

God's Word: The Gospel

*Ill news hath wings, and with the wind doth go,
Comfort's a cripple and comes ever slow.*

—Michael Drayton

War, famine, crime, scandal: such is the stuff of headlines. It grabs our attention; it sells newspapers. And it depresses us. There is, to be sure, a desperate shortage of good news in our daily news. So much so that we are frequently skeptical of good news; in moments of cynicism we may even be tempted to label it sentimentalism rather than proper news.

12. What was the last bit of good news you read in the newspaper, saw on television, or heard on the radio? What was the last bit of good news that had relevance for your own life?

Power Points

13. Read Romans 1:16–17. How does Paul famously describe the Gospel? In what way does it differ from the Law?

14. In the above passage, Paul mentions righteousness being “revealed” with the Gospel. Compare Ephesians 6:19 and 2 Corinthians 4:4. How do these passages shed light on why the Gospel must be revealed?

15. Scripture declares that God's Law is universal; it is given to all people. Read 1 Timothy 2:3–6 and 2 Peter 3:9. For whom is the Gospel revealed?

16. Compare Mark 1:1; 2 Corinthians 2:12; and Romans 16:25–27. What fuller names or descriptions do these passages give to the Gospel? What significance do these have for understanding the Gospel?

17. Sadly, many people and many religions preach about Christ without in fact preaching the Gospel. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 and compare 1 Corinthians 2:2. What does Paul say forms the content of the true Gospel message?

18. Read Galatians 1:6–8. What warning does Paul here give? Why is he so adamant that the church reject all other “gospels”?

Living by Faith

In the same way that many people faithfully read the morning paper or turn on the evening news, Christians are eager to hear important news that affects their lives. There is none more important or more relevant than the good news of Christ Himself.

19. In the light of question 14, what relevance does frequent worship have for the Christian?

20. In the light of questions 17 and 18 above, what benefits may the Christian derive from frequent study of God’s Word and sound Christian doctrine?

Communicating the Message

In our sinful world, where good news is so infrequently heard, it is easy to become skeptical about such news or cynical about its content. But our Lord assures us that His Gospel is no sentimental story; it is true, faithfully reported, and eternally relevant. It is good news indeed.

21. How might you respond to a friend who believes the Gospel is too good to be true?

22. How might you respond to a friend who believes that the importance of Jesus is found in His moral example rather than in His death and resurrection?

Comparisons

Eastern Orthodox: “What was Christ’s doctrine? The Gospel of the kingdom of God, or, in other words, the doctrine of salvation and eternal happiness, the same that is now taught in

the Orthodox Church (Mark 1:14–15). How have we salvation by Christ's doctrine? When we receive it with all our heart, and walk according to it. For, as the lying words of the devil, received by our first parents, became in them the seed of sin and death; so, on the contrary the true Word of Christ, heartily received by Christians, becomes in them the seed of a holy and immortal life (1 Peter 1:23). How have we salvation by Christ's life? When we imitate it. For He says, 'If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be' (John 12:26)" (*The Longer Catechism of the Eastern Church*, questions 196–98).

Lutheran: "But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law of God, and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all his sins, and has obtained and acquired for him, without any merit of his . . . forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life" (Epitome of the Formula of Concord V 4).

Reformed/Presbyterian: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how He pleases. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word. . . . God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them" (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapters 10.3 and 11.4).

Roman Catholic: "The Synod furthermore declares that . . . the beginning of the said Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ . . . that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through His quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and cooperating with that said grace" (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, chapter 5).

Wesleyan/Methodist: "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith and calling upon God; wherefore we have not power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will" (*Methodist Articles of Religion*, article 8).

Baptist: "We believe that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the Gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial, penitent, and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the Gospel; which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation" (*The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, article 6).

Liberal: "Theologically, the content of Christology is to be found by asking two questions: 'From what do men need to be saved?' and 'How is Jesus related to man's salvation?' If the source of our sin is located in a non-psychological 'nature' which we inherit, we shall, of course, interpret the work of Christ in terms of His 'natures,' divine and human. But if we think of sin concretely and refer it to its psychological causes, we shall interpret salvation in terms of conscious experience. We shall then not ask concerning the 'nature' of Jesus, but rather concerning His religious consciousness and life. We shall emphasize His *God-consciousness* and His ability to create in His disciples a trust in God, which gives spiritual insight and moral power. As Schleiermacher declared, the important thing about Jesus is His God-consciousness" (Gerald Birney Smith in *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion*, pp. 531–32).

Point to Remember

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. Romans 1:16

To prepare for “Distinguishing Law and Gospel,” read Galatians 3:21–24.