of suffering in hell for eternity in separation from God. This is everyone's end; that is, unless someone would pay the penalty for him or her. But who could do such a thing?

Jesus Christ, the Savior

No ordinary human could pay this penalty for others. Here's why: 1) The penalty of a human suffering for eternity, precisely because it requires the suffering of a human for eternity, could never be paid off by an ordinary human and therefore the penalty could never be paid. 2) If the entire penalty were put on an ordinary person in a moment of time, that is, if the person were to receive the full wrath of God at once, he would be destroyed before he could pay the full penalty. 3) Everyone is sinful and, therefore, could only suffer for his or her own sinfulness and could never pay for others' sins.

Anyone who could pay for others' sins would have to be completely sinless himself, and he would have to be able to withstand God's full wrath. Enter Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He neither had Adam's sin imputed to Him nor did He commit any sins of His own. The Bible calls Him "Jesus Christ the righteous," (1 John 2:1), and says, "he [God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As we have already seen, Jesus Christ, although a man (yet a sinless man), was also God. Therefore, only He could bear the full wrath of God, pay the penalty for our sins, and appease the wrath of God against us, reconciling us to God. Read what Isaiah prophesied about him:

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God,

and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people he was stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53

So now we see that we are sinful; that our sins have earned us eternal death (eterna1 separation from God and punishment in hell under the wrath of God); that we have no good in us and thus there is no good work we can do by which we can earn our salvation from this woeful fate. But there is Jesus Christ. He came to save His peop1e. He lived a sinless life, suffered the wrath of God, and died for our sins. He expiated (or paid the penalty for) our sins, ransomed us from our sins (Mark 10:45), propitiated or appeased God's righteous indignation and wrath against us (Romans 1:18; 3:25; 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10), and reconciled us to God (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 2:16).

The Bible also tell us that Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.... For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which

receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:12, 17).

This means that Jesus Christ's righteousness is put on our account so that God sees us as legally righteous: "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:18–19). It is important to note that this is an external, legal declaration of righteousness; this does not infuse us internally with righteousness. Legally, our status before God changes from sinful to righteous.

In review, Jesus Christ's sacrifice removes our sins. Having had our sins removed and Christ's righteousness imputed to us, our legal status changes. We are justified; that is, our legal status before God changes from that of a lawbreaking sinner to one who has kept the law and is therefore just or sinless.

If you will read Romans 4:2, 5, and 25; and 5:1, 9, 16, and 18, you will find that we are condemned by Adam's sin (as well as our own sins); but we are justified, not by our works, but by Jesus' righteousness, His shed blood, and His resurrection.

Previously, I said we would see why Jesus rose from the dead. Here is that answer: When we say that Jesus suffered and died for our sins, we mean that He literally bore our sins (1 Peter 2:24). On the cross, He suffered the full wrath of God because of those sins, which is why He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). By His resurrection from the dead, He proved Himself to be the Son of God, proved His victory over death, and proved He had paid for our sins—that they had been removed and are no more (if they were still on Him, He could not have risen from the dead). Therefore, was He "raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Earlier, I explained that Adam was the legal representative of all humanity, and his sin is automatically imputed to everyone. But Jesus' death and righteousness are not automatically applied to everyone. The application of Jesus' death and righteousness occurs only by faith. Jesus is the legal representative only of the children of faith (Galatians 3:26–27; Romans 4:5–8). But faith in what? and how do we have this faith?

The Object of Our Faith

The Scriptures leave us in no doubt that Jesus Christ must be the object of our faith or belief: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt

be saved" (Acts 16:31), "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who believeth not the Son shall not see life" (John 3:36). To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed of God; that He is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity and is, therefore, God; that He was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-14); that He suffered, bore your sins, shed His blood, and died on the cross to pay the penalty you otherwise deserve; that He rose from the dead for your justification, and that His perfect righteousness is counted as your righteousness; to believe, therefore, that Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone (with none of your works or anyone else's works added) is your personal Savior who has saved you from your sins and put you into His glorious kingdom, is the exercise of saving faith.

But how is anyone capable of believing these things (of exercising saving faith) if all are sinners incapable of doing any good?

How Do We Have Faith?

The Bible answers this question very directly: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that [the faith] not of yourselves: it [the faith] is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith is a gift from God.

On our own, we would never believe who Jesus is and what He has done (that is, we would never believe the Gospel): "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7); "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

It is the Holy Spirit who causes us to believe by regenerating our minds: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10); and, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6).

Regeneration is also called being born again: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Saving faith, then, is a gift of God enabling us not merely to understand, but also to believe the Gospel.

God's Choice, Not Man's

Now isn't the true Gospel vastly superior to the so-called gospels mentioned earlier? And, when the Gospel of the Bible is examined next to the most common false gospel heard today, it is like comparing light to darkness. Perhaps you've heard that false gospel. It says that Jesus Christ died to pay for everyone's sins. Now, that might sound like very good news. But there's a catch: this so-called gospel says that, although Jesus died to save everyone, His sacrifice applies to someone only after that person accepts Jesus as his Savior. This means that Jesus died for many people who will never be saved. What's wrong with that? Plenty! This so-called "gospel" makes God out to be weak, and the sacrifice of Jesus largely ineffectual.

If, as this popular "good news" says, Jesus died for everyone, then God must want everyone saved. But not everyone has believed in Christ and been saved. Many throughout history have died in their sins without salvation. Therefore, the logical implication of this "gospel" is that God is powerless to save whom He wants, and He must be content to weep in heaven as most of humanity whom He wants to save reject Him.

According to this false gospel, God has no sovereignty over salvation, and saving faith does not come from Him but is something for the human to muster up. Therefore, a crucial step in salvation would be up to the sinful man (something we have seen is impossible because all men are sinners and cannot do anything good). It also is obvious that if this "gospel" is true and Jesus died for everyone, and if everyone is not saved, then Jesus' sacrifice is largely wasted. Jesus' atoning sacrifice was inefficient. Didn't God realize what a failure His plan would be? And think about it: To say that those who never believe on Jesus are not saved (which, of course, is true) while also saying that Jesus died for everyone (which is absolutely false) is the same as saying that Jesus' death is not what saves people. According to this "gospel," something else saves people. What is it? It is human choice—the man or woman's deciding for Jesus. But if the person who believes this "gospel" insists that he does believe that only Jesus' sacrifice pays the penalty for our sins and saves us, then he implies that God is an unjust monster who punishes unbelieving people for sins that Jesus has already died for. But this is not the all-powerful and all-knowing God of the Bible!

And this is not good news! Instead, it is a tragedy. This is especially so when we recall that the Bible tells us "the carnal mind is enmity against God"

(Romans 8:7). Without having first been chosen and regenerated and given saving faith by God, no one would be saved.

Part of the awe of the real Gospel is that none of this is up to us. The Lord God omnipotent reigns, and He is sovereignly saving whom He will. (You can read more about God's sovereignty in man's salvation in our TULIP series of booklets. These booklets even include discussions of the Scriptures that appear to be saying that God wants everyone saved.) To God's glory, Jesus did not die for everyone; He did not die for those who die in unbelief. But everyone for whom Jesus died—all of the believers—will be saved. And if you believe this message, that includes you. Now that's Good News!



What do you think your song will be when you come to heaven? Blessed be God, that he gave me free-will; and blessed be my own dear self, that I made a good use of it? O no, no! Such a song as that never was heard in heaven yet, nor ever will, while God is God, and heaven is heaven. Look into the Book of Revelation, and there you will find the employ of the blessed, and the strains which they sing. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 4:10). There is discriminating grace for you! "Thou has redeemed us out of every kindred," that is, from the rest of mankind. Is not this particular election and limited redemption?

Augustus Toplady, 18th century English theologian and
hymn writer, author of "Rock of Ages"

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Peter Ditzel

There is an aspect to the Gospel that I have not mentioned in the main body of this booklet. But I don't want to let it go unmentioned. It is an aspect that, for the most part, is now either overlooked completely or is completely distorted. What I have in mind is the "kingdom" facet of the Gospel.

In Matthew 3:2, we read that John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Because the Jews thought that the kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of God, and because Matthew specifically wrote his Gospel for Jews, Matthew clarified for his readers that this Gospel was not about the nation of Israel by calling the kingdom "the kingdom of heaven.") Although the account of his life is in the New Testament, John the Baptist was really the last of the prophets of the Old Testament (the Old Testament is often referred to in the New Testament as the law and prophets see for example, Matthew 7:12; 22:40; Acts 13:15; and Romans 3:21). Hence, we read in Luke 16:16, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."

The Time is Fulfilled

John said that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. In Mark, 1:14-15, we read, "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Notice that immediately after John is put in prison, Jesus also begins preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand, and He now adds that "the time is fulfilled."

When John had finished his Old Testament ministry, Jesus began His New Testament ministry. As an Old Testament prophet, John prepared the way for Jesus' New Testament ministry. John's ministry was one of preparation. Jesus' ministry was one of fulfillment. Part of John's preparation was to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. And, as soon as Jesus started His ministry, as we have seen, He went about "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Many preachers now seem not to be aware that Jesus' Gospel included "the gospel of the kingdom of God," and that the message was specifically, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." They overlook that this same Gospel of the kingdom was preached in Matthew 4:17; 10:7;

Luke 4:43; 8:1; and so on. Not many preachers today talk of this Gospel of the kingdom.

On the other hand, those who do speak of this Gospel of the kingdom usually misinterpret it to refer to a kingdom in the future, a kingdom still in our future in which Jesus and the Jews will rule for a thousand years. But Jesus specifically said to the Jews, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall

be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). That "nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" is the same as that nation Peter addresses in 1 Peter 2:9-10: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." That nation in the Greek is called the *ekklesia*, the people of God who are called out of this world. In most Bibles, this word is translated, "the church."

At Hand

To understand Jesus' message, we must understand what John the Baptist and Jesus meant when they said that the kingdom of God was "at hand." Letting the Bible interpret itself, in Luke 21:29-32, we read, "And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled." Many people seem to want to ignore what Jesus says here, but the meaning is really very clear. Jesus was telling the people standing there listening to Him that, just as summer is at hand when trees start to send out their shoots, so the kingdom of God was right then at hand and the things He told them would come to pass in their lifetimes.

Notice another example of "at hand" in Mark 14:42-43: "Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders." Jesus said that His betrayer Judas was "at hand," and "immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas." What does the Bible tell us "at hand" means? The Bible tells us that "at hand" means the next immediate thing in the sequence of events, or even right now.

So, Jesus' announcement was not good news of some kingdom of God coming two thousand or so years after He spoke. Jesus was saying that the kingdom of God was, at that time, coming. Certainly, this was good news! And it should be good news to us also, because the kingdom of God is still here! You are living in the time of the kingdom of God right now.

You Must Be Born Again

But you look around and see all kinds of troubles in the world. How is this then the kingdom of God? Jesus said troubles in this world are normal (Matthew 24:6-7; John 16:33). He also said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). And this is how the Gospel of the kingdom is seen as but a facet of the larger Gospel message of salvation. When we are born again and exercise the gift of faith, we see the kingdom of God by faith using the spiritual sight God gives us, and we enter it by

faith. We see that it is not a kingdom that is of this world, but it is in it (John 18:36; 17:9-16).

The Gospel tells us that Jesus died to save His people from their sins. But He did not intend that we just stuff that salvation into our pockets and go back to our worldly way of life. To have a full picture of the Gospel, we should understand that God, through His Son, has not only saved us and “delivered us from the power of darkness,” but He also “hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). Our citizenship is now in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador does not entangle himself in the affairs of the nation to which he is sent. Instead, he carries out the commission given him, always putting his nation's interests first. Our nation is the kingdom of God. Let us not become distracted by the affairs of this world or the nation of our physical birth, but put our resources into carrying out the commission the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10) has given us (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15) and putting the interests of our kingdom above all else (Matthew 6:33; 2 Timothy 2:4). My friends, will you do this?

Who We Are

I hope this little booklet has been a blessing to you. I was a member of and writer for the Worldwide Church of God until 1991. My wife, Mary, was also a member and a production assistant in the church's television department. But then God began revealing to us the truth of His glorious Gospel of the free gift of grace by Jesus Christ. So, in 1991, we left the Worldwide Church of God, our friends, our worldview, and our employment.

In the mid-1990s, I began writing articles that exposed the heresies and spiritual abuses that were continuing in the Worldwide Church of God even after the death of its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong. These articles appeared in *The Quarterly Journal of the Personal Freedom Outreach*, a well-respected Christian apologetics journal. Many people who read the articles wrote asking for help for themselves or loved ones exiting Armstrongism, to ask doctrinal questions, or to share their experiences in Armstrong-type sects.

I soon came to see that cults and unbiblical teachings are flourishing because too many people are ignorant of the basics of biblical Christianity and only give lip service to following the Bible alone. Toward the end of 2000, I launched *Word of His Grace* to address these issues through both print and our website, wordofhisgrace.org.

The website has since grown in impact and respect. Our increasing number of articles are reproduced and favorably cited on websites around the world. We publish Gospel tracts and small books that have been widely requested and used by a number of missionaries and other Christian teachers. We also publish an email newsletter. Everything we write is centered on Jesus Christ and our commitment to take the Bible alone for our doctrine.

We are family-based. Mary and I are truly a team and always thank God for having given us to each other. We try to be good stewards of the resources God provides. To this end, we have recently put all of our literature on our website. This has enabled us to scale-back our print publishing, which had been growing increasingly expensive as costs rise. We now send printed materials only to those who do not have access to the internet.

We trust that as long as we continue to please God in what we teach, and we remain good stewards of what He supplies, He will provide everything needed to continue these activities. We do not ask humans for money, or anything, but bring our needs in prayer to God.

This does not mean that God has not used people to provide our needs. He has. It means that we make our needs known to God, and if He then makes them known to you, well, that is between you and Him. This is a lesson in faith. You can trust in God's promises found in Scripture: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). If you are like-minded with us, we would love to fellowship with you. Email us.

By His grace alone,

Peter Ditzel

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Our TULIP series of booklets have been read by Christians around the world and have been used by missionaries and other teachers to disciple their brothers and sisters in Christ.

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Man's Sinfulness, God's Sovereignty, and the New Birth (Book T)

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Once Saved, Always Saved? (Book P)

Can you lose your salvation? Is it arrogant to think you can't? Can you have both security and assurance?

OTHER BOOKLETS

What Is the Gospel?

Paul warned the Galatians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." But what is the Gospel? And what are some of the false gospels being promoted?

Is Salvation for You?

This Gospel tract emphasizes God's sovereignty, man's inability, and Jesus Christ's totally effectual atonement in salvation. It gives enough information to avoid the pitfall of briefer tracts of being so general they either mislead or leave the reader with more questions than answers.

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