
What Really is the Gospel?

1 Corinthians 15:1-11²²

Russ Kennedy

The church at Corinth had many things wrong. They were wrong on leadership, on moral purity, on marriage and divorce, on the Spirit's work of grace in the gifts. Each of these needed to be corrected. But nothing was more destructive to the church than its failure to understand the gospel.

What really is the gospel?

This is an important question.

The misunderstanding of the gospel...

The lack of applying the gospel...

The attacks on the gospel...

The decentralization of the gospel...

The Gospel's Fruitful Effect

(v.1-2)

Paul sees the work of the Lord as being a labor in the gospel. The gospel is the sum and center of what he is working and toiling so hard in.

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

In the Preaching (v. 1)

Now the work of the Lord for Paul is preaching. What he did when he labored was to preach. He preached the *gospel* (v.1) and he preached the *Word* (v.2). It was a ministry that involved a man, a message and a method. It was a ministry that constantly spoke the gospel from the Word.

In the People (v. 1b - 2)

But look at what it did in the lives of those who received this sort of ministry.

²² Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

It taught what had been learned. It was addressed to the mind for it made known, it revealed, it communicated.

It was received. There was a sense of embracing what had been preached. It come into good soil and grown into harvest producing plants.

It was affirmed. They stood in this gospel from the Word. It was not something that they heard in the background noise of their Christianity like Muzak or elevator music. They took a stand for it.

It was the means of their salvation. The gospel preached by Paul from the Word was how they came to be saved.

It required a continuing perseverance. They must hold fast to what they had learned and received and affirmed.

Luther, towards the end of his life, said, "The Word has done it all."

The Gospel's Scriptural Content

(v.3-8)

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Under its Authority (v. 3)

Paul is so clear that the gospel he preaches is what he *received* and what he *delivered*. As an apostle he had direct revelation from God. Yet, the gospel was "according to Scripture." Even as an apostle, he was not cut off from the Word. As these two things came together in Paul's soul, the preaching of the gospel became paramount.

In its Clarity (v. 4-5)

Paul has no question as to what the gospel is. The good news is about the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is not just those facts, but all the interpretation of His death, burial and resurrection *that the Scriptures give*. The gospel is both simple and deeply complex. It is about Jesus' death for our sins and His burial for three days and His resurrection. The Scriptures fill out in wonderfully deep and satisfying ways what all that means.

The truths of the gospel bring us our salvation. They are what Jesus did in His death and resurrection to deal with the problem of our being sinners. All that was required by God, was satisfied by Christ.

The truths of the gospel are foundational for our sanctification. In His death, Jesus died to, was separated from the old world, the flesh and the Law. In His resurrection,

Jesus brought life and the powers of the new creation, the new age, into this realm. Now being placed in Christ, we too have died to the power of the old and have been given the life of the new. So we have been separated from the old person we used to be and are now the new people we are becoming.

The truths of the gospel assure our transformation. In His death Jesus broke the power of sin and the old person of sin we were. In His resurrection Jesus gave us true righteousness, the righteousness that comes by life. Now, yes, we have received a legal righteousness put to our account. But we have the life of God in us by the Spirit. Therefore, we have the life of the Spirit who enables us to live in grace as the new people we are.

With its Certainty (v. 6-8)

Paul has great confidence, not only because he has received this gospel, and it is in Scriptures, but also because of its authentication. Its centerpiece, the resurrection, was attested to by an innumerable company of eyewitnesses, not the least of which was himself. "Jesus appeared to all these people and to me," he writes.

The Gospel's Enabling Grace

(v.9-11)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

A Grace Made Man (v. 9-10)

Though Paul has received and delivered by preaching this great gospel, he understands deeply his own utter unworthiness in God's eyes. He has persecuted the church. Imagine going about in gospel ministry with the blood of Stephen and the keys to chains and the heaven-welcomed cry of martyrs in your memory.

But it was God's grace that made Paul what he was. It was the free favor of God that chose and called Paul, self-righteous and self-important as he was. God's grace took the great persecutor of the church and turned him into the glorious preacher of the church.

A Grace Enabled Man (v. 11)

It was also God's grace that enabled Paul to do what he did. He labored and worked and toiled more than anyone else in the gospel. He worked because grace worked. He labored in the strength grace gave.

It is God's grace that enables any Christian to do serve and please the Lord. Any labor you do in ministry is as a grace enabled person. Christians work because God is at work. God does His work primarily through the work of His people.

So grace shaped Paul's character and strengthened Paul's ministry. How do we know when God is at work? When men are at work.

Reflect and Respond

What really is the gospel? To you?

Can you say it?

How do you apply it?

How do you connect it to texts like Romans 6-7, Colossians 2-3, 1 Peter 2-3?

Do you even think about it much?

The gospel is not just a story to be believed. It is the events of Christ's death and resurrection as interpreted by the Bible. It is history as anticipated by the Old Testament and interpreted by the New Testament. All other understandings and interpretations of the facts of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension are myths, lies and will damn your soul to hell.

This is a portion of the Gospel's Biblical meaning. Jesus' death was a voluntary, sacrificial, substitutionary, redeeming death as payment for the sins of God's people. Jesus' resurrection was a real, bodily resurrection from a real, bodily death. It was the seal of approval on Jesus' work on the cross. Jesus received a glorified body and entered into heaven. His resurrection guarantees ours. His resurrection began the life and power of the new creation. His life now sent into His people through the Spirit raises us from the dead.

The gospel and grace are interwoven. No gospel, no grace. No grace, no gospel.

Grace makes God's people who and what they are. Are you a grace-made person?

Grace enables God's people in all aspects of life. Are you a grace-enabled person?

This is what we are committed to in all our ministry, its preaching and teaching.

This is what you should believe. May God make it so.