

GOSPEL TEACHING SUMMARY ONE: THE GOD-CENTRED GOSPEL

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Mark 1:1 *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."*

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Aims

By the end of this study the reader should be able to: -

- 1) Answer the question “*what is the Gospel?*”
- 2) Discern the source of the Gospel.
- 3) Comprehend the assumptions, which underpin Gospel.
- 4) Note the characteristics of the Gospel.
- 5) Realise that the Gospel presents a definite challenge to their lives.
- 6) See that the Gospel gives hope of a personal change in their lives.
- 7) Seek a personal relationship with God, should he/she desire it.

Definitions

1) GOSPEL: the good news (or glad tidings) that Jesus Christ came to die on the cross in order to save sinners from the ruinous consequences of their evildoing and to give them a life-transforming relationship with God their Father. As such, the Gospel shows how God was IN Christ reconciling people to Himself through providing a perfect ‘*covering*’ (or atonement) for sin, (2 Corinthians 5.19). Moreover, the Gospel shows how it is possible for people through faith to come into a life-saving, life-enhancing, personal relationship with God, (Appendix One).

2) SIN: the inborn, radical personality disorder, which leads to a selfish, rebellious lawlessness and a proud defiance of God’s will as revealed in Scripture. An inherited condition blighting every single human being and every single type of human activity, sin causes people to ‘*fall short*’ of God’s holy standards – thereby provoking His justifiable wrath. The long-term effect of sin is death and eternal separation from God. Sin expresses itself through an almost endless variety of evil thoughts, words and deeds. It pollutes whole civilizations as well as individual human beings.

3) THE ABSOLUTE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL: the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the ONLY SINGLE true way in which people can enter into a relationship with God. This implies that the Gospel is an absolute truth applying to all people, no matter what their cultural, social or historical background. Therefore it is not something, which can be amended, compromised or ignored without subsequently destroying the whole nature of Christianity. Any ‘*alternative*’ version of this Gospel is false.

4) THE EXCLUSIVE-INCLUSIVE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL: the fact that, while the Gospel excludes all other religious alternatives, its benefits can therefore apply to all peoples, of all societies in all historical epochs.⁽¹⁾ Consequently, it is NOT legitimate to withhold sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the grounds that people belong to a particular race, religion or social group.

5) THE TOTAL NATURE OF THE GOSPEL, its role in provoking total allegiance to Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and God. Whilst affecting every single area of a person’s life, such a commitment contains many practical implications needing to be worked out in the daily activities of the Christian believer.

⁽¹⁾ Even in the time before his first coming, Christ was at work through His Holy Spirit, restraining evil and witnessing through individual conscience, (Romans 2.12-16). However, such facts shouldn’t be misinterpreted to mean that in the end everyone would be saved.

Section One: Source

The source of the Gospel is the pre-ordained plan of God to reduce a portion of humanity from the consequences of their sin, (Ephesians 1.3-5). It should be stressed that the precise nature of this plan is disclosed only in the Bible – which represents God authoritative word to mankind. People could NEVER have discovered it themselves for the Gospel is a 'mystery,' only revealed by God, (1 Corinthians 1.18).

Section Two: General Assumptions

The Gospel of Jesus Christ assumes that: -

2.1 Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man, harmoniously united in one person, (Philippians 2.6-11).

2.2 Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, (Matthew 1.18-25).

2.3 Jesus Christ represents the ONLY SINGLE WAY any person can enter into a relationship with God, (John 14.6).

2.4 Jesus Christ came to offer people a personal relationship with God through His sacrificial death at Calvary, (Colossians 1.20).

2.5 All people everywhere are helpless sinners (Psalms 14.3); they cannot please God by their own efforts or turn to Him of their own volition, (Jeremiah 7.24-26).

2.6 People can only respond to the Gospel if the Holy Spirit is already working in their hearts to counteract the effects of sin, (John 6.63).

2.7 Once the Holy Spirit is working, people have a responsibility to accept the Gospel by employing the faith God has given to them, (Matthew 12.31-33).

2.8 Should people sense a lack of faith or humility to respond to the Gospel, all they have to do is ask God to bestow those characteristics, (Mark 9.24).

2.9 The Gospel itself presents a choice either to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ or not to believe, (Acts 28.24). Any refusal to believe has ruinous consequences both in this world and the next, (Revelations 20.15).

2.10 A genuine response to the Gospel allows people to enjoy the kind of vertical relationship with God illustrated in Appendix One. From this relationship stem many benefits, all which serve to transform the believer's life, (2 Corinthians 5.17-18).

These general assumptions help to confirm that the Gospel is largely God centred in its approach. The focus is upon His will and nature, not mans.

Section Three: Specific Assumptions

Specific assumptions of the God centred Gospel are: -

3.1 It can be shared through either formal preaching of informal witnessing ⁽²⁾ (I Peter 3.15).

3.2 The Love of God and a love for people form the only two valid, general motives behind any attempt to share this Gospel, (Mark 12.30-33).

⁽²⁾ For its part, preaching is a specialised ministry, usually performed within the setting of a local Christian group. It's a task to which only a relatively few believers are called. In contrast, most "ordinary" Christians on a one-to-one, personal basis can do witnessing. It's a task to which all reasonably able-bodied and able-minded believers are called (and even some less able-bodied and able-minded as well).

3.3 The glory of God, the honour of Jesus and the welfare of people should form the three specific motives behind any attempt to share the Gospel, (Philippians. 1.16-18).

3.4 The sharer's⁽³⁾ chief task is to display Jesus in the powerful love of the Holy Spirit, (1Corinthians. 1.23).

3.5 People's total inability to turn to God of their volition is accepted as a fact. A prior work of the Holy Spirit needs to occur before there can be any positive response, (Zechariah 4.6).

3.6 The Father and Son ACTIVELY draw sinners by the power of the Holy Spirit, (John 6.44).

3.7 Any large or small spiritual revival is a result of God sovereign kindness. It cannot be worked up by human effort or through the use of Psychological techniques, (Joel 2 .28).

3.8 People will be saved in God way and at God time, while seasons of blessing are balanced by seasons of dryness and even by seasons where God withdraws his Holy Spirit in response to prolonged disobedience from his people, (Deuteronomy 32.14-22; Ecclesiastes 3.2-9).

3.9 Faith and repentance are freely bestowed divine gifts; there is no room for human credit in any response to the Gospel, (Ephesians 2.8).

3.10 The Holy Spirit needs to be at work in softening the human heart, renewing the mind and re-directing the will before salvation⁽⁴⁾ can take place, (John 12.39-40).

3.11 Repentance is that dramatic turn around in one's life, which produces a drastic change of mind and shift of priorities. From being self-centred, one becomes Jesus-centred, (Acts 9.1-9).

3.12 Faith is directed toward the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is a faith with both a solid doctrinal and historical basis, (Hebrews 12.2).

3.13 A clear presentation of Bible-based doctrine is an important part of preaching, (Acts 17.2-4).

3.14 The Gospel is ONLY revealed in the Bible, which is God word to the human race. Attempts to work out the Gospel apart from this revelation are doomed to failure and are likely to lead to deception, (2 Timothy 3.16).

3.15 The Bible shows that Christ's work is complete – nothing whatsoever can be added to it, (Colossians 3.1-14).

3.16 The Bible shows that Christ died for all nations and for all types of people, (Acts 22.21).

3.17 The Bible shows that without Jesus in their lives, people are lost sinners, (Ephesians 2.5).

3.18 The Bible shows that coming to a '*saving faith*' in Jesus depends entirely upon the work of the Holy Spirit, (John 6.65).

3.19 Total Lordship – Christ is to be Lord of every single area of a person's life. No division should exist between the '*religious*' and '*non-religious*' areas, (John 20.28).

3.20 Individual witnessing – should be backed up by a sound knowledge of Biblical teaching, practical good deeds and life-styles, which bring honour to Jesus, (James 2.14).

3.21 That both preaching and witnessing should be integrated together within the life of a local church, (1 Corinthians 12.27-31).

⁽³⁾ Meaning both preachers and witnesses.

⁽⁴⁾ This means a person's rescue from sin and its ruinous consequences. Such deliverance is done with a view to making a person whole and complete in Jesus.

3.22 The local Christian group⁽⁵⁾ is by far the most important organisational ingredient in evangelism. Therefore the role of Para-church organisations and their large-scale evangelistic endeavours are only to supplement, not supplant the effort of such groups, (Titus 1.5).

3.23 Miraculous “*signs and wonders*” may accompany Gospel preaching at times of God choosing. However, they are less important than the contents of the message being offered, (Acts 19.11-20).

3.24 Widespread sharing of the Gospel is one important way⁽⁶⁾ to check the evils in society. Present are social as well as spiritual implications, (Matthew 5.13-16).

3.25 Any attempt to share the Gospel will incite either violent and/or subtle opposition from the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6.10-18). These can work through “*fallen*” human nature as well as impersonal socio-economic forces, (Acts 19.23-41).

Section Four: Main Characteristics

Characteristics of the “*absolute*” God centred Gospel are: -

4.1 A central reference point is God and His attributes, *i.e.* His sovereignty, mercy, judgement, holiness, love and wrath, (Genesis 1.1).

4.2 Its basis in the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that the One true God who revealed himself to the people of Israel through Moses and the Prophets consists of a tri-unity of three equally divine persons who are responsible both for the original work of creation and for the work of saving people through the Gospel, (Appendix Two). These persons are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28.19).

4.3 Its reliance upon both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to produce the desired effect of faith in Jesus, (Hebrews 4.12).

4.4 Its capacity to challenge people and make them feel uncomfortable with sin, (Acts 2.37).

4.5 The simplicity of its basic message (Mark 1.15) – even when it may be obscured by a lot of complex theological jargon, (Matthew 4.17).

4.6 Realism – both **God** and people are seen as they really are, (Jeremiah 17.9-10).

4.7 The unchanging stability of its basic message, which never alters over time – no matter what the cultural pressures, may be exerted upon it, (2 Thessalonians 2.15).

4.8 Its ability to meet the deepest spiritual needs of people, (Psalms 3.2).

⁽⁵⁾ These may include either loosely structured small fellowships or formally organised large city centre churches. However, the principle remains that often the best-qualified people to evangelise an area are those who live in, or are adjacent to it.

⁽⁶⁾ The other ways are the general witness of the church through its good works and social activism.

Section Five: Particular Characteristics

Particular characteristics of the “*exclusive-inclusive*” God centred Gospel are its stress upon: -

5.1 God free election⁽⁷⁾ as the main cause of salvation (Eph 1.4-5), this means that he will save those He wishes to save, (John 10.29).

5.2 Man’s natural innate inability and unwillingness to obey God, or to choose Jesus, (Romans 8.7-8).

5.3 Divine Love as well as divine Wrath, (1 Thessalonians 1.10).

5.4 Moral law and divine forgiveness, (Colossians 1.14).

5.5 Christ’s death as a ‘*substitutionary*’ atonement⁽⁸⁾ for those who believe upon Him, (Romans 5.11).

5.6 Christ as Saviour, Lord and God, (2 Peter 3.18)

5.7 The fact that God actually did something in human history, (1 Corinthians 15.1-20).

5.8 Both the cost and blessing of following Jesus, (Luke 14.25-33).

5.9 Both the joys of Heaven and the terrors of Hell, (Luke 16.19-31).

5.10 The ordered presentation of truth – put forward in the power of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6.1-3).

An attractive feature of the Gospel is its ability to balance a number of truths, (Ephesians 2.10). By doing this it avoids missing out important parts of Biblical teaching, *i.e.* the existence of Hell, (Matthew 6.30).

⁽⁷⁾ The selection of a portion of humanity for eternal life, it is pre supposed that such a selection has been in place for eternity.

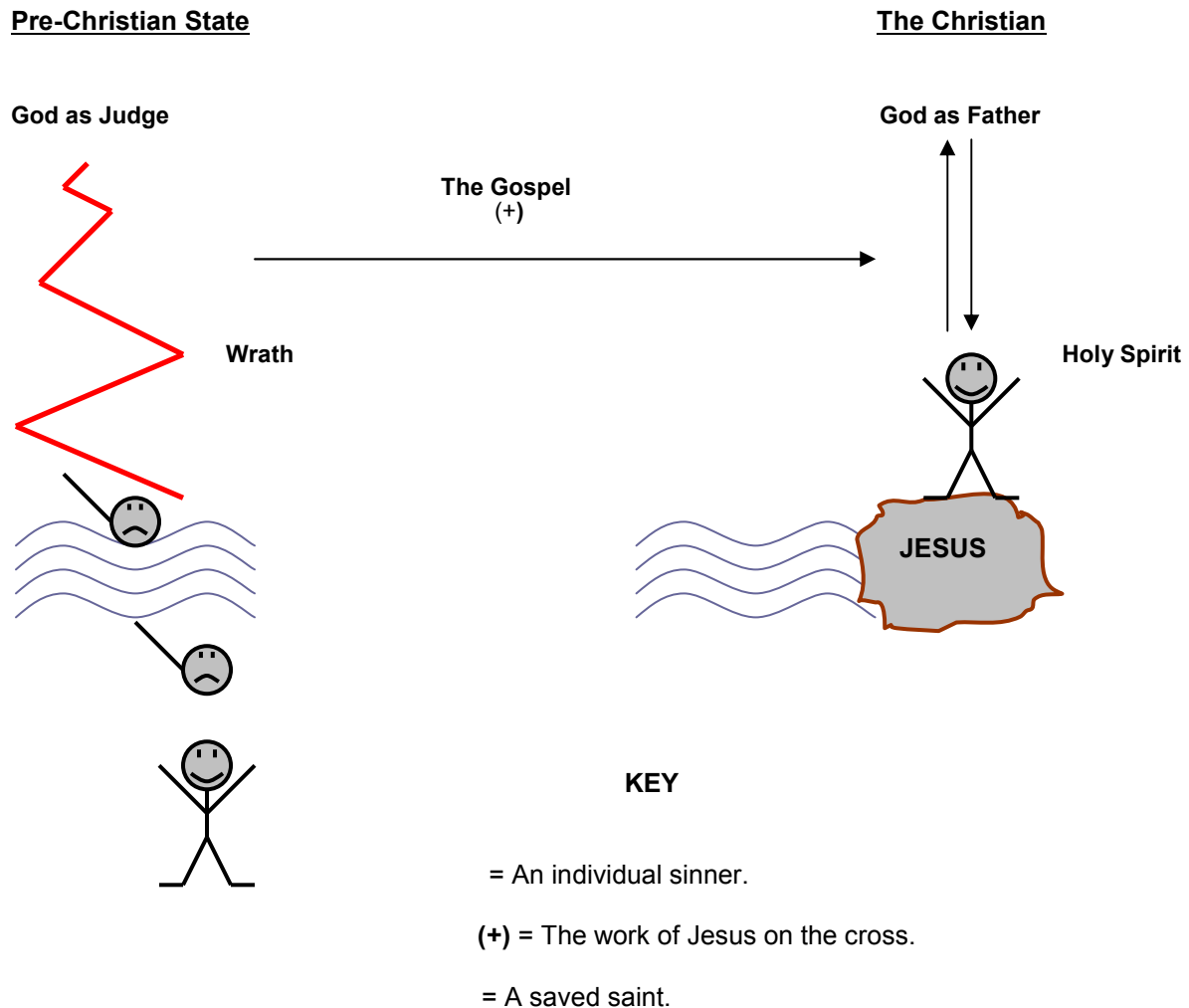
⁽⁸⁾ The word means ‘*covering over*’ of sin so that it no longer calls for judgement.

Section Six: Concluding Comments

The Gospel is NOT just a series of doctrines to be speculated about; rather it is a living reality, which demands our most urgent response, (John 10.10). Yet, to respond to that reality, it is first of all necessary to ask (as well as answer) the question “*What is the Gospel?*” Once that has been done, it’s helpful to stress that the Gospel shows how – through the work of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 9.26) – God takes people out of the mire of sin and brings them into a love relationship with Himself, (Psalms 69.14).

Therefore, THE CHIEF FUNCTION OF THE GOSPEL IS TO SHOW PEOPLE HOW THEY CAN PERSONALLY KNOW AND LOVE THEIR CREATOR. In the final analysis, there is really nothing more to it than that, (1 John 5.12).

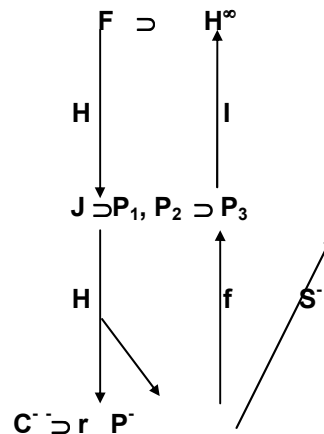
APPENDIX ONE
THE RELATIONAL NATURE OF THE GOSPEL



COMMENTS

In their pre-Christian state an individual is drowning in a mire of sin (Psalms 69.14) and as if that wasn't enough, he is positioned firmly under the wrath of God (Ephesians 2.3). The message of the Gospel then allows the individual to come into a relationship with God through the work of Jesus on the cross. Once in their Christian state, he is then able to relate to God as Father by the power of the Holy Spirit, (Romans 8.15). This is because he is standing (by faith) on the rock of Jesus (Matthew 7.24-25), having been rescued from the mire of sin.

APPENDIX TWO
THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF GOD AND HIS RELATION TO SALVATION



Key

- ⊃ = Contains, includes
- F = God the Father
- H[∞] = Unlimited Holiness
- H = The Holy Spirit
- J = Jesus, the Son, the great High Priest
- P₁ = Perfect deity
- P₂ = Perfect Humanity
- P₃ = Perfect sacrifice from sin
- C⁻ = A good but fallen creation
- r = The Holy Spirits regeneration of imperfect sinful people
- P⁻ = Imperfect sinful people
- f = Justifying faith
- S⁻ = Removal of sin from God the Father's sight
- C = Jesus' priestly intercessions and the satisfaction of divine holiness so that God the Father no longer views His redeemed, regenerated people as sinners fit only for eternal condemnation

COMMENTS

The above diagram displays a Trinitarian view of God in which: -

- 1) Through Jesus, God the Father sends His Holy Spirit to the whole of creation, which was originally good, but now exists in a fallen sinful state, (Genesis 1.25; Romans 8.22).
- 2) As Perfect God and Perfect man Jesus can act as the perfect and only mediator between His Father and sinful humanity, (1Timothy 2:5).
- 3) As Perfect God and Perfect Man Jesus could offer the Perfect Sacrifice to quench His Father's Holy wrath against sin. He does this by satisfying His unlimited holiness, (Romans 3.25; 1 John 22.45).
- 4) Through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, sinful humans can respond to the Gospel and receive the blessing of justifying faith, which leads to a removal of sin from God's sight, (Psalm 103.12, Titus 3.5).
- 5) Once saved through faith people can then relate to God the Father through the priestly mediation of Jesus. Fully satisfied by His Son's perfect sacrifice the Father's holiness no longer brings condemnation, (Romans 8:1).

Taken in its entirety, this diagram also implies that to abandon the Biblical view of the Trinity is tantamount to abandoning the Biblical view of salvation. Indeed, if God wasn't a Trinity of three mutually interacting persons how could lost sinful people ever receive salvation? Also, if there were no Trinity the gulf between God and man would remain unbridgeable. Whilst the former would be isolated in Holiness the latter would be isolated in his sin. No proper relationship could exist between the two parties.

Therefore to deny the Trinity is to deny the only Gospel, which can bring about salvation. As a doctrine, the Trinity cannot be dismissed as an optional extra to the Christian faith; rather it represents an integral part of that faith.