

GOSPEL DEFINITIONS

Compiled by Trevin Wax
www.trevinwax.com
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Definitions from Christians in the Past

Gilbert Beebe

Like so many Bible terms, the word GOSPEL has been given various definitions contrary to its original and proper meaning.

The word has its origin “in Christ before the foundation of the world.” This was contained in the “promise” God made before the foundation of the world. (Tit. 1:2) The “gospel,” the “good news” or “good tidings” is the declared fulfilment of that promise.

In Isaiah 61:1-3 is found the outstanding proclamation made by the Sum and Substance of the good tidings, — Jesus Christ Himself:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the meek, He has sent Me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn. To appoint to them that mourn in Zion, to give to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.”

The Redeemer repeated this same proclamation of Himself in the synagogue.

While this prophetic statement is often quoted, its full significance is rarely understood. In this one sweeping declaration, there is encouched – not the beginning of the gospel, not a part of its fulfilment, – the grand total of what the Son of Man declared on the cross: “IT IS FINISHED”!

The Greek word “evangelion” is translated “gospel” in the King James Version. This word, together with its rendering of “good tidings,” “glad tidings” and “preach the gospel” occurs some one hundred and eight times in the New Testament, none of which intimate anything less than “finished redemption” in Christ.

F.F. Bruce

“Only one saving message is attested by the NT. The “gospel to the circumcision” preached by Peter and his colleagues did not differ in content from the “gospel to the uncircumcised” entrusted to Paul (Gal. 2:7), though the form of presentation might vary according to the audience. Paul’s testimony is, “Whether therefore it was I or they [Peter and his colleagues], so we preach, and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:11).

The basic elements in the message were these:

1. the prophecies have been fulfilled and the new age inaugurated by the coming of Christ;
2. he was born into the family of David;
3. he died according to the Scriptures, to deliver his people from this evil age;
4. he was buried, and raised again the third day, according to the Scriptures;
5. he is exalted at God's right hand as Son of God, Lord of living and dead;
6. he will come again, to judge the world and consummate his saving work."

Jeremiah Burroughs

The gospel of Christ in general is this:

It is the good tidings that God has revealed concerning Christ.

More largely it is this:

As all mankind was lost in Adam and became the children of wrath, put under the sentence of death, God, though He left His fallen angels and has reserved them in the chains of eternal darkness, yet He has thought upon the children of men and has provided a way of atonement to reconcile them to Himself again...Namely, the second person of the Trinity takes man's nature upon Himself, and becomes the Head of a second covenant, standing charged with sin. He answers for it by suffering what the law and divine justice required, and by making satisfaction by keeping the law perfectly, which satisfaction and righteousness He tenders up to the Father as a sweet savor of rest for the souls that are given to Him...And now this mediation of Christ is, by the appointment of the Father, preached to the children of men, of whatever nation or rank, freely offering this atonement unto sinners for atonement, requiring them to believe in Him and, upon believing, promising not only a discharge of all their former sins, but that they shall not enter into condemnation, that none of their sins or unworthiness shall ever hinder the peace of God with them, but that they shall through Him be received into the number of those who shall have the image of God again to be renewed unto them, and they they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

C.H. Dodd

"The Gospel" Summarized in 6 Parts

1. The Age of Fulfillment has dawned, the "latter days" foretold by the prophets. (*Acts 3:18-26*)
2. This has taken place through the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (*Acts 2:22-31*)
3. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as Messianic head of the new Israel. (*Acts 2:32-36*)
4. The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory. (*Acts 10:44-48*)
5. The Messianic Age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ. (*Acts 3:20-21*)
6. An appeal is made for repentance with the offer of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and salvation. (*Acts 2:37-41*)

Robert A. Guelich

"The answer to our dilemma of how the gospel of the Kingdom and the gospel of the cross relate is that the gospel of the cross is integral to the gospel of the Kingdom if we understand both to mean expression of the same "gospel," namely, Isaiah's promised "gospel" of God.

The “gospel” then is the message that God acted in and through Jesus Messiah, God’s anointed one, to effect God’s promise of shalom, salvation, God’s reign.’

- ‘What is the Gospel?’

Inaugural Address, Fuller Theological Seminary (9 May 1989)

J. Hampton Keathley

8 Aspects to “The Gospel”

1. **The gospel of Jesus Christ** (Mark 1:1; 1 Cor. 9:12) **or the gospel of God’s Son** (Rom. 1:9). These two descriptions speak of the good news of salvation that comes through the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the very Son of God in human flesh. Again, this is a good news of deliverance from sin’s penalty, power and presence through the two advents of Christ.
2. **The gospel of the grace of God** (Acts 20:24) emphasizes that salvation in all of its aspects is on the basis of grace rather than on some meritorious system of works.
3. **The gospel of the kingdom** (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14) is the good news that God will establish His kingdom on earth through the two advents of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. **The gospel of peace** (Eph. 6:15) describes how this good news of salvation in Christ brings peace in all its many aspects (peace with God, the peace of God, peace with others, and world peace) through the victory accomplished by the Savior.
5. **The eternal or everlasting gospel** (Rev. 14:6) expands our perspective of gospel as we normally think of it. This gospel as proclaimed by the angel has several key elements of gloriously good news that are developed in three commands and two reasons:
 - Command #1:** “Fear God.” This refers to a holy reverence that recognizes the sovereign authority and power of God to deal with man in His holy wrath and thus, to bring an end to the world of sin as we now know it. To fear God is to recognize Him as the true God who can destroy the soul and not just the body as God will do with the beast of Revelation and His anti-God system.
 - Command #2:** “Give Him glory.” This refers to the praise and honor that should accrue to God from mankind due to our recognition and high estimation of God as the sovereign Creator of the universe.
 - Command #3:** “And worship Him who made ...” The word “worship” means to show reverence or respect. This word emphasizes the external display as seen in our obedience, prayer, singing, and formal worship. The word “fear” emphasizes the reverential mental attitude behind the worship. In the Tribulation people will be forced to fear and formally acknowledge the beast and his image. In this message the angel is demanding that mankind reject the beast and formally turn to God to worship Him (cf. Rev. 14:11).
 - Reason #1:** “The hour of his judgment has come” is a reference to the final judgments of the Tribulation—the bowl judgments—which are about to occur that will put an end to the system of the beast and bring the rule the Lord Jesus, the King of kings. These will conclude with the return of Christ Himself (Rev. 19) and lead to the removal of all unbelievers from the earth. The emphasis is to not delay because the time is short.
 - Reason #2:** This is seen in the reference to God as the Creator in verse 7b. Here we are called to pay attention to the ageless and universal message of the creation itself. Age after age creation has called mankind to recognize God’s existence and to seek after Him (cf. Acts 17:26-27 with Psalm 19:1-6). This means people are without excuse and that, when the angel proclaims this gospel, the hour of the Creator’s judgment is about to fall (see Rom. 1:18f). Though this is the essential and primary element of the angel’s everlasting gospel, perhaps he will say more than this for from age

to age a person's capacity to reverence, glorify and worship God has come only through believing and knowing Christ (cf. John 14:6 with Acts 4:12; John 4:23-24).

George Eldon Ladd

"I can only bear witness at this point to what *Heilsgeschichte* means to me. My sense of God's love and acceptance is grounded not only in the resurrected Christ but also in the Jesus of history. He taught something about God that was utterly novel to his Jewish auditors: that God is not only gracious and forgiving to the repentant sinner but is also a seeking God who, in Jesus' person and mission, has come to seek and to save the lost...

God has shown me that he loves me in that while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me (Rom. 5:8). This is not faith in history; it is not faith in the kerygma; it is not faith in the Bible. It is faith in God who has revealed himself to me in the historical event of the person, works and words of Jesus of Nazareth who continues to speak to me through the prophetic word of the Bible."

- "The Search for Perspective," *Interpretation* 25 (Jan. 1971), 56 and 57.

"This is the good news about the kingdom of God. How men need this gospel! Everywhere one goes he finds the gaping graves swallowing up the dying. Tears of loss, of separation, of final departure stain every face. Every table sooner or later has an empty chair, every fireside its vacant place. Death is the great leveller. Wealth or poverty, fame or oblivion, power or futility, success or failure, race, creed or culture — all our human distinctions mean nothing before the ultimate irresistible sweep of the scythe of death which cuts us all down. And whether the mausoleum is a fabulous Taj Mahal, a massive pyramid, an unmarked spot of ragged grass or the unplotted depths of the sea one fact stands: death reigns.

"Apart from the gospel of the kingdom, death is the mighty conqueror before whom we are all helpless. We can only beat our fists in utter futility against this unyielding and unresponding tomb. But the good news is this: death has been defeated; our conqueror has been conquered. In the face of the power of the kingdom of God in Christ, death was helpless. It could not hold him, death has been defeated; life and immortality have been brought to life. An empty tomb in Jerusalem is proof of it. This is the gospel of the kingdom."

- from *The Gospel of the Kingdom*

Martin Luther

At its briefest, the gospel is a discourse about Christ, that he is the Son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, and that he has been established as Lord over all things.

This much St. Paul takes in hand and spins out in his epistles. He bypasses all the miracles and incidents (in Christ's ministry) which are set forth in the four Gospels, yet he includes the whole gospel adequately and abundantly. This may be seen clearly and well in his greeting to the Romans, where he says what the gospel is, and then declares:

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord," etc.

There you have it. **The gospel is a story about Christ, God's and David's son, who died and was raised, and is established as Lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell.**

- *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, pg. 94

M.F. Sadler

“The word ‘gospel’ in the New Testament is applied exclusively to the announcement of certain events occurring at a particular time in the history of the world. These are, the Incarnation, Birth, Baptism, Temptation, Ministry, Miracles, Betrayal, Condemnation, Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. This is the meaning of the word ‘gospel’ in the opening sentence of St. Mark’s Gospel. This is its meaning in the opening sentence of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans... When St. Paul in another place, sets forth in so many words the gospel which he preached, and by which his converts were saved, he declares it to be the record of three facts...

“If this be the aspect under which the Gospel is set before us in the New Testament, then a Church which would set forth the Gospel as it is contained in Scripture must adhere to this Scripture form of it. It is not given to any Church to assume to be more spiritual than God’s Holy Spirit—so as, in place of the sequence of events recorded in Scripture as ” the Gospel,” virtually to substitute a sequence of certain doctrines beginning (say) with the secret decree of God respecting the election of the individual soul, proceeding to set forth the effectual calling, conversion, and justification of that soul so elected, and culminating in the present assurance of its salvation.

“Presenting the Gospel under such a form as this would not be scriptural, for the Scriptures do not set forth this as the Gospel. I am not now denying that all this (or something like it) respecting individual election, calling, justification, and sanctification, is to be found in Scripture, or to be inferred from some Scripture statements. I am pronouncing no opinion upon it, except that it is not presented in Scripture as ‘the Gospel.’

“The Gospel does *not* appear in Scripture under the aspect of certain dealings of God with the individual soul apart from its fellow souls. It *does* appear as certain events or outward facts having to do with the Second Person in the ever-Blessed Trinity, which facts are—the Incarnation, Birth, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Son of God.”

M.F. Sadler, *Church Doctrine, Bible Truth* 1867

Richard Sibbes

“What is the gospel itself but a merciful moderation, in which Christ’s obedience is esteemed ours, and our sins laid upon him, wherein God, from being a judge, becomes our Father, pardoning our sins and accepting our obedience, though feeble and blemished? We are now brought to heaven under the covenant of grace by a way of love and mercy.”

- Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*

William Tyndale

“Evangelion (that we call the gospel) is a Greek word and signifieth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a man’s heart glad and maketh him sing, dance, and leap for joy... [This gospel is] all of Christ the right David, how that he hath fought with sin, with death, and the devil, and overcome them: whereby all men that were in bondage to sin, wounded with death, overcome of the devil are without their own

merits or deservings loosed, justified, restored to life and saved, brought to liberty and reconciled unto the favor of God and set at one with him again: which tidings as many as believe laud, praise and thank God, are glad, sing and dance for joy.”

- William Tyndale, *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, 1531

Zacharias Ursinus

The gospel is... the doctrine which the Son of God, our Mediator, revealed from heaven in Paradise, immediately after the fall, and which he brought from the bosom of the Eternal Father; which promises, and announces, in view of the free grace and mercy of God, to all those that repent and believe, deliverance from sin, death, condemnation, and the wrath of God; which is the same thing as to say that it promises and proclaims the remission of sin, salvation, and eternal life, by and for the sake of the Son of God, the Mediator; and is that through which the Holy Spirit works effectually in the hearts of the faithful, kindling and exciting in them, faith, repentance, and the beginning of eternal life.

Or, we may, in accordance with the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth questions of the Catechism, define the gospel to be the doctrine which God revealed first in Paradise, and afterwards published by the Patriarchs and Prophets, which he was pleased to represent by the shadows of sacrifices, and the other ceremonies of the law, and which he has accomplished by his only begotten Son; teaching that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; which is to say that he is a perfect Mediator, satisfying for the sins of the human race, restoring righteousness and eternal life to all those who by a true faith are ingrafted into him, and embrace his benefits.

- Zacharius Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 1534-83

Definitions from Christians in the Present

Danny Akin

“I define the gospel in my [Axioms message](#) as being the good news that Jesus Christ came from heaven, died on the cross having lived a perfect sinless life, bore then in His body the full penalty of our sins, was raised from the dead. Those who repent of sin and place their faith in the perfect work of Christ can and will be saved. There’s the gospel.”

- Dr. Danny Akin, President of Southeastern Seminary, from [2009 interview](#) at Kingdom People

Craig Bartholomew

“*Gospel* (from the Old English *godspel*, ‘good tale’) means ‘good news,’ and this is the best news there can be: **in Jesus, the kingdom of God has come!**”

- *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*

Alistair Begg

Here’s the gospel in a phrase. Because Christ died for us, those who trust in him may know that their guilt has been pardoned once and for all. What will we have to say before the bar of God’s judgment? Only one thing. Christ died in my place. That’s the gospel.

- from *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross: Experiencing the Passion and Power of Easter*

Jim Belcher

“The ‘gospel’ is the good news that through Jesus, the Messiah, the power of God’s kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. Through the Savior God has established his reign. When we believe and rely on Jesus’ work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship to God, that kingdom power comes upon us and begins to work through us. We witness this radical new way of living by our renewed lives, beautiful community, social justice, and cultural transformation. The good news brings new life. The gospel motivates, guides, and empowers every aspect of our living and worship.”

- Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional*

Pope Benedict XVI

“The term has recently been translated as ‘good news.’ That sounds attractive, but it falls far short of the order of magnitude of what is actually meant by the word *evangelion*. This term figures in the vocabulary of the Roman emperors, who understood themselves as lords, saviors, and redeemers of the world.... The idea was that what comes from the emperor is a saving message, that it is not just a piece of news, but a changing of the world for the better.

“When the Evangelists adopt this word, and it thereby becomes the generic name for their writings, what they mean to tell us is this: What the emperors, who pretend to be gods, illegitimately claim, really occurs here – a message endowed with plenary authority, a message that is not just talk but reality.... the Gospel is not just informative speech, but performative speech – not just the imparting of information, but action, efficacious power that enters into the world to save and transform. Mark speaks of the ‘Gospel of God,’ the point being that it is not the emperors who can save the world, but God. And it is here that God’s word, which is at once word and deed, appears; it is here that what the emperors merely assert, but cannot actually perform, truly takes place. For here it is the real Lord of the world – the Living God – who goes into action.

“The core of the Gospel is this: *The Kingdom of God is at hand.*”

- Pope Benedict XVI, from *Jesus of Nazareth*, pgs. 46-47.

Michael Bird

“Taken together we can infer from I Corinthians 15:3 – 5, Romans 1:1-4 and II Timothy 2:8, that the gospel is both about the person and work of Christ.

“God promised in the scriptures that He would renew creation and restore Israel. The gospel is the good news that God has made these promises good in Jesus, the Messiah and Lord. Jesus died and rose for the purpose of atoning for sins, and through faith in Him and His work believers are reconciled to God.

“The new age has been launched and God has revealed His saving righteousness in the gospel so that He justifies and delivers persons from the penalty and power of sin and death.”

- Michael Bird, *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message*

John Blanchard

“The gospel is a glorious declaration of the mighty acts of God when he invaded this earth in the person of his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lorraine Boettner

The Gospel is the good news about the great salvation purchased by Jesus Christ, by which He reconciled sinful men to a holy God.

C.C. Broyles

Gospel, or “good news,” designates Jesus’ message of the appearance of God’s kingdom, a message entailing liberty for those held captive to any form of affliction and demonstrated most dramatically in acts of healing. In some instances the term encompasses the whole story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus...

The reader of the Gospels must be wary of reading a post-Easter definition into the Evangelists’ use of the term *gospel* (such as is found in Pauline writings). In the Synoptics, it is found in the mouth of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry... They use the term to designate Jesus’ message without prior definition, implying that it was a term known to their audience.

- *IVP Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pg 282, 283

Robert F. Capon

“Christianity is NOT a religion; it is the proclamation of the end of religion. Religion is a human activity dedicated to the job of reconciling God to humanity and humanity to itself. The Gospel, however – the Good News of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the astonishing announcement that God has done the whole work of reconciliation without a scrap of human assistance. It is the bizarre proclamation that religion is over – period.”

D.A. Carson

The gospel is integrally tied to the Bible’s story-line. Indeed, it is incomprehensible without understanding that story-line.

God is the sovereign, transcendent and personal God who has made the universe, including us, his image-bearers.

Our misery lies in our rebellion, our alienation from God, which, despite his forbearance, attracts his implacable wrath.

But God, precisely because love is of the very essence of his character, takes the initiative and prepared for the coming of his own Son by raising up a people who, by covenantal stipulations, temple worship, systems of sacrifice and of priesthood, by kings and by prophets, are taught something of what God is planning and what he expects.

In the fullness of time his Son comes and takes on human nature. He comes not, in the first instance, to judge but to save: he dies the death of his people, rises from the grave and, in returning to his heavenly Father, bequeaths the Holy Spirit as the down payment and guarantee of the ultimate gift he has secured for them—an eternity of bliss in the presence of God himself, in a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The only alternative is to be shut out from the presence of this God forever, in the torments of hell. What men and women must do, before it is too late, is repent and trust Christ; the alternative is to disobey the gospel.

Summarizing 1 Corinthians 15

1. The gospel is Christological.
2. The gospel is theological.
3. The gospel is biblical.
4. The gospel is apostolic.
5. The gospel is historical.
6. The gospel is personal.
7. The gospel is universal.
8. The gospel is eschatological.

- D.A. Carson, from "What is the Gospel?" – Gospel Coalition Address

Knox Chamblin

"[Paul's] gospel is 'the word of the cross' (1 Cor. 1:17-18); nowhere is there a comparable reference to 'the word of the resurrection.' In I Corinthians 1:23-24 it is 'Christ crucified' who is identified as 'the power of God and the wisdom of God,' not as we might have expected (especially in the case of 'power'), Christ resurrected.... Both the cross and the resurrection are 'of first importance' in Paul's gospel (I Cor. 15:3-4). Unless Christ has risen from the dead, the preaching of the cross (and of the resurrection) is a waste of time (15:14); but once the resurrection has occurred, the cross remains central."

Andy Crouch

"The gospel is the proclamation of Jesus, in [two] senses. It is the proclamation *announced* by Jesus – the arrival of God's realm of possibility (his "kingdom") in the midst of human structures of possibility. But it is also the proclamation *about* Jesus – the good news that in dying and rising, Jesus has made the kingdom he proclaimed available to us."

- Andy Crouch, *Culture Making*, page 146

Mark Dever

"Here is what I understand the good news to be: the good news is that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust in him. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted. He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God. Now that is good news."

- from *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*

David Dockery

"The heart of genuine gospel proclamation must be a firm theological understanding of what God has done in the person and work of Jesus Christ... The basic themes that help us understand the biblical and theological aspects of the gospel message.

1. God as Creator and the place of men and women in God's creation
2. The fall of humanity into sin

3. God's provision in Jesus Christ
4. God's salvation of men and women from their estranged, guilty, and dreadful plight
5. God's ultimate work of redemption

“In conclusion, we confess and affirm that Jesus Christ, as the God-man, has fully revealed God to men and women. Having lived a sinless life, Christ, as our substitute, died a death for the sins of the world. Having been raised from the dead, he now sits exalted at God's right hand, a position of honor and exaltation, exercising his rule and dominion. We gladly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, our prophet, priest, and king who has fully revealed God, who has reconciled men and women to God, and who now sits enthroned as ruler of God's kingdom and head of his Church. In him we place our trust and hope, offering our thanksgiving, praise, and worship for the gift of salvation he has provided for us by grace through faith.”

- David Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, pg 70, 95.

Graeme Goldsworthy

“The gospel is the word about Jesus Christ and what he did for us in order to restore us to a right relationship with God.”

- Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*

“The gospel is the event (or the proclamation of that event) of Jesus Christ that begins with his incarnation and earthly life, and concludes with his death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. This historical event is interpreted by God as his preordained programme for the salvation of the world...

“It cannot be stressed too much that to confuse the gospel with certain important things that go hand in hand with it is to invite theological, hermeneutical and spiritual confusion. Such ingredients of preaching and teaching that we might want to link with the gospel would include the need for the gospel (sin and judgment), the means of receiving the benefits of the gospel (faith and repentance), the results or fruit of the gospel (regeneration, conversion, sanctification, glorification) and the results of rejecting it (wrath, judgment, hell). These, however we define and proclaim them, are not in themselves the gospel. If something is not what God did in and through the historical Jesus two thousand years ago, it is not the gospel. Thus Christians cannot ‘live the gospel,’ as they are often exhorted to do. They can only believe it, proclaim it and seek to live consistently with it. Only Jesus lived (and died) the gospel. It is a once-for-all finished and perfect event done for us by another.”

- Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58-59.

“First, in order to understand the place of the gospel in biblical theology, tentative definitions of both gospel and biblical theology are called for. One way to define the gospel is in the terms Paul uses in Romans 1:1-4. Here he states four crucial things about the gospel.

“Verse 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, First point: it is God's gospel, which is probably self-evident. However, the epistle to the Romans implies that this gospel is God's solution to his own problem of how to justify the ungodly. Verse 2. [The gospel] which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, Second point: it is the gospel of the Old Testament prophets and cannot be regarded as replacing or discarding the Old Testament antecedents to

the coming of Jesus. It means that Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy. This fact alone makes biblical theology necessary. Verse 3. [The gospel] concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh Third point: it concerns the Son of God whose lineage goes back to the theologically significant figure of David. We may infer from this that, though there can be no gospel without the Father or the Holy Spirit, its focus is on the incarnate Son. This Davidic lineage also points to the structure of biblical theology in redemptive covenant and kingdom history. Verse 4. and [he is the Son who] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

“Fourth point: the defining moment is the resurrection which, of course, implies the death of Jesus which, in turn, implies the life of Jesus. The resurrection fulfils the promises concerning the rule of the son of David. The gospel, then, is God’s message of the person and work of Jesus, testified to by the Old Testament, and coming to its climax in the exaltation of Jesus.”

- Graeme Goldsworthy, from his lecture at Southern Seminary titled *“The Necessity and Viability of Biblical Theology”*

Tim Keller

The ‘gospel’ is the good news that through Christ the power of God’s kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. When we believe and rely on Jesus’ work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship to God, that kingdom power comes upon us and begins to work through us.”

A.B. Luter, Jr.

The Greek word *euangelion*, frequently translated “gospel,” means “glad tidings,” or “good news,” and in Pauline usage it refers to the message of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. Of the seventy-six instances of “gospel” in the NT, sixty are found in the Pauline corpus... *Euangelion* is for Paul the classic expression of the grace of God, responded to by faith.

- IVP Dictionary of Paul and His Letters

Rick McKinley

“Sometimes it seems as though we find two gospels in the New Testament—the gospel of Jesus and the gospel about Jesus. The gospel of Jesus is usually taken to mean His announcement of the kingdom and the life He embodied in His loving actions toward the world. The gospel about Jesus refers to his atoning work on the cross and His resurrection, through which we can receive the forgiveness of sin through our faith and repentance.

“I believe, however, that the two are actually one gospel and that when we lose the tension that comes from holding both together, we experience an unhealthy and unbiblical pendulum swing in our faith.

“If all we value is the salvation gospel, we tend to miss the rest of Christ’s message. Taken out of context of the kingdom, the call to faith in Christ gets reduced to something less than what the New Testament teaches. The reverse is also true: if we value a kingdom gospel at the expense of the liberating message of the Cross and the empty tomb and a call to repentance, we miss a central tenet of kingdom life. Without faith in Jesus, there is no transferring of our lives into the new world of the kingdom.”

- Rick McKinley, *This Beautiful Mess*

Scot McKnight

“The gospel is the work of God to restore humans to union with God and communion with others, in the context of a community, for the good of others and the world.”

- Scot McKnight, *Embracing Grace*

“God loves you and everyone else and has a plan for us: the kingdom community.

But you and everyone else have a sin problem that separates you and everyone else from God, from yourselves, from one another, and from the good world God made for you.

The good news is that Jesus lived for you, died for you, was raised for you, and sent the Spirit for you – so you all can live as the beloved community.

If you enter into Jesus’ story, by repentance and faith, you can be reconnected to God, to yourself, to others, and to this world.

Those who are reconnected like this will live now as God’s community and will find themselves eternally in union with God and communion with others.

Those who preach this gospel will not deconstruct the church. Instead, they will participate in what God is doing: constructing the kingdom community even now.”

Roger Nicole

Moved by His incomprehensible love for mankind, the Triune God was pleased not to abandon our rebellious and corrupt race to the misery and hell that it justly deserved, but to undertake to save a great multitude of human beings who had absolutely no claim on His mercy.

In order to bring this plan into execution, the second Person of the Godhead, the Son, took unto himself a full human nature, becoming in all things like his brethren and sisters, sin excepted. Thus he became the Second Adam, the head of a new covenant, and he lived a life of perfect obedience to the Divine Law.

Identifying with his own, he bore the penalty of human sin on the cross of Calvary, suffering in the place of the sinner, the just for the unjust, the holy Son of God for the guilty and corrupt children of man.

By his death and resurrection he has provided the basis

- for the *reconciliation* of God to humans and of humans to God;
- for the *propitiation* of a righteous Trinity, justly angry at our sins;
- for the *redemption* of a multitude of captives of sin whose liberty was secured at the great price of His own blood.

He offered himself as an expiatory sacrifice sufficient to blot out the sins of the whole world and secured the utmost triumph over the enemies of our soul: sin, death, and Satan.

Those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ are thus to be absolved from the guilt of all their sins and are adorned with the perfect righteousness of Christ himself. In gratitude to him they are to live lives of obedience and service to their Savior and are increasingly renewed into the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This good news of salvation by grace through faith is to be proclaimed indiscriminately to mankind, that is to every man, woman, and child whom we can possibly reach.

J.I. Packer

“I formulate the Gospel this way: it is information issuing in invitation; it is proclamation issuing in persuasion. It is an admonitory message embracing five themes. First, God: the God whom Paul proclaimed to the Athenians in Acts 17, the God of Christian theism.

Second, humankind: made in God’s image but now totally unable to respond to God or do anything right by reason of sin in their moral and spiritual system. Third, the person and work of Christ: God incarnate, who by dying wrought atonement and who now lives to impart the blessing that flows from his work of atonement.

Fourth, repentance, that is, turning from sin to God, from self-will to Jesus Christ. And fifthly, new community: a new family, a new pattern of human togetherness which results from the unity of the Lord’s people in the Lord, henceforth to function under the one Father as a family and a fellowship.” (44, emphasis added)

- Packer, J.I. *Serving the People of God: Collected Shorter Writings of J.I. Packer*. Vol. 2. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998.

Michael Patton

The Gospel is “good news.” It is good news only to the degree that the bad news can be understood first.

The world is a messed-up place. It is not just our generation that notices this, but every generation has had to deal with their share of problems. Today is not really any worse than it was 100 years ago or 1000 years ago.

The good news is that God is fixing what is broken in every generation. This is called redemption. Redemption means to “buy back” or restore to a previous condition.

God is in the process of putting his messed up creation back in order. The Gospel is the good news that that which was broken is being fixed.

But the brokenness had its genesis in us, mankind. God is different. He is perfect and demands perfection because of his character. In other words, as the Bible puts it, God is righteous. Our brokenness is due to choices that we have made. All of us have messed things up. This is called “sin.”

We have sinned through our selfishness, pride, hatred, and perversion of his creation. It is not the way it was supposed to be.

God allows us to reject him and suffer the consequences, but he also offers us hope. This hope is the Good news. It is the hope that God has not abandoned us. It is the hope for redemption.

God loves us in spite of our perversion of good. God loves us in spite of our rejection of him. He did not wait for us to live up to his standard, which can never happen, but he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, 2000 years ago to live a life that we could not.

God the Son became man and never failed, never perverted, and showed us who God is. Because Christ lived a sinless life, he could take the place of man, creating a new race . . . a redeemed race.

Christ was rejected and killed on a cross by man. But God allowed this so that Christ could take the punishment that man—that you and I—deserved. In doing this, he died instead of you. He took your penalty of death and separation from God on an execution cross.

But since he was God the Son and since he never sinned, he did not stay dead. After three days he came back to life and proclaimed victory over all the death, perversion, sin, and penalties that man had afforded creation.

But this Good News does not apply to everyone. It is only for those who believe and trust in what Christ did for them. If you believe in him, you will have life. If you trust in him, not in yourself or your works, but in him alone, you will live forever, witnessing and being a part of a redeemed creation.

One day Christ will come back to call into account all people. You can either stand on your own, giving account for your own sin or you can accept the free gift of salvation and stand with Christ. The bad news is that without Christ, you stand alone and hopeless. The Good News—the Gospel—is that you can stand with Christ full of hope.

- *Michael Patton, director of Reclaiming the Mind Ministries*

John Piper

“The heart of the gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead. What makes this good news is that Christ’s death accomplished a perfect righteousness before God and suffered a perfect condemnation from God, both of which are counted as ours through faith alone, so that we have eternal life with God in the new heavens and the new earth.”

- *Christianity Today, June 2009*

“The gospel of Christ is the good news that at the cost of his Son’s life, God has done everything necessary to enthrall us with what will make us eternally and ever-increasingly happy, namely, himself.”

- John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*

“The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy.”

- John Piper, *The Gospel in 6 Minutes*

The Gospel is the good news of our final and full enjoyment of the glory of God in the face of Christ. That this enjoyment had to be purchased for sinners at the cost of Christ’s life makes his glory shine all the more brightly. And that this enjoyment is a free and unmerited gift makes it shine more brightly still. But the price Jesus paid for the gift and the unmerited freedom of the gift are not the gift. The gift is Christ himself as the glorious image of God – seen and savored with everlasting joy.

- John Piper, *God is the Gospel*

Jeff Purswell

“The gospel is the good news of God’s saving activity in the person and work of Christ. This includes his incarnation in which he took to himself full (yet sinless) human nature; his sinless life which fulfilled the perfect law of God; his substitutionary death which paid the penalty for man’s sin and satisfied the righteous wrath of God; his resurrection demonstrating God’s satisfaction with his sacrifice; and his glorification and ascension to the right hand of the Father where he now reigns and intercedes for the church.

“Such news is specific: there is a defined ‘thatness’ to the gospel which sets forth the content of both our saving faith and our proclamation. It is objective, and not to be confused with our response. It is sufficient: we can add nothing to what Christ has accomplished for us—it falls to us simply to believe this news, turning from our sins and receiving by faith all that God has done for us in Christ.”

R.C. Sproul

“There is no greater message to be heard than that which we call the Gospel. But as important as that is, it is often given to massive distortions or over simplifications. People think they’re preaching the Gospel to you when they tell you, ‘you can have a purpose to your life’, or that ‘you can have meaning to your life’, or that ‘you can have a personal relationship with Jesus.’ All of those things are true, and they’re all important, but they don’t get to the heart of the Gospel.

The Gospel is called the ‘good news’ because it addresses the most serious problem that you and I have as human beings, and that problem is simply this: God is holy and He is just, and I’m not. And at the end of my life, I’m going to stand before a just and holy God, and I’ll be judged. And I’ll be judged either on the basis of my own righteousness – or lack of it – or the righteousness of another.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness, of perfect obedience to God, not for His own well being but for His people. He has done for me what I couldn’t possibly do for myself. But not only has He lived that life of perfect obedience, He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to satisfy the justice and the righteousness of God.

The great misconception in our day is this: that God isn’t concerned to protect His own integrity. He’s a kind of wishy-washy deity, who just waves a wand of forgiveness over everybody. No. For God to forgive you is a very costly matter. It cost the sacrifice of His own Son. So valuable was that sacrifice that God pronounced it valuable by raising Him from the dead – so that Christ died for us, He was raised for our justification. So the Gospel is something objective. It is the message of who Jesus is and what He did.

And it also has a subjective dimension. How are the benefits of Jesus subjectively appropriated to us? How do I get it? The Bible makes it clear that we are justified not by our works, not by our efforts, not by our deeds, but by faith – and by faith alone. The only way you can receive the benefit of Christ’s life and death is by putting your trust in Him – and in Him alone. You do that, you’re declared just by God, you’re adopted into His family, you’re forgiven of all of your sins, and you have begun your pilgrimage for eternity.”

Ed Stetzer

The gospel is the good news that God, who is more holy than we can imagine, looked upon with compassion mankind that is more sinful than we would possibly admit, and then sent Jesus into history to establish his Kingdom and reconcile people and the world to himself.

Jesus, whose love is more extravagant than we can measure, came to sacrificially die for us so that we might gain what the Bible defines as eternal life: to know the only true God and take hold of eternal life by the direction and abundant strength afforded to us by his Spirit.

- Ed Stetzer & Philip Nation, *Compelled by Love: The Most Excellent Way to Missional Living*

Tullian Tchividjian

"The Gospel is the the good news that in and through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, God makes all things new."

- from *Tullian's Blog*

"The good news of the gospel is simply this: in the midst of our hopeless and helpless circumstance, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners like you and me."

- Tullian Tchividjian, *Do I Know God?*

Derek Thomas

"The gospel is not 'God loves us,' but 'God loves us at the cost of his Son.'"

Allen Wakabayashi

"So what is the gospel? According to the Synoptic Gospels, the good news of Jesus Christ is primarily that Jesus has come to inaugurate the kingdom of God, to establish God's good reign over all of creation. In the same way that Aslan drew near and brought springtime into the bitter winter of Narnia, Jesus has drawn near to bring the springtime of his redemption into the bitter winter of our fallen world. He died to pay the price for our rebellion and to free creation from Satan's dominion. He will return one day to bring it all to completion and fully establish the kingdom of God. This is good news. This is the gospel!"

- Allen Mitsuo Wakabayashi, *Kingdom Come*

Derek Webb

"What a great question. I guess I'd probably...my instinct is to say that it's Jesus coming, living, dying, and being resurrected and his inaugurating the already and the not yet of all things being restored to himself...and that happening by way of himself...the being made right of all things...that process both beginning and being a reality in the lives and hearts of believers and yet a day coming when it will be more fully realized. But the good news, the gospel, the speaking of the good news, I would say is the news of his kingdom coming the inaugurating of his kingdom coming...that's my instinct."

- *from SaidatSouthern podcast #2*

N.T. Wright

"The gospel is the royal announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures, has been enthroned as the true Lord of the world. When this gospel is preached, God calls people to salvation, out of sheer grace, leading them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord."

- *Christianity Today, June 2009*

“The whole Christian gospel could be summed up in this point: that when the living God looks at us, at every baptized and believing Christian, he says to us what he said to Jesus on [the day of his baptism]. He sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in Jesus Christ.”

– *Mark for Everyone*, pg. 4.

“The gospel itself refers to the proclamation that Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, is the one, true and only Lord of the world.”

- from “*Paul in Different Perspectives: Lecture 1*”

“The idea of ‘good news,’ for which an older English word is ‘gospel,’ had two principal meanings for first-century Jews. First, with roots in Isaiah, it mean the news of YHWH’s long-awaited victory over evil and rescue of his people. Second, it was used in the Roman world of the accession, or birthday, of the emperor. Since for Jesus and Paul the announcement of God’s inbreaking kingdom was both the fulfillment of prophecy and a challenge to the world’s present rulers, ‘gospel’ became an important shorthand for both the message of Jesus himself, and the apostolic message about him. Paul saw this message as itself the vehicle of God’s saving power (Romans 1:16, 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

- from the Glossary in Wright’s *For Everyone* series

Trevin Wax: *Could you give us a brief definition of “the gospel”?*

N.T. Wright: I could try taking a Pauline angle. When Paul talks about “the gospel,” he means “the good news that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and therefore the Lord of the world.” Now, that’s about as brief as you can do it.

The reason that’s good news... In the Roman Empire, when a new emperor came to the throne, there’d obviously been a time of uncertainty. Somebody’s just died. Is there going to be chaos? Is society going to collapse? Are we going to have pirates ruling the seas? Are we going to have no food to eat? And the good news is, we have an emperor and his name is such and such. So, we’re going to have justice and peace and prosperity, and isn’t that great?!

Now, of course, most people in the Roman Empire knew that was rubbish because it was just another old jumped-up aristocrat who was going to do the same as the other ones had done. But that was the rhetoric.

Paul slices straight in with the Isaianic message: Good news! God is becoming King and he is doing it through Jesus! And therefore, *phew!* *God’s justice, God’s peace, God’s world is going to be renewed.*

And in the middle of that, of course, it’s good news for you and me. But that’s the derivative from, or the corollary of the good news which is a message about Jesus that has a second-order effect on me and you and us. But the gospel is not itself about *you are this sort of a person and this can happen to you*. That’s the result of the gospel rather than the gospel itself.

It’s very clear in Romans. Romans 1:3-4: *This is the gospel*. It’s the message about Jesus Christ descended from David, designated Son of God in power, and then Romans 1:16-17 which says very clearly: “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God *unto* salvation.” That is, salvation is *the result of the gospel*, not the center of the gospel itself.

- from my interview with N.T. Wright, November 2007

Organizational and Corporate Definitions

Antioch Network

The gospel is the story about Christ, God's and David's Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord. Churches forming the Antioch Network desire to join together to proclaim the good news that God's Kingdom has come in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord and Messiah, in fulfillment of the Word of God.

The gospel we declare evokes faith, repentance and discipleship — its accompanying effects include the forgiveness of sins, justification, reconciliation, adoption, wisdom and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We accompany our proclamation of the gospel with cooperative works of compassion and mercy for those in need or distress.

- Antioch Network of Churches Doctrinal Confession

An Evangelical Celebration

This Gospel of Jesus Christ which God sets forth in the infallible Scriptures combines Jesus' own declaration of the present reality of the kingdom of God with the apostles' account of the person, place, and work of Christ, and how sinful humans benefit from it. The Patristic Rule of Faith, the historic creeds, the Reformation confessions, and the doctrinal bases of later evangelical bodies all witness to the substance of this biblical message.

The heart of the Gospel is that our holy, loving Creator, confronted with human hostility and rebellion, has chosen in his own freedom and faithfulness to become our holy, loving Redeemer and Restorer. The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14): it is through his one and only Son that God's one and only plan of salvation is implemented. So Peter announced: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Christ himself taught: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Through the Gospel we learn that we human beings, who were made for fellowship with God, are by nature—that is, "in Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22)—dead in sin, unresponsive to and separated from our Maker. We are constantly twisting his truth, breaking his law, belittling his goals and standards, and offending his holiness by our unholiness, so that we truly are "without hope and without God in the world" (Rom. 1:18-32, 3:9-20; Eph. 2:1-3, 12). Yet God in grace took the initiative to reconcile us to himself through the sinless life and vicarious death of his beloved Son (Eph. 2:4-10; Rom. 3:21-24).

The Father sent the Son to free us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and to make us God's children and friends. Jesus paid our penalty in our place on his cross, satisfying the retributive demands of divine justice by shedding his blood in sacrifice and so making possible justification for all who trust in him (Rom. 3:25-26). The Bible describes this mighty substitutionary transaction as the achieving of ransom, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, and conquest of evil powers (Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 3:23-25; John 12:31; Col. 2:15). It secures for us a restored relationship with God that brings pardon and peace, acceptance and access, and adoption into God's family (Col. 1:20, 2:13-14; Rom. 5:1-2; Gal. 4:4-7; 1 Pet. 3:18). The faith in God and in Christ to which the Gospel calls us is a trustful outgoing of our hearts to lay hold of these promised and proffered benefits.

This Gospel further proclaims the bodily resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Jesus as evidence of the efficacy of his once-for-all sacrifice for us, of the reality of his present personal ministry to us, and of the certainty of his future return to glorify us (1 Cor. 15; Heb. 1:1-4, 2:1-18, 4:14-16, 7:1-10:25). In the life of faith as the Gospel presents it, believers are united with their risen Lord, communing with him, and looking to him in repentance and hope for empowering through the Holy Spirit, so that henceforth they may not sin but serve him truly.

God's justification of those who trust him, according to the Gospel, is a decisive transition, here and now, from a state of condemnation and wrath because of their sins to one of acceptance and favor by virtue of Jesus' flawless obedience culminating in his voluntary sin-bearing death. God "justifies the wicked" (ungodly: Rom. 4:5) by imputing (reckoning, crediting, counting, accounting) righteousness to them and ceasing to count their sins against them (Rom. 4:1-8). Sinners receive through faith in Christ alone "the gift of righteousness" (Rom. 1:17, 5:17; Phil. 3:9) and thus become "the righteousness of God" in him who was "made sin" for them (2 Cor. 5:21).

As our sins were reckoned to Christ, so Christ's righteousness is reckoned to us. This is justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. All we bring to the transaction is our need of it. Our faith in the God who bestows it, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is itself the fruit of God's grace. Faith links us savingly to Jesus, but inasmuch as it involves an acknowledgment that we have no merit of our own, it is confessedly not a meritorious work.

The Gospel assures us that all who have entrusted their lives to Jesus Christ are born-again children of God (John 1:12), indwelt, empowered, and assured of their status and hope by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:6, 8:9-17). The moment we truly believe in Christ, the Father declares us righteous in him and begins conforming us to his likeness. Genuine faith acknowledges and depends upon Jesus as Lord and shows itself in growing obedience to the divine commands, though this contributes nothing to the ground of our justification (James 2:14-26; Heb. 6:1-12).

By his sanctifying grace, Christ works within us through faith, renewing our fallen nature and leading us to real maturity, that measure of development which is meant by "the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The Gospel calls us to live as obedient servants of Christ and as his emissaries in the world, doing justice, loving mercy, and helping all in need, thus seeking to bear witness to the kingdom of Christ. At death, Christ takes the believer to himself (Phil. 1:21) for unimaginable joy in the ceaseless worship of God (Rev. 22:1-5).

Salvation in its full sense is from the guilt of sin in the past, the power of sin in the present, and the presence of sin in the future. Thus, while in foretaste believers enjoy salvation now, they still await its fullness (Mark 14:61-62; Heb. 9:28). Salvation is a Trinitarian reality, initiated by the Father, implemented by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. It has a global dimension, for God's plan is to save believers out of every tribe and tongue (Rev. 5:9) to be his church, a new humanity, the people of God, the body and bride of Christ, and the community of the Holy Spirit. All the heirs of final salvation are called here and now to serve their Lord and each other in love, to share in the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings, and to work together to make Christ known to the whole world.

We learn from the Gospel that, as all have sinned, so all who do not receive Christ will be judged according to their just deserts as measured by God's holy law, and face eternal retributive punishment.

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration

Dictionary.Com

Noun

1. the teachings of Jesus and the apostles; the Christian revelation.
2. the story of Christ's life and teachings, esp. as contained in the first four books of the New Testament, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
3. (usually initial capital letter) any of these four books.
4. something regarded as true and implicitly believed: to take his report for gospel.
5. a doctrine regarded as of prime importance: political gospel.
6. glad tidings, esp. concerning salvation and the kingdom of God as announced to the world by Christ.
7. (often initial capital letter) Ecclesiastical. an extract from one of the four Gospels, forming part of the Eucharistic service in certain churches.
8. gospel music.

Adjective

9. of, pertaining to, or proclaiming the gospel or its teachings: a gospel preacher.
10. in accordance with the gospel; evangelical.
11. of or pertaining to gospel music: a gospel singer.

The Gospel Coalition

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God's very wisdom.

Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is "Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised").

This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

Evangelical Dictionary of Theology

"The gospel is the joyous proclamation of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of man enslaved by sin."

- R.H. Mounce. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.

HeartCry Missionary Society

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16) and the preaching of the Gospel is the great "means" and "methodology" of missions. The Gospel is, first and foremost, God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). It answers the eternal question of how a just God can rightly justify wicked men (Romans 3:26). It points to Christ alone, who bore the sins of His people upon the cross, was forsaken of God, and crushed under the full force of His just wrath against sin. The Good News of the Gospel is that through Christ's death, the justice of God was satisfied, and salvation was won for a great multitude of people. This is evidenced by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25).

IVP Dictionary of the New Testament

GOSPEL (Good News) – See “Kingdom of God”

Daniel G. Reed, The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament, Dowers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. page 457

Sovereign Grace Ministries

“Jesus Christ is the gospel.

“The good news is revealed in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ’s crucifixion is the heart of the gospel, his resurrection is the power of the gospel, and his ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ’s death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God’s holy justice and appeases his holy wrath. It also demonstrates his mysterious love and reveals his amazing grace.

“Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what he has accomplished. Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches, and ministries to proceed from and be related to the cross.”

- Sovereign Grace Ministries

Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia

“The central truth of the gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for men through the gift of His son to the world. He suffered as a sacrifice for sin, overcame death, and now offers a share in His triumph to all who will accept it. The gospel is good news because it is a gift of God, not something that must be earned by penance or by self-improvement.”

- Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia

Appendix: Kingdom People Articles on “The Gospel”

The Trinitarian Gospel: Why We Need All Three Parts

Since I have begun collecting online definitions of “the gospel” during the past year, I have received a number of requests from readers who wonder what I think about some of the definitions I’ve posted. Others simply ask, “How would *you* define the gospel?” Here’s my shot at it:

Biblically speaking, if we are to be very specific, “the gospel” properly defined is the announcement of good news regarding Jesus Christ: namely, that Jesus Christ of Nazareth has been crucified for our sins, raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and is now Lord of the world. Put Rom. 1 and 1 Cor. 15 together, and that’s what you get. If someone asks me quite specifically what the *definition* of the word “gospel” is, I’m going to point to that short synopsis.

Of course, if someone asks me to *share* the gospel, then I can’t start with the announcement of good news. The gospel has to be set within the biblical framework in which it makes sense. So we must unpack the worldview truths about God as Creator, our human rebellion, God’s initiative in restoring sinners to himself through Jesus Christ, his launching of the new creation through the resurrection (and now through the church), and his future return. Furthermore, a clear gospel presentation should always call for human response: repentance and faith.

The gospel itself is a message *about* Jesus. But that message is for *us*.

There is also a Trinitarian layer to the gospel that needs to be recognized.

- God the Father justifies sinners by satisfying his own wrath through the death of Christ and by applying Christ’s righteousness to sinners who respond to him in faith.
- God the Son inaugurates the kingdom of God on earth through his life, death, and resurrection.
- God the Spirit breathes new life into sinners, giving us eternal life (“the life of the age to come”), uniting us to the community of faith, and empowering us to live in the world as a foretaste of the new creation.

Each of these aspects of the gospel should remain Christ-focused. Each points back to his life, death, and resurrection.

When these get out of balance, we run into problems.

The Pentecostal tendency is to emphasize the work of the Spirit. Emphasizing personal holiness to the neglect of the other aspects can lead to some fuzzy teaching on justification and leave little room for manifestations of the kingdom in contemporary society.

The Liberal tendency is to emphasize the Gospel accounts of the coming kingdom of God. Some go so far as to pit Jesus against Paul. In the end, Jesus turns out to be little more than a moral example. Political or social activism replaces the good news about the King inaugurating his kingdom by dying sacrificially for his people.

The Reformed tendency is to emphasize the work of God the Father in justification, sometimes to the exclusion of the launch of God’s kingdom or the Spirit’s work in beginning the new creation.

Antinomianism, legalism or a separatist quietism can result if we overemphasize the Father's work to the exclusion of the other aspects.

We need to hold these three strands together. The gospel is about what God has done to reconcile the world to himself. It is about the kingdom being inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is about the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into a new creation.

The Gospel of God: Personal Atonement or Christ's Kingdom?

What is the gospel?

We claim to preach it. We want to live in light of its message. We are commissioned to share it.

Getting the gospel right is vital to the Christian faith. Calling something "the gospel" that is most definitely *not* the gospel could be devastating. Saying something *is not* "the gospel" that *is* in fact part of the gospel could likewise be detrimental to our faith.

In thinking through the importance of defining "the good news," I have been running a series called "Gospel Definitions" on this blog – showing how many people today and throughout history have defined "the gospel." It is interesting to see the variety of ways Christians define the message at the heart of Christianity.

The question has become quite heated in recent days. Evangelicals are dividing into different camps, largely depending on what they emphasize as the vital part of the gospel message.

Christianity Today is devoting the Christian Vision Project in 2008 to this very issue, asking contributors to weigh in on the provocative question: "Is our gospel too small?" Scot McKnight gives eight marks of the "robust gospel." Others warn that we have shrunk the gospel to a matter of personal, private salvation – leaving out its cosmic dimension.

On the other hand, there are pastors and scholars who are publicly resisting the idea that we need to increase our view of the gospel. A major evangelical leader at a recent conference asked the question: "Is our gospel *too big*?" He listed what he sees as the dangers of confusing the gospel's implications with the gospel itself.

It seems that two opposing camps are forming. The first camp believes we have truncated the gospel *by only* focusing on individual salvation at the expense of the cosmic dimension of Jesus' lordship. Furthermore, by neglecting the biblical teaching about the coming Kingdom of God, some worry that we have embraced a gospel that is so heaven-centered as to render it ineffective to speak to earthly realities.

The second camp fears that historic evangelicalism is rapidly being replaced by a resurgent "social gospel." Alarmed at the growing number of self-professing evangelicals who are rejecting or diminishing the penal substitutionary model of the atonement or downplaying the necessity of personal faith in the finished work of Christ, these pastors and scholars choose to reaffirm their commitment to personal salvation through Christ's atoning death. They worry that cutting out penal substitution and neglecting the importance of individual salvation will leave us with a new form of liberalism whose gospel is powerless.

Now the camps seem to be polarizing.

Those in the Kingdom camp fear that emphasizing penal substitution will reduce the atonement to one theory, lead to over-individualizing of the gospel, and leave little place for the public implications of Jesus' Resurrection. Better to put aside penal substitution. Since it's not the heart of the gospel and the doctrine might lead us to leave out the kingdom or the importance of life transformation, it's better to leave it aside for now.

Those in the Atonement camp fear that talking too much of "the kingdom" will lead us to the doorstep of liberalism and leave us with a neutered social gospel. Once you begin talking about the kingdom, you're bound to lose the cross and wind up in the Emerging camp. Better to leave aside the kingdom for now.

It is frustrating to me that the two camps expect us to choose between these two options as if they were mutually exclusive. If the gospel is the announcement of Jesus Christ – specifically his death and resurrection and exaltation as Lord of the world – then we have a message that is both personal *and* cosmic. It is a message about the coming of God's kingdom, yes. And the king of that kingdom has given his life for its subjects (atonement).

We should not have to choose between making the gospel either about personal salvation *or* cosmic renewal, seeing the gospel as public *or* private, making it all about the kingdom *or* the atonement, centered on the cross *or* resurrection, proclaiming Jesus as personal Savior *or* Lord of the world.

Can we not hold these together at the same time? Doesn't the Bible affirm the gospel as a message about a king *and* his kingdom? Doesn't the Bible affirm the gospel as a message about Jesus' death *and* resurrection? Doesn't the Bible affirm the gospel as a message about personal repentance *and* corporate witness?

Too many speakers in both of the gospel camps have decided that the emphases of the other camp are unimportant. Instead, we need to hear the cautions from both sides. It is true that we cannot dismiss the substitutionary atonement and the importance of individual repentance without fatally wounding the gospel. Yet at the same time, we cannot dismiss the kingdom-centered nature of the gospel of Jesus and Paul and the public nature of the announcement that Jesus is Lord without reducing the gospel to a matter of private spirituality.

We should not be satisfied in either the kingdom camp or the atonement camp. Perhaps we can all be happy campers if we join with others in proclaiming a "both-and" gospel instead of an "either-or."

Don't Replace the Substitute!

Regular readers of *Kingdom People* know that I often stress the cosmic aspects of the gospel and the importance of not limiting the atonement to one theory (namely "penal substitution").

I warn against over-individualizing the gospel, failing to include the Church as central to true Christian faith, and failing to focus on the lordship of Christ.

These aspects have been missing from gospel presentations in the past, and because of our over-individualized gospel, we have produced individualist Christians who see no real need for the Church and

who have little understanding of the mission of God beyond God's mission to save individual souls. The kinds of disciples we produce are a direct result of the gospel we preach.

I am encouraged to see campus ministers, Intersivity teachers, youth pastors, and church planters seeking new ways to share the gospel that incorporate the "bigger picture" of salvation that has often been excluded in evangelical gospel presentations. I am cheering on the young ministers who are coming up with creative ways of sharing the gospel.

I have been asked to review and comment on several of the newer gospel presentations. So far, I have been disheartened to see many abandoning penal substitution altogether. Yes, the atonement is bigger and broader than the penal substitutionary model. But to excise the doctrine completely is to greatly damage the biblical witness.

The good of the new evangelistic proposals is in what they *add*. Many of the newer gospel presentations emphasize transformation instead of just decision. They reveal the communal aspect of salvation, not merely the individual. They focus on how salvation leads us to mission in *this* life, not merely a heavenly afterlife. I appreciate the way that these presentations describe the purpose God has for the whole world. This is a necessary corrective to previous presentations.

The best part of the new approaches to gospel-sharing are found in the beginning, namely, a strong emphasis on the world being "messed up." We know it's true. We feel it in our bones. And because we know something's wrong, we must be made for something that is "right." It is a terrific (C.S. Lewis-like) way to bring a person into the Christian story because it disarms (in a good way) the listener by presenting a scenario that most everyone agrees is accurate.

The other terrific part of these gospel presentations is the emphasis on the kingdom community that comes at the end. We must reclaim an oft-neglected aspect of the gospel – that Christ came to create a community, not just to save people here and there. The Church is central to God's purposes.

But there are some weaknesses in the new forms of gospel-sharing.

1. Evil without "Sin"

The new presentations tend to use the more impersonal word "evil." But talk about how we are "damaged by evil" gives the impression that we are victims of sin and have no moral culpability before God. Speaking of "evil" in the cosmic sense is good, but we must maintain the biblical teaching that evil runs through each of us and manifests itself in deliberate sinfulness. *We* are corrupt.

Evil is not just an outside force that holds us in slavery. It is an inside force that runs through us. We choose to *not* live in harmony with those around us. We choose to *not* live in harmony with our world. We choose to *not* live in harmony with God. We're more than damaged – Scripture teaches we're *dead*. Without the proper emphasis on human culpability for sin, we're going to run into problems later.

2. Explanation of the Cross

The new gospel presentations rightly affirm that "Jesus came to restore the world and everything in it for better." I enjoy the "already/not yet" paradigm of kingdom eschatology that comes through in these presentations.

Still, I wish for a clearer explanation of why Jesus *had* to die on the cross. The gospel presentations leave us with vague statements about “evil overpowering” Jesus or the sinfulness of the world “infecting” Jesus instead of the Scriptural description of Jesus willingly taking on our evil and sin upon himself and willingly dying.

The substitutionary atonement gets left out in many of these presentations. Thus we miss the reason why Jesus *had* to die – not the historical reasons for Jesus’ death, but the theological reasons *why this death was necessary*. Jesus dying as the Passover lamb is a clear statement that:

1. Jesus is taking God’s wrath upon himself in place of his people and
2. A new exodus is beginning.

Most of the new gospel presentations emphasize Point 2, but sidestep Point 1.

3. No faith. No repentance.

The New Testament continually tells people to “repent” and “believe.” Because personal sin is not highlighted much in the early part of these presentations, repentance for the forgiveness of sins is virtually absent at the end.

Regarding faith, I agree that we need to call people to submission under Jesus’ lordship (thus the verse in Romans 10 that speaks of “obeying the gospel”), but this call to submission follows the call to faith in his death and resurrection. We must maintain a proper emphasis on saving faith.

Suggestions

If we are going to keep the substitutionary atonement model in our presentation, we must show that God so passionately loves this world that he is committed to rooting out and purging all evil from it. He is not indifferent to human sin and evil. He loves this world so much that he is rightly wrathful against anything that defaces it and dishonors him.

When I share the gospel, I turn to examples of horrific evil like Nazi Germany or the sex-slave children taken from Indonesia after the tsunamis, etc. This helps people get a good idea of what evil in its worst forms is like and how a good God will not shrug his shoulders at evil. He is just and fair to rid the world of evil.

Then, after people acknowledge that evil exists and that evil must be done away with, I show how (in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s phrase) “the line of evil runs through each us too.” The sin we see in others runs through ourselves, even if we think we’re good. And if God is going to be just and fair, then *all* human sin has to be judged. *All* evil has to be purged from the world, which means that all humans are “gonners.” “For all have sinned” fits in here.

Once we tweak the beginning of the presentation, the effects on our view of the atonement naturally follow. God steps in to bring redemption to our world in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Human Being that we were all intended to be. He is the Image of God – the true image, whereas the image of God in us is defaced. Jesus fulfills God’s original intention for humanity. Because of that – *here comes substitution* – He is crucified in our place.

It wasn't just that Jesus was a great guy who wound up dying for a good cause. He died according to the plan of God because *we* were so bad, and yet God loved us anyway. The way it sounds in some of the new gospel presentations, the cross looks like a surprise, not like the climax to which the Gospels are all moving.

If God is just and good, he must purge the world of evil. The way he does that and manages to save human beings who bear his image is by sending the True Human Being – His own Son to take the weight of the world's evil upon himself and have it condemned in his body. God passes judgment on all that's wrong in the world and all that's wrong with us when Jesus, the Righteous One, dies on that cross. So evil is defeated, the loving judgment and love-based "wrath" of a good God falls upon Jesus, the sin-bearer dying on the cross.

We need to call people to trust in Jesus for salvation, to trust that the Story is true, to trust that our salvation is in God's hands, to trust that Jesus' death reconciled us to God and to others. Surely, we need to have "trust" in these presentations and not just "submit." If not, we will eventually wind up with converts who are constantly examining themselves saying, *Have I submitted enough? Have I committed enough? Have I turned away from enough sin? Am I a good enough agent for the Kingdom?* Without trust in God's mercy and grace at the forefront, we run the risk of turning this incredible story of good news about the world's true Lord into a heavy burden. If salvation is about being justified by faith in Jesus as Lord, then faith needs to be included in the final point. Right now, faith is absent.

The Question of Future Disciples

When I evaluate a gospel presentation, I try to imagine what kind of disciple the presentation will produce. The gospel presentations of past generations have given us individualistic Christians without an understanding of the *missio Dei* and the nature of the church. They need to be fixed.

But I hope we don't trade the inadequate presentations from the past with other inadequate presentations. I can see future generations who have grown up with this newer presentation asking questions like, "What does the gospel say about my guilt? How do I know I'm okay with God? How can I be sure I've been doing enough for the Kingdom?" And eventually, we will have self-focused, self-centered Christians who have turned introspective precisely because the gospel presentation they heard and believed did not say much to them about that.

Ironically, whereas our past gospel presentations have sometimes produced self-centered, consumerist Christians with little life change, it is very possible that our current presentations will produce the same self-centeredness, but in different ways.

We need to hold together the biblical understanding of the atonement and the kingdom. Let's hold together the personal and the communal. Let's hold together the afterlife and the mission-Life. Let's hold together the decision and the transformation. Let's not swing the pendulum too far to one side and make other errors.

The readers of my blog know I harp on the cosmic scope of the gospel because the cosmic implications of Jesus' death and resurrection are often minimized or missing in evangelicalism today. If it sounds like I've done a 180 and am now harping on substitutionary atonement, repentance, and faith, it is only because I don't want us to abandon the traditional aspects of the gospel. We need to *increase* our view of the gospel, not *replace* it with something less.

Gospel Confrontation and Gospel Comfort

In counseling, I often come across two kinds of people:

Some people think they are true Christians, but are probably not. They need a dose of gospel confrontation.

Other people doubt they are true Christians, but probably are. They need a dose of gospel comfort.

Sam's Story

Sam is a twenty-something who is upset with God because of a recent downturn in his business profits. He waltzes into my office, mad at God and (by extension) the church.

I ask a few diagnostic questions, and I quickly discover that Sam is living with his girlfriend. He rarely attends church. His biggest goal in life is to make a lot of money.

In short, Sam is not living the life of a Christian. I fail to see any genuine fruit of repentance. The more I talk to him, the more I realize that he is not concerned about his lack of commitment to the Christian community; neither is he upset about his misplaced priorities or sexual immorality.

I ask him some questions about his spiritual condition. He tells me about a decision he made at a youth event ten years ago. He raised his hand, filled out a card, and got his "ticket to heaven." He insists that he is truly saved because of this experience.

What does Sam need? The gospel.

Sam needs to be confronted with the lack of fruit in his life. He needs to see his life compared to the holiness of God. He needs to hear that true salvation *always* leads to good works. The absence of fruit in his life indicates that Sam is not a true believer.

I urge him to examine his own life to see if he is in the faith. I urge him to see himself in light of God's holiness. I urge him to repent of his sins and trust in Jesus. By pointing to the fruitlessness of his life, I confront him with the gospel truth that Jesus Christ transforms us into new people. Sam is comfortable in his sin and needs to be confronted with the gospel.

Jenny's Story

Jenny is a twenty-something who meets me and my wife in my office. She has a sweet spirit and a naturally introspective personality. She tells us that she feels guilty about the sins she commits daily. She weeps about the ways she fails the Lord. Her constant struggles against sin are causing her to doubt if she is saved.

I ask a few diagnostic questions and discover that Jenny is very active in church. She sincerely wants to please the Lord. She is very aware of her sinfulness, and that is why she fears she doesn't have enough fruit to show for her salvation. Looking at her life, I see fruits of repentance and faith everywhere.

What does Jenny need? The gospel.

But I take a different road with Jenny than I did with Sam. I challenged Sam to examine his life and see that the fruit of his life indicates a diseased tree. He needed to repent and trust in Jesus. I confronted Sam with the gospel that leads to a transformation of life.

But with Jenny, the last thing I want to do is say, "Look at your life! It's obvious you love the Lord. You do good works. You repent of your sins." Once I tell Jenny to examine her life, I've condemned her. "I haven't done enough to prove my salvation," she will say.

Instead, I take her back to the truth of Christ's righteousness covering our sinfulness. *Look to Christ*, I tell her. *Remember that your salvation is not dependent on you, not even on the works you do after you are a Christian. Christ is your redeemer. Christ is your righteousness.* Jenny is conflicted about her salvation and needs to be comforted. So I point her to Christ.

Confrontation and Comfort

We all need the gospel.

Some people think they are Christians because of a one-time decision that never bore genuine fruit in life. They need gospel confrontation: *the gospel changes us.*

Others doubt they are Christians because they recognize their sinfulness. They need gospel comfort: *the gospel saves us.*

The gospel should comfort the conflicted and confront the comfortable.