

What is the Gospel?

*The Most Important Message in the Bible
is the Most Misunderstood Message in the World!*

Introduction:

This is a series of six lessons on the most important message in the Bible - **The Gospel of Jesus Christ**. Many people, even those who profess to be Christians, are confused or unclear about the exact meaning of the Gospel message. Others are unclear as to how a person receives the Gospel - how to be forgiven of sins and have eternal life. This life-changing series is highly recommended for pastors, teachers, and evangelists, as well as all other Christians and non-Christians alike.

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Lesson 1 - The Gospel Message

A. Defining the Gospel

- Romans 1:16 says, *"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."*
- What is the gospel? The word *gospel* (EUAGGELION) means good news. Galatians 1:6-9
- The gospel is the good news about the work God did for our salvation through Jesus Christ on a weekend in history nearly two thousand years ago. It is a message that must be believed. The four gospels give extensive explanation of that world changing event, but in brief, here are some verses that explain it.
 - 1 Peter 2:24a – *...[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.*
 - Acts 5:30 – *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.*
 - Acts 13:28-29 – *And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.*
 - Acts 13:30-32 – *But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers...*
- The results of believing the gospel are found in Acts 13:38-39: *Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.*
- Paul explained the gospel to the Corinthians: *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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.* 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

- Concisely and precisely speaking, the message you must believe in order to be saved has to do with a particular person (Christ) and what He did on your behalf: Christ died for your sins and rose again.

B. The Gospel is an Objective Message

- The gospel is an objective message about the most important historical event that ever took place. It is the news report concerning what Jesus Christ did: He died on the cross and rose again three days later. He did this to forgive us of our sins, save us from God's just wrath, and provide us with eternal life.
- The gospel is not a subjective, how-to message or a step-by-step method used to herd people through a process that leads to salvation.
- The gospel does not change from person to person. It is the historically verifiable account of how God brought salvation to mankind through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

C. Essential Components of the Gospel from 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

1. 1 Corinthians 15:3a – *Christ died...* Christ is the person in whom you must believe for salvation. 1 Timothy 3:16

- Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah from the Old Testament. He is the principle person of the gospel message. In order to be saved, a person's faith must rest exclusively on Jesus Christ. Luke 24:44-48, Romans 1:2-4, Hebrews 2:10
- *Christ*, or CHRISTOS in Greek, is the translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. The term *Christ* has both deity and humanity built into its meaning. John 7:41
- God foretold that the Christ would be a human being, the Seed of the woman. Genesis 3:15, John 1:14
- God also foretold that the Christ would be deity. He was Emmanuel, "God with us". Isaiah 7:14, 9:6; John 8:23-24; Titus 2:13
1 Corinthians 15:3b – *Christ died...* This describes the work of Christ for our salvation. Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 2:9, 1 Peter 2:24
 - Christ suffered spiritual death for us on the cross in that He was separated from God the Father when He took all the sins of mankind on Himself. In Matthew 27:46 we read, "*About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'"*
 - Christ suffered physical death on our behalf when His soul and spirit were separated from His body. 1 Peter 2:24 – *He Himself bore our sin in His body on the cross.* Luke 13:29b – *They took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.* Luke 23:46, Hebrews 10:10
 - And Christ suffered the implications of eternal death. Whether Christ was separated from His Father for one minute or one million years made no difference, since God lives outside the realm of time. Hebrews 9:26, 10:12, 1 Peter 3:18

2. 1 Corinthians 15:3c-4a – *Christ died for our sins.* Christ died on our behalf in order to save us from the penalty we deserved for our sin. By suffering death for us, Christ saved

us from having to face the death penalty ourselves and from being separated from God for all eternity. Paul gave *two* very important verifications of Christ's death.

- Proof #1: Detailed prophecies fulfilled. 1 Corinthians 15:3d – *Christ died...according to the Scriptures...* The death of Christ was a prophetic *event* that happened exactly as the Old Testament foretold. Psalm 22:17-18, 69:11; Isaiah 53:3-6; Zechariah 12:10; Luke 24:46; Acts 10:43; Romans 1:2-4
- Proof #2: The burial of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:4a – *Christ died...and was buried.* The burial of Christ provides enduring proof of His death. The living are not buried. Acts 13:29

3. 1 Corinthians 15:4b-10 – *...and that He was raised on the third day...* The resurrection of Christ is an integral part of the gospel message that must be believed for a person to be saved from the penalty of sin. The resurrection validated Christ's victory over both sin and death. Paul provided two important verifications for the resurrection. Romans 4:23-25

- Proof #1: Detailed prophecies fulfilled. 1 Corinthians 15:4b – *...and that He was raised according to the Scriptures...* Just as precisely fulfilled prophecies prove the validity of Christ's death, precisely fulfilled prophecies also prove the resurrection of Christ. Job 19:25-26; Psalm 16:9-10; Isaiah 25:8, 53:10
- Proof #2: Multiple eye-witnesses. 1 Corinthians 15:5-9 – *...and was seen...* More than 500 eyewitnesses are presented as conclusive proof for the resurrection. 1 John 1:1-
 - 1 Corinthians 15:5a – *...and that He appeared to Cephas...* Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends and one of the most well-known Christians of all time, saw the risen Christ. Later, Peter was martyred because he believed Jesus died for our sins and rose again.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:5b – *...then to the twelve [disciples]...* While still doubting Christ's resurrection, the twelve disciples saw Him. This statement may include Matthias from Acts 1:26, who also witnessed Christ's resurrection. Later these disciples (with the exception of the apostle John) were all martyred for publicly testifying to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. John was arrested and exiled for the same reason.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:6 – *After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.* Christ appeared to over 500 people at one time. Most of these witnesses were still alive at the time 1 Corinthians was written and could have been questioned for verification.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:7a – *...then He appeared to James...* The James referred to here is Christ's half-brother, who saw Jesus after He rose from the dead. Having grown up with Jesus, James could easily confirm or deny Christ's identity. It is significant that he did not call the resurrected Christ a fraud, but instead became a believer.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:7b – *...then to all the apostles...* The apostles, the ones Christ personally commissioned to tell the entire world about his death and resurrection, saw the resurrected Christ. Acts 5:32, Revelation 21:14
 - 1 Corinthians 15:8-9 – *...And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God...* The

apostle Paul, formerly a blasphemer and destroyer of the church, also saw Christ alive and believed in Him.

Lesson 2 - Faith In Christ Alone

A. The Only Requirement for Salvation: Faith alone in Christ alone

- It is significant that more than 160 verses in the New Testament show faith, or belief, in Jesus Christ as the only prerequisite for salvation.
- Acts 16:30b-31 – *He said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*
- John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*
- John 6:47 – *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.*
- John 8:24 – *Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*
- John 11:25-26 – *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"*
- John 20:30-31 – *Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus in is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

B. Biblical facts about faith, or belief, in Christ

- It is important to understand the words *faith* and *belief* are synonyms in the Bible. In Greek, *believe* (PISTEUO) is the verb while *faith* (PISTIS) is the noun. Both words (PISTEUO and PISTIS) have the same basic meaning: to trust in, to rely on, to have faith in or to believe.
- It is not the size of a person's faith that matters; the important thing is the object in whom a person is trusting. Your faith is only as good as its object. Jeremiah 17:5-8
 - Matthew 17:20 – *...for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.*
 - 1 Peter 1:8 – *And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.*
- Faith is not some illusive concept; faith is based on knowledge that comes from the Word of God. Romans 10:17 – *So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*
- Faith is not a work, and therefore it is not based on merit. Since faith is not a work, and grace is God's favor apart from works, faith and grace fit together perfectly like a hand in a glove.

- Romans 4:5 – *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.*
 - Romans 4:20a – *For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace.* Romans 11:6, Ephesians 2:8-9
 - It is important to know the Bible does not make a distinction between head faith and heart faith.
 - In New Testament times, the mind of a person was considered to be a part of the heart, and the heart was the place in which faith occurred. Romans 10:10a – *For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness.*
 - Obviously, someone can intellectually know the facts of the gospel without personally relying on Christ’s finished work for salvation. In that case, such a person is not saved.
 - However, we should be careful to not measure a person's sincerity by using terms such as head faith, heart faith, true faith or saving faith.
 - Some of these qualifiers have been added or inserted into recent Bible translations including the NLT, WNT, ABPE and CEV, but these inaccurate and misleading terms are not used found in the original manuscripts of scripture and can only produce confusion and even paralyzing doubt.
 - Biblically, a person either believes or does not believe. Belief in the gospel is personal reliance on Jesus Christ, on who He is and what He did to save you. If you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are saved, if you have not believed in Him, you are still dead in your sins.
 - John 8:24 – *Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*
 - 1 John 5:13 – *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*
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Lesson 3 - The Proper Response to the Gospel

A. Misleading & Confusing Gospels

- Why it’s important to present a clear gospel.
- Most believers nod in agreement when they hear the true gospel, but when you point out unclear gospel presentations, you may get many different responses, including shock, sadness, guilt, or even denial of the truth of the gospel.
- The intent of this section is not to criticize, but rather to challenge our thinking. This section is presented with the confidence that as Christians, each one of us will want to be clear and faithful to the meaning of the most important message on earth.
 - Since many of us were saved despite unclear gospel presentations, we might be tempted to think accuracy is not that important and that the

unclear presentations that we grew up with are acceptable, even though they are not entirely accurate.

- We should be careful when we share the gospel. We should strive to present the gospel message as clearly as possible.
 - Referring to clarity, in 1 Corinthians 14:7-8 Paul said, *“Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?”*
 - Similarly, in Ephesians 6:19-20 Paul said, *“And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*
 - In Acts 18:25-26 Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos to be more accurate: *This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; ...he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus... But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.* The scriptures are very bold in stating what the gospel is and what it is not. Here are a few examples of this fact.
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Lesson 4 - Saved By... / Not Saved By...

- Ephesians 2:8-9 - *“For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*
- Acts 13:39 - *“And through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.”*
- Titus 3:5 - *“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”*
- 2 Timothy 1:9 - *“He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our own works, but by His own purpose and by the grace He granted us in Christ Jesus before time eternal.”*
- Galatians 2:16 - *“Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law. Since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”*

Unclear Gospel Presentations:

1. Confusion: Believe and do good works

- Almost all false gospels require the sinner to do some work for salvation, but the gospel is NOT faith in Christ plus good works.

- The Bible teaches that salvation is the work of God. Revelation 7:10 – *And they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation [belongs] to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”* Psalm 3:8, Jonah 2:9b
- We can add nothing to Christ’s work on the cross. He achieved complete and full salvation for all mankind, without the help of anyone. By faith we rely on what He already accomplished. Hebrews 1:3, 10:12
- Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*
- Titus 3:5 – *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*

2. Confusion: Believe and keep the Ten Commandments

- Confusion about keeping the Ten Commandments in order to earn or gain God's acceptance is still very prevalent in our world today. The Bible speaks plainly against this wrong gospel (false gospel).
- Galatians 2:16 – *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law, no flesh shall be justified.*
- Acts 13:39 – *Through Him, everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.*
- Romans 3:20 – *Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.*
- Galatians 3:11 – *Clearly no one is justified before God by the law because “The righteous will live by faith.”*
- The law was given to be our school master to teach us to recognize our desperate need for a savior. However, the law was never given to save us. The law cannot make us righteous, it only demonstrates how unrighteous we really are. In fact, the law condemns us, but only Jesus Christ can save us. Romans 3:20, 2 Corinthians 3:9, Galatians 3:10-14, Galatians 3:23-25

3. Confusion: Believe and be baptized

- Water baptism is a public testimony of salvation for people who have believed in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, but it is not a requirement or the means of salvation for the unsaved. Acts 8:26-40, 10:43-48
- If water baptism was required for salvation, Paul made a major blunder when in 1 Corinthians 1:17 he said, *“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”*
- A person is justified before God without the ritual of water baptism, as confirmed by the testimony of the thief on the cross, who was unquestionably saved without getting baptized in water. Luke 23:42-43

4. Confusion: Believe and be circumcised

- Although this false gospel is not common today, it was a problem in the early church when the majority of Christians were still Jews. Many of these Jewish

believers felt that in order for Gentiles to be saved, they also needed to be circumcised.

- Acts 15:1 – *Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”*
- Galatians 5:2-3 – *Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.*
- God made it clear that if a person was relying on circumcision to be saved, he would need to keep the whole law, not just the circumcision requirements. Since no one has ever been able to keep the whole law, any effort to gain eternal life through circumcision falls miserably short.
- Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant which was an agreement between God and Abraham dating to the time when Israel first became a nation. All Israeli boys were required to be circumcised eight days after birth. This ritual, however, did not save anyone from their sins. Genesis 17:9-14, Romans 4:9-12

5. Confusion: Believe and confess your sins

- Confession of sins is not a requirement for salvation. While confession of sin is not a requirement for salvation, all people must understand they are sinners in need of the Savior. Understanding or recognizing you are a sinner prior salvation is not the same thing as confessing your individual sins.
 1. First of all, no one can possibly remember every sin he/she has ever committed.
 2. Secondly, trying to confess all your sins would cause distressing soul searching and doubt. If you think you have to confess all your sins in order to be saved, you will never be secure in your salvation knowing you have forgotten many of your sins.
- Unbelievers will be condemned to the Lake of Fire because they did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not because they failed to confess their sins. John 3:18 says, *“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*
- Confession of sin is for the saved person, one who is already a child of God. Due to committing a sin, the child of God can get out of fellowship with God. In On such occasions, believers are to confess their sins in order to restore their fellowship with God.
 1. 1 John 1:9 – *If we [believers] confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous [just] to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 2. The Greek word translated *confess* (HOMOLOGEO) is from HOMO, meaning the same, and LOGEO, meaning to speak. To confess is to say the same thing. It means to agree with God concerning your sin. When you confess your sins, you are acknowledging that you have fallen short of His perfect standard.

6. Confusion: Believe and ask for forgiveness

- God does not require a person to ask for forgiveness in order to be saved. This is similar to the previous confusion of requiring confession of sins for salvation.
- The truth is, the moment we believe in Christ, we are totally forgiven, even without asking for forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7 says, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”*
- Forgiveness comes as a result of believing the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection, not because we asked God for forgiveness. Forgiveness is a byproduct and promised benefit of believing the gospel. It is granted to us the moment we believe in Jesus Christ.
- Colossians 2:13-14 says, *“When you were dead in your transgressions ...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”*

7. Confusion: Repent from your sins

A. God's Word does not command repentance from sins in order to be saved.

- The phrases repent of your sins and repent from your sins are not found anywhere in the Bible (although there is an exception in the New Living Translation where the phrase “of your sins” was added in error by the translators).
 - At the same time, with that said, every person who has ever believed in Christ for salvation has repented of [changed their mind about] something. As 2 Peter 3:9 teaches, *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”*
 - In order to properly understand the New Testament usage of the words repent (verb) and repentance (noun), we must look at the original Greek word as it was used in scripture and not the modern English dictionary definition.
1. The Greek word repentance (METANOIA) literally means afterthought, change of mind or change of thinking. META means change and NOIA means mind. What we repent of, or change our minds about, can vary. We can repent of good things or bad things. Repentance in and of itself is neutral.
 2. Unfortunately, our modern understanding of repentance was not derived from the Greek word METANOIA, which was the word used in the Bible. Instead, it was derived from the Medieval Latin word REPOENITĒRE, which means to be sorry or feel regret. REPOENITĒRE is an alteration of a previous Latin word PAENITĒRE, which meant to be penitent.
 3. This confusion concerning the meaning of the word repent began with Jerome (AD 347–420) when he erroneously decided to use the Latin word for penance (PAENITENTIAM) to translate the Greek word for change-of-mind (METANOIA) in the Latin Vulgate translation of the New Testament. This error has led to a great deal of misunderstanding and misinterpretation.
 4. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation became the standard Bible of Christians for many centuries, causing a shift in the common understanding of repent from

change of one's mind to doing penance or feeling sorrow for sin. This mistranslation affects our understanding even today.

5. Biblical repentance is a change of mind, not a change of conduct. Repentance is not a work that an unbeliever must add to salvation. This would not be consistent with salvation by grace alone, apart from works.

B. How repentance relates to salvation.

1. All unbelievers in the world have some false hope they are relying on for eternal salvation or some false idea that allows them to ignore the subject all together. Hebrews 6:1
2. When unbelievers trust in Christ for salvation, it is because they have changed their minds (repented). Instead of trusting in the false hope they previously held, they now trust in Christ alone for salvation. Acts 20:21
3. When we share the gospel, we need to encourage unbelievers to change their minds about what they have been trusting in (a religion, philosophy, or self-effort) and urge them to believe exclusively on Jesus Christ for their salvation. Acts 11:18
4. In Acts 19:4 Paul said, *"John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."*
5. While it is not necessary to repent of your sins to be saved, you must repent (change your mind) in order to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. As Acts 17:30 states, *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent [change their mind]."*
6. Repentance must not be taught as an extra requirement as if were a work, and something apart from (or other than) believing in Christ.
7. Repentance is not a change of life or a change of direction, as if to clean-up or reform your life in order to merit salvation. That would be an extra step, a human work, required for salvation. Isaiah 53:6 calls our righteousness [i.e., the best of our own works], *"filthy rags"*.

8. Confusion: Invite Christ into your life; Ask Jesus into your heart

- The gospel is not about inviting or asking Jesus to come into your life or heart. The proper response to the gospel is simply to believe in Christ and His work – He died for your sins and rose again.
- You are not saved by begging, inviting or persuading Christ to come into your life. The moment you believe Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again, you receive eternal life as a totally free gift. At that moment, you are placed into union with Christ and the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside of you.
- Ephesians 1:13-14 – *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*
- Whenever a person trusts in Christ as Savior, God the Holy Spirit comes to live in his/her life, but the Bible does not teach us to ask Jesus to live in us, He does not come because we ask. He comes because we believe.

- It is important to understand the proper meaning of Revelations 3:20 – *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*
 1. This verse is often quoted in support of having the an unsaved person ask Jesus to come into our their heart for salvation. First of all, this verse was not addressed to unbelievers, and secondly, the words "ask" and "heart" are absent.
 2. This verse was written to Christians from the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22. It speaks of fellowship, encouraging these Christians to dine with Jesus Christ. Audaciously, these believers had excluded Christ, of all people, from of their meetings. As believers they needed to reopen the door of fellowship to Him.
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Lesson 5 - Unclear Gospel Presentations (*continued*)

9. Confusion: Give your life to God; Give your heart to Jesus; Make a Commitment to Christ

- The gospel is not about giving your life, your heart, or anything else to God in exchange for eternal life. In fact, salvation is just the opposite. The direction of salvation is from God to man, not man to God.
- If salvation (being saved from the penalty of our sin) is received through some type of bargain or exchange we make with God, it is no longer a free gift.
- Romans 11:6 – *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*
- The good news of the gospel is that Christ gave Himself for our sins, dying for us as our substitute on Calvary. We don't give ourselves to God, He gave Himself to us.
 - Ephesians 5:2 – *...as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*
 - Galatians 2:20b – *...the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*
- God does not accept anything whatsoever from you in exchange for salvation, no matter how sincere you may be. We make no contribution or payment in exchange for salvation. From beginning to end, salvation is a totally free gift, given to us by God's grace alone when we believe.

10. Confusion: Come Forward make a public profession of faith

- This confusion implies that you must make a verbal public profession of your faith in Christ in order to complete your salvation.
- If this were required, Christ's work on the cross to pay for your sins was not enough. To complete your salvation, you would need to add your imperfect work of public confession to His already perfect work of dying for your sins.
- Christ alone gained our complete salvation and nothing more can be added to improve on it. Ephesians 2:9, Titus 3:6-7

- It is true, that before God in heaven, you will either receive rewards for publicly confessing Christ or be denied rewards for denying Him but testifying publicly does not earn or ensure your salvation. Matthew 10:33
 1. It is important to understand the proper meaning of 2 Timothy 2:11-12 – *It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us.*
 2. What this verse is saying is that He will deny us rewards, crowns or ruling authority for unfaithfulness, but He will not deny us entrance into heaven. 1 Corinthians 3:15
 3. 2 Timothy 2:13 – *If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown [deny] himself.* Even if we became totally faithless, He will remain faithful to us His children.
- Romans 10:9-10 is often cited to support the concept that an unbeliever must proclaim Christ publicly in order to be saved.
 1. First of all, the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of Romans were written specifically to address the past, present, and future spiritual condition of Israel. These chapters were not written with unsaved Gentiles in mind.
 2. Romans 10:9-10 – *That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*
 3. In the context of this passage, if an Israelite called on the name of the Lord with his voice, it would be because he had already believed on the Lord in His heart. Romans 10:14 confirms this saying, *“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?”*
 4. Even to this day, Jewish people will not confess that Jesus Christ is the LORD Yahweh of the Old Testament, unless they have already believed on Him in their hearts.
 5. Confession merely confirms verbally what has already gone on in the privacy of the heart, but it is not a requirement for salvation. 1 Corinthians 12:3

11. Confusion: Pray the sinner’s prayer

- A person is saved based on faith in Christ and not because of praying a prayer. Acts 16:30-31 says, *“And after he brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”*
- There is no example in the Bible of a person being required to pray a prayer in order to be saved. If prayer were required for salvation, God would have plainly communicated that to us. Prayer is a good work, and we already know we are not saved by doing works. Titus 3:5
- Are we implying that prayer is wrong? Never! It is proper for the believer, one who has already trusted in Christ as savior. It is just not a requirement for becoming a believer. Faith in the gospel is what saves, not leading someone to pray a prayer.

12. Confusion: Just say yes to Jesus

- While this may seem like a very positive response to the gospel message, it is not synonymous with *“believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”* Acts 16:31
- This statement is confusing, as it does not specify that we are to believe in Christ’s death and resurrection for salvation. Many well-meaning people easily become convinced they are going to heaven based on a positive attitude towards Jesus.
- Salvation is not based on a “yes” statement to the Lord. What exactly would a person be saying “yes” to? If this would be some kind of promise or vow to the Lord, then saying “yes to the Lord” would be requiring a human work. We know from scripture that our works do not save us. Titus 3:5
- In fact, Matthew 7:22-23 says, *“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me...’”*

13. Confusion: Love God

- This confusion teaches that if you say, “I love you,” to the Lord and your neighbor, you become saved. This false concept demands that the unsaved love God and love others to earn or merit salvation. In reality, this is something the unsaved are totally incapable of doing before salvation. Ephesians 2:1-3
 1. Many preach this as a gospel message based out of Deuteronomy 6:5 which says, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”*
 2. Jesus said this was the greatest commandment (Luke 10:27) but He did not imply that obeying this command would earn you salvation.
 3. There are many similar commands given in the word of God to be obeyed, but these are for God’s children to fulfill as His growing disciples. They but they are not given as means or methods for obtaining salvation.
- A person is brought into God’s family by means of spiritual birth and not by promising to fulfill a particular standard, like loving God and your neighbor.
 1. Jesus clarified this fact with the spiritual teacher of Israel, Nicodemus. In John 3:3 He said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*
 2. It is believing the good news about Jesus that saves a soul and not a statement that we love God or love our neighbors.

14. Confusion: Follow Jesus; Bear your cross

- It is important to understand the context of Matthew 16:24-26. *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*
- The key to understanding this passage is to understand that Jesus was addressing believers, *“He said to His disciples.”* Since Jesus was talking to His

disciples, we know this is not a “how-to-be saved passage” but a sanctification passage.

- When Jesus spoke of someone losing his life and forfeiting his soul, He was warning the believer to not miss out on the abundant life here on earth. He was speaking against the believer selling out to the world. Romans 12:2; James 1:27, 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17
- He was not speaking of the saved forfeiting their souls in hell. Otherwise, this verse would contradict many verses on the eternal nature of our salvation, as we will be studying in the next section. He was speaking against believers selling out to the world and becoming unfruitful in service. 2 Peter 1:5-9

15. Confusion: Make Christ Lord of your life; Submit to the lordship of Jesus.

- It is true that in order to be saved you must believe Jesus is the Lord God. John 8:24 says, *“Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins for unless you believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins.”*
 1. Jesus’ title, Christ, signifies that Jesus is the Lord. In Matthew 16:16, when Jesus asked Peter who He was, *“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”* Acts 2:36, Luke 2:11, John 4:25, 1 John 2:22-23
 2. It would be nonsensical to trust in Jesus for salvation if you thought He was merely an ordinary, sinful human like yourself.
- However, while you must believe Christ is the Lord God in order to be saved, making Him Lord of your life will not save you. If that were the case, your salvation would not be based on Christ’s finished work, but on the addition of your work of making Him your Lord. Salvation would be based on your frail and continuously failing efforts to submit to Him. Titus 3:5-6
 1. Making Christ Lord of your life is not a decision you make moments before you believe.
 2. How can an unbeliever, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3), under Satan’s control, without the Spirit of God in his or her life, ever honestly and successfully promise submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ? If making Jesus the Lord of your life were a requirement for salvation, no one could ever be saved.
- Lordship is a discipleship issue for the believer, not a salvation issue for the unbeliever.
 1. We know the Lord Jesus Christ wants to be Lord of every member of His body. He initiates this lifelong process the moment a person believes in Him and He promises to continue working toward this goal until the second we die. Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13; 1 Peter 1:13-16
 2. We all struggle with sin and at times find ourselves fighting the lordship of Christ in some area of our lives. Romans 7:18, 1 John 1:8
 3. However, as we consistently present the members of our bodies as instruments of righteousness to the Lord, Christ’s lordship over our lives increases. Romans 6:19-22

16. Confusion: Just have faith

- This confusion treats faith as an end in itself (i.e., **having faith in faith**). The unsaved are told to “just have faith”. Faith becomes abstract and nothing more than a form of positive thinking or a positive vibe toward God or toward life.
- But in this confusing message the object of our faith is not actually stated or clearly defined. Many people mistakenly feel that they will be saved because they have positive optimism about life or God. Sadly, to not have faith specifically in Christ and His finished work on the cross for our sins is a fatal mistake.
- Clearly, the concept of having faith is biblical, but for salvation, faith must be **in Christ** specifically. John 6:29 – *Jesus replied, “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”*
- To many modern thinkers, Jesus is an undefined “good man” or “good example.” Christ becomes a goal we can ultimately achieve if we simply have a good outlook on life. Many of these people see faith as a mystical type of Karma or holy cosmic force.
- Because the phrase “just have faith” or “just believe” does not describe a faith placed in the Lord Jesus Christ’s death for our sins and resurrection, it becomes a misleading message. Acts 16:29-34, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

17. Confusion: Keep the faith

- This is the false gospel concept is preached by many, who implying that salvation is about maintaining your faith in Christ. If you happened to stop believing then you’ll lose your salvation and go to hell.
- In this scenario, the reason people go to heaven is because THEY maintained the faith or persevered in faith and not because of the fidelity and faithfulness of Christ in maintaining them.
- The object of their faith for salvation is not Christ. Instead, their trust is in THEIR OWN ability to hold or to maintain the faith.
- Sadly, this boils down to reliance on your own faith and your own faithfulness, rather than on Christ’s finished work for salvation. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:13, *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”*

18. Confusion: The cross-less gospel; The promise-only gospel

- This false message fails to emphasize, or even mention in many cases, the person of Christ (the God-man) and His redeeming work on the cross.
- The specific facts of the biblical gospel – Christ’s death and resurrection – are minimized or ignored altogether. The essential details of the gospel are viewed as extra or unnecessary information, that is not needed for salvation.
- Some of those who preach a cross-less gospel, go as far as to say that if you require faith in Christ’s death and resurrection, you are actually adding to the gospel.
- Proponents of this false gospel claim that the deity of Christ, as well as His death and resurrection are nonessential truths for eternal life. They often call the message to be believed for eternal life, “the saving message”. They may also say that the gospel refers to the entire message of the Bible.
- This false message teaches that for salvation, a person must believe in the promise of Jesus to give us eternal life. To these teachers, it is faith in eternal

security through a man named Jesus and that this is all that is essential to salvation.

- To these teachers the identity of Christ as God and His death for sins and resurrection are not part of the saving message. To these proponents, these truths are definitely not part of the message that must be believed for eternal life.
- While it is true that Christ gives us eternal life when we believe in Him, we are not told to merely believe in Christ's promise, but to believe in His person and work which made His promise possible.
- Peter and Paul both preached the person and work of Christ in their evangelism of the lost.
 1. In Acts 2:23-24, 36, in evangelism Peter preached the deity, death and resurrection of Christ. *"This Man, ...you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again... Therefore, ...know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."*
 2. Paul preached the cross in evangelism. 1 Corinthians 2:2 – *And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.* 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23; Galatians 1:1-9, 3:1
 3. Paul preached the resurrection in his evangelism. Acts 17:32 – *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer...* 2 Timothy 2:8

Lesson 6 - Summary

Summarizing what the gospel is not

- The gospel is not a subjective message.
 1. The gospel is not something we say or do in our hearts.
 2. The gospel is not an experience we have had.
- The gospel is not a formula.
 1. The gospel is not repeating some phrase.
 2. The gospel is not what we say or what someone leads us to say.
- The gospel is not saying the so-called "sinner's prayer."
- The gospel is not an emotion.
 1. The gospel is not a show of remorse, penance or beating oneself up.
 2. The gospel is not a display of tears, joy or sorrow.
- The gospel is not some ecstatic or mystical experience.
 1. The gospel is not speaking in tongues.
 2. The gospel is not being slain in the spirit.
 3. The gospel is not some sort of magical incantation.
- The gospel is not a promise or commitment we make.
- The gospel is not something we do for God.

- The gospel is not some deal we make with God. God does not say,
 1. “If you’ll make me Lord, then I’ll save you.”
 2. “If you’ll give me your life, your heart or your all, then I’ll give you salvation.”
- The gospel is not something we have to ask or beg God for.
 1. The gospel is not asking Christ into your heart or life.
 2. The gospel is not begging for forgiveness or confessing your sins.
- The gospel is not your ability to believe.
 1. The gospel is not trusting in your faith.
 2. The gospel is not your ability to be sincere.
 3. The gospel is not your ability to cast out all doubts.
- In summary, the gospel is not doing good works, keeping the Ten Commandments, being baptized, being circumcised, confessing your sins, asking forgiveness, repenting from your sins, inviting Jesus into your heart, giving your life to God, making a public profession of faith, praying the sinners prayer, saying yes to God, loving God, following Jesus, submitting to His lordship, having faith in yourself, or keeping the faith.
 1. How could the gospel possibly be all these things!
 2. Who could ever satisfy these requirements? We would surely fail even if just one of these things were required.
- Plain and straightforward, the gospel is the objective message that Christ died for your sins and rose again on the third day. Do you believe in Christ and what He did for you? If so, you are saved. 1 John 5:13
- Beware of preaching any other gospel. Galatians 1:6-9
 - Galatians 1:6 – *“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel.”* A believer can sadly desert the gospel, as was happening in the Galatian churches.
 - Galatians 1:7 – *“which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”* The gospel is that Christ died for your sins and rose again. No other gospel exists. Sadly, deceivers constantly disturb and confuse us with distortions to the simple, but destiny-changing gospel message.
 - Galatians 1:8 – *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!* Paul stated that anyone, angels or otherwise, who preaches another gospel, should be accursed.
 - Galatians 1:9 – *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!* The fact that Paul repeated his strong hostility toward false gospels and those who preach them shows how serious this issue is to God.
 - Galatians 1:10 – *For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.* We must resist at all costs the temptation to preach

a popular, watered-down, or appealing gospel message, because if we do, we are no longer serving Christ.

- Are you convinced Jesus is the only way?
 1. In John 14:6 Jesus said..., *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."* Do you believe Jesus? Do you believe He is the only way to God? Or was He mistaken? Is there another way?
 2. Are there many doors or pathways to God? No! In John 10:9, Jesus did not give room for any exceptions, but exclusively specified, *"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."* There are not multiple doors.
 3. We need to remember salvation that cannot be both God's work and ours at the same time. It cannot even be 99% Christ and 1% us. Salvation is 100% God's free gift. Ephesians 2:8-9, Isaiah 42:8
 4. We must rely solely on the work of Christ. There is no middle ground. It is not Christ plus anything. Acts 4:12 says, *"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."* Isaiah 42:8
 5. The reason we must be accurate with the most important message on earth is because it is a matter of life and death – eternal life and eternal death.
- If you had a malignant brain tumor, you would want only a qualified surgeon who understood the facts and didn't approach your surgery in a confusing, vague or careless way. You would want the surgeon to cut exactly in the right place. You would want him to do precisely what he learned in medical school.
- The gospel is even more important than brain surgery because it has eternal consequences.
- Matthew 7:22-23 says, *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me...'"*
 1. For these reasons, we seek to be concise and clear with the gospel message. Our goal in this teaching is not to judge, belittle or discourage God's children. If you have been guilty of being unclear with the gospel message or of giving a misleading invitation that adds extra unbiblical conditions to the gospel to believe, trust the Lord and ask God to make your presentation of the gospel clearer than ever before.
- Christ's calls to us to share a clear gospel everywhere.
 1. In Mark 16:15, the Lord Jesus Christ commanded, *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation."*
 2. Christ called us to make disciples in all nations. Matthew 28:19-20 says, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

3. In Acts 1:8, just before returning to heaven, Jesus added, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth.*”
4. Because it’s a matter of life and death, let’s make sure we are accurate and precise in teaching others that Christ died for their sins and rose again on the third day.

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