

What is the Gospel?

The News We Hear

Turn on the television on any given day and there are a number of networks you could watch. Cooking channels, hunting channels, sports channels, and the list goes on and on. But in our politically charged climate, how do you feel about *news* channels? Do you find them comforting, encouraging, and supportive? Would you describe the daily chatter on CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC as life-giving?

Probably not.

Regardless of your political persuasion, you probably haven't said to a friend lately, "That news segment the other night on foreign relations between the US. & China was thrilling! The news anchor really captivated me with his words. I even teared up a bit at the end." Maybe you have said this...in which case, please let us know. We'd like to pray for you.

As helpful as the news can be at giving us information about what's going on in the world, we rarely (if ever) walk away from watching our news segments feeling like we just heard *good news*. Informative news, shocking news, troubling news, helpful news, biased news, even fake news—but *good news*? Does such a thing even exist anymore in our world?

Yes—yes it does. Two-thousand years ago, the apostle Paul wrote to a church in Rome—an empire as politically and culturally charged as the United States. Throughout this letter, Paul wanted to share some news with Christians in Rome.

This news wasn't political in nature, although it would affect the way they dealt with politics. It wasn't social in nature, although it would affect the way they lived and shared life with people. No, this news was something altogether different. Let's zoom in to take a closer look:

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. — Romans 3:23–24 NLT

God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. — Romans 5:8 CSB

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 8:38–39 CSB

What's Paul talking about? *The gospel*.

In a world full of news of every sort, people need to hear news that brings them hope, fills them with faith, and has the power to change them. Ironically, the word "gospel" literally means *good news* and Paul calls it "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

In the gospel we discover the news we need, the news we long for, the news that can change our lives.

But you may be unsure or unfamiliar with this news. "What does it mean? How do I know? Can it really change my life?" These are great questions and in part, they are the reason why we've written this document. We want to help you see the gospel in Scripture for yourself. We want to

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guide you through key passages where the gospel is explained and described so that you can understand and experience this good news personally.

So, if you're ready to learn—perhaps for the first time—about the gospel, then get ready. You'll need a Bible in a translation you understand (i.e. CSB, NLT, or ESV), something to write *with*, and something to write *on*. You may plan to work through each page over the course of a week or two. You may plan to do a deep dive and study this all at once. What works for you is what works for you.

Throughout this guide, we've broken down the gospel into five distinct words. Each word communicates a different aspect of God's saving love for us in Christ. As you read through this guide, you'll notice some very distinct ideas along with some overlap between them.

Along the way, you will learn some biblical terminology, become a little more familiar with the Bible, and probably have a few “ah-ha!” moments. Most importantly, you will read about *the best news in the world*: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's get started.

What is the Gospel?

Justification

This fancy word is one that appears in the Scriptures at several places (as you'll see shortly). The basic meaning is "to be made right with God." In other words, the gospel truth of justification answers questions like: How can I be made right with God? & How can God accept me?

As you read the following passages, write down how they answer these questions.

Main Reading

- Romans 3:9–26
- Titus 3:1–8
- Galatians 3:10–14

Optional Extra Reading

- Romans 4:1–25
- Romans 5:1–21
- Philippians 3:1–9
- Isaiah 53:1–10

The Good News

Throughout these passages, we hope you see the main point: God declares us righteous on the basis of what Jesus has done for us. We don't save ourselves; Jesus saves us. There is no amount of "law" we can keep that saves us—no amount of prayer, church attendance, abstinence from sin, etc.

Instead, we are saved on the basis of Jesus' perfect life. When we trust in Jesus, God declares us righteous, because He transfers the perfect obedience of Christ to our life. Even though we are imperfect, God sees us through the lens of Jesus' perfect life.

Practical Application

The gospel truth of justification hits the ground level when we start thinking about the purpose of our faith and church involvement. Because Christ has made us fully righteous in God's sight, there is no amount of religious activity that can improve upon this.

This means that all our efforts to grow as a Christian have nothing to do with God accepting us, but rather with us experiencing the grace and power of God in our lives. The more we grow in Christ, the more we experience Christ. Because God has already justified us, we can be free from the fear of condemnation. Christ was already condemned in our place. Now, we can pursue spiritual growth as a journey of joy instead of a journey of fear.

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Adoption

You've probably heard this word before and it means what you probably think it means. The gospel truth of adoption looks at God's grace to us in more familial language. This aspect of the gospel asks questions like: How can God love me? & How loved am I?

As you read the following passages, write down how they answer these questions.

Main Reading

- Luke 15:11–32
- Romans 8:14–17, 31–39
- Ephesians 1:3–6

Optional Extra Reading

- John 1:10–13
- Galatians 4:1–6
- 2 Corinthians 6:16–18
- 1 John 3:1–3

The Good News

The gospel-truth of adoption declares that because of Jesus, we are fully known and fully loved by God. Because of what Jesus has done, we are now considered to be the adopted sons and daughters of God. We now call God our Heavenly Father.

Because of Christ, there is nothing we can do for God to love us any more or any less. Instead, we are fully and completely loved by God. *You* are fully and completely loved by God if you have trusted in Jesus. What's more: because God has already punished Christ for *all* your sins, there is *nothing* you can do to remove God's love from you.

Practical Application

This reality of being adopted by God hits the ground when we consider who's love and approval in life we live for. Are we constantly living for the approval of a parent, a spouse, a friend, a boss? The gospel-truth of adoption declares that we are loved and approved by the ultimate authority in the universe—the Almighty God of Heaven and Earth.

Because of this, we don't have to live in fear of people's rejection or disapproval. Instead, we can rest in *God's* love for us, because His love and His approval are all we truly need for life, for joy, and for peace.

This week, focus your heart on resting in God's love for you.

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Forgiveness

Have you ever done something you were really, really sorry for? Better yet, have you ever done something you knew was bad, but you tried to avoid owning up to it? No question, guilt is something very hard and very painful to deal with.

Thankfully, God addresses this difficulty with incredible grace by showing us the gospel-truth of forgiveness. This gospel-truth answers questions like: How do I deal with my shame and guilt? & Where can I find true peace?

As you read the following passages, write down how they answer these questions.

Main Reading

- Psalm 103:1–13
- Isaiah 53:1–10
- Matthew 26:26–28
- Colossians 1:9–14

Optional Extra Reading

- Mark 2:1–12
- Luke 7:36–50
- Ephesians 1:7–12

The Good News

Right now, in this moment, think about this: think about some of the worst sins you've ever committed. This may be hard, but go there in your mind. Do you see yourself there? Good. Now imagine Jesus on the cross, absorbing the wrath of God—for *those specific sins*.

Dear friend, when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the price of your guilt and bore the wrath of God in your place. The result is: *you are forgiven*—cleansed of *all* unrighteousness in the eyes of God. Now, you can be at peace and stop holding your sins against you, because two-thousand years ago, God held your sins against Jesus.

Practical Application

This gospel-truth of forgiveness hits the ground for us when we think about how to deal with the bad choices we make in life. One route we can take is to justify ourselves by explaining how everyone else is imperfect too. Another route we could take is to ignore our guilt by drowning ourselves in food, drink, or entertainment.

But a better solution is to take our guilt to the cross and confess our sins to God. When we do this, God doesn't cast us from His presence. Instead He embraces us and offers us His grace. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

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New Creation

Everyone seems to be looking for a fresh start, a new beginning, a “do-over.” In the gospel, God declares that we have been given the ultimate fresh start through faith in Christ. In other words, the gospel-truth of new creation is a perspective on the gospel that is full of hope. It answers questions like: Where is true life really found? & Where can I find a genuine fresh start?

As you read the following passages, write down how they answer these questions.

Main Reading

- John 11:1–27
- 2 Corinthians 5:16–21
- Ephesians 2:1–10

Optional Extra Reading

- John 3:1–21
- Romans 6:1–14
- Romans 8:1–11

The Good News

The gospel-truth of new-creation declares that we are no longer defined by our old life apart from Christ. Instead, we are defined through the work of Christ in us. In Him, we have the ultimate fresh start and the most epic new beginning.

When we trusted in Christ, God wiped the slate clean—He saved us, cleansed us, and gave us new life. As you’ve just read, this is compared to a resurrection. We were spiritually dead, but God made us alive. Now, because of what Jesus has done, we don’t have to walk in the death of our sins or failures. Instead, we can walk in the life of following Jesus and pursuing all God has called, designed, and gifted us to be.

Practical Application

The truth of new-creation becomes more real to us when we consider the things we turn to for joy and satisfaction. What is this for you? When you think about what gives you the greatest joy—the greatest sense of *life*—what are some things that come to mind? Is it money? Success? A relationship?

Whatever it is for you, you must know: God designed these common-grace realities to be *good* things that help us rejoice *in Him*, not *ultimate* things to find all our joy in. When we think our best life will occur when we just have more of these things, then we put our hope in things that were never designed to fill our hearts. Instead, God calls us to put our hope in Him, because only in Him do we find “life and life abundant” (John 10:10).

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Redemption

What does it mean to redeem something? Maybe you've received an offer in your inbox to "redeem a coupon" offer for a department store. Perhaps you've thought about how you could "redeem" yourself in light of bad decisions you've made. None of these are wrong uses of the word, but what does the word mean biblically? In this final gospel-truth, we're going to look at what it meant for God to redeem us. This truth answers questions like: Who wants me? & Where do I belong?

As you read the following passages, write down how they answer these questions.

Main Reading

- Psalm 130:1–8
- Galatians 3:10–14
- 1 Peter 1:13–21

Optional Extra Reading

- Luke 15:1–10
- Titus 2:11–14
- Hebrews 9:11–15

The Good News

In the Bible, redemption occurred in two settings: the marketplace and in a contract exchange. In both settings, the idea was basically the same: something or someone was being *purchased*. When Jesus died for us, He "purchased [us] with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). That's how much Jesus wanted us—He paid for us with His very own blood. Let that sink in.

In the Old Testament, someone was purchased because they were a slave and were coming under the ownership of a new master. The gospel-truth of redemption tells us that we are now slaves to Christ and in becoming slaves to Christ we experience true freedom. Only in following Jesus do we experience who we were called, designed, and gifted to be.

Practical Application

This great truth gets practical for us when we consider where we find our sense of belonging in life. Do we identify ourselves with a political party, a group at work, or something else? As followers of Jesus, we have been placed into a community of redeemed sinners—the church.

It is this group of people Jesus calls us to find our primary sense of belonging with, because it is this group of people He redeemed. Now that you know who your Master is, have you decided to join up with other redeemed sinners to love, follow, and serve Him with? Dear friend, *this* is where you belong.

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You Never Graduate

Now that you've read about what the gospel is and what it means for your life, there are some important instructions we want to give you for how to grow in the gospel and apply it to your everyday life.

First, realize that what you've just read is merely scratching the surface of God's glory. There are many other angles we could have looked at besides the five we chose. For example, we could have talked about Holiness and how God makes us holy in His sight through Jesus (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 10:10). We could have talked about Chosen and how God chose us to be His children before we were ever born (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4–5). We

But even if we stuck to just the five truths of the gospel we've looked at here, we could spend the rest of our lives searching the depths of grace, love, and mercy God has poured into our hearts through Christ. The apostle Peter said it this way:

These things have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—angels long to catch a glimpse of these things. — 1 Peter 1:12 CSB

Did you catch that? Even the angels don't have a complete grasp of God's glory revealed in the gospel. The point is this: the gospel is an endless sea of God's greatness that we have been invited to swim in for the rest of our lives.

Dear friend: *swim in the gospel...for the rest of your life.* Never graduate for looking to Jesus, loving Jesus, and returning your heart to Jesus and His grace for you.

The gospel is not simply the diving board that gets you into the faith; it is the sea you swim in for the rest of your life. Genuine Christian maturity is not a matter of moving on from the gospel, but a matter of growing deeper *into* the gospel. We do this by becoming more and more in awe of Jesus in a way that spills over into everyday living full of grace and truth.¹

One very practical way you can do this: take your thoughts captive to the gospel.

Taking Your Thoughts Captive

You know what it feels like to have your mind filled with thoughts of accusation: "You're worthless!" "You should be ashamed of yourself!" "No one could ever love you!" Very often, these very statements fill our minds because Satan wants to take our eyes off of Jesus and fix our eyes on our failures.

This is where the gospel comes in. The gospel is the counter-argument to every time Satan accuses you of shame and guilt. The apostle Paul put it this way:

For although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. — 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 CSB

¹ The language in this paragraph is greatly inspired by J.D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids: B&H Books, 2013), 21.

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When the lies of Satan come toward us, we take them captive—we put them in a cage surrounded by the steel bars of gospel truth. Here’s what it looks like:

Satan’s Lie: “You are worthless!”

Your Response: “Wrong. I’m more loved that I could ever imagine. Jesus proved that when we died on the cross for me.”

Satan’s Lie: “You should be ashamed of yourself!”

Your Response: “Wrong. Jesus already took my guilt and shame on the cross. I am free from all condemnation.”

Satan’s Lie: “No one could ever want you!”

Your Response: “Wrong. God wants me and He proved it by crushing His Son in my place.”

Do you see how this works? However, it doesn’t just work when Satan tries to bring you down, but it also works when Satan tries to puff you up with pride and self-righteousness—two of the deadliest and most deceptive sins for the Christian.

It’s easy to move on from the gospel and become very proud of your Christianity, forgetting that all of it is a gift of His grace. Here’s how taking your thoughts captive to the gospel looks from this perspective:

Satan’s lie: “Wow. You’re a mature Christian—more than most people.”

Your Response: No, I’m just a Christian like every other brother and sister. I have nothing to boast about except for Jesus and His grace toward me.”

Satan’s lie: “You should be really proud of how good of a Christian you are.”

Your Response: “No, I am who I am because of *God’s grace*. Nothing more.”

Satan’s lie: “Look at you! You really have all the right answers, don’t you?”

Your Response: “Not even close. All I have is what Christ has given me. I am completely dependent on Him to open my eyes and heart to the truth.”

No matter the struggles we face, the gospel tells us, “We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”²

² Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 44.

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Conclusion

As you continue your journey with Jesus, never move on from the gospel. It is the source of all true joy and fulfillment in the Christian life. As you can see, it both elevates the lowly and humbles the proud—it truly is “the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16).

And this power is something we never graduate from needing. No matter how long you walk with Jesus, you will still need to hear and remember the wonderful truths of God’s grace.

So dear friend, decide today that you are going to make your life’s mission revolve around the gospel—learning it, loving it, and sharing it with others. As you do this, you will experience God’s power fill you and flow through you as He uses you to advance His Kingdom. This is what you were created for. This is what life is all about. This is where true joy is really found.

This is the best news in the world.

Some Resources for Further Study

- *Gospel Fluency* by Jeff Vanderstelt
- *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller
- *Gospel* by J.D. Greear
- *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert
- *The Explicit Gospel* by Matt Chandler
- *The Unbelievable Gospel* by Jonathan Dodson
- *Tell the Truth* by Will Metzger