

## COMMON QUESTION NO. 11

### WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Most of us know that the word 'Gospel' translates a word in the original language of the New Testament (Greek) that literally means 'good message' or 'good news'. Mark calls his writing about the life and death of Jesus Christ "the gospel" (1:1). So we call the four writings about Jesus, the Four Gospels. We conclude that the Gospel is good news about the Person and work of Jesus. Our study begins by considering substitutes for this gospel.

1. *There are so-called Gospels today that are not good news.* What is good news? When your job application is successful. When your exam results are better than expected. When you hear of the safe arrival of the baby. Good news is something that has already happened for which there is rejoicing. There are no conditions to be fulfilled to make it happen. It has happened! For example, it is not good news to be told that you will enter heaven *if* you are good enough. You sadly may prove not to be good enough. Any message that makes the sinner to rely on works of obedience or the performance of religious ceremonies is NOT a gospel. Yet I venture to think that most people calling themselves Christians are hoping to get to heaven on the basis of their performance.

*The good news is that through the plan of the Father, the cross of Christ, and the work of the Spirit within, all Christians will finally have eternal glory.*

2. *There are Gospels today that are counterfeit.* It is very clear from the Bible that Jesus came for one great reason, to "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Any message that claims to be the Gospel which does not deal with this central problem in the life of every person is a counterfeit gospel. It may proclaim good things. How many times have we heard, 'Come to Jesus for your miracle, your healing, your prosperity, etc.'? You may get all you pray for, a spouse, a job, vibrant health, children, and still go to hell. "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matthew 16:26). Because such things are good news in a worldly sense false teachers use them to attract adherents, but they are not the true gospel. The real Gospel will announce to me that I am delivered for ever from that eternal punishment for my sins that I fully deserve.

3. *What did Jesus Christ proclaim as the Gospel?* Jesus proclaimed "the kingdom" as His Gospel message (see Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14). Since the fall in the Garden of Eden the whole world has been in rebellion against God, under the "domain of darkness" (Colossians

*Jesus came to re-establish God's rightful reign and this kingdom will ultimately triumph.*

1:13). Jesus came to re-establish God's rightful reign and this kingdom will ultimately triumph (1 Corinthians 15:24-26, Revelation 11:15). All those who turn from their sins and believe in the gospel (Mark. 1:15) become members of that kingdom. You might ask, 'What is the difference between the kingdom and the church?' The kingdom is the powerful rule of Christ in the hearts of all His people, what some have called the 'invisible church'. The church in the New Testament is usually the gathering of professing believers in a particular place. 'Kingdom' emphasizes the power of the King in the lives of His people; 'Church' emphasizes

the assembling of the people of the King. Both tell us that the Gospel is not just about individual salvation, but the gathering of a new people of God to worship and serve Him for ever. Think of all the parables Jesus told about the kingdom. That God is doing this in Christ is good news indeed. Read Matthew 13:1-52, 20:1-16, 22:1-14, 25:1-30. Are you in this kingdom? Jesus makes it very clear who are the members of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (see 5:3-12, especially vs. 3 and 10).

4. *What did the apostles of Jesus Christ proclaim as the Gospel?* Paul told the Elders of the Church in Ephesus that his one desire was to complete the ministry the Lord Jesus had given him, “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). The Gospel is not about what we have or done or can do. It is about what God has done and unreservedly promises to do. And He speaks and works not in response to what we do and deserve, but by His grace. The good news is that when we were lost, helpless and hopeless in our sin, He sent His Son to save us by giving Him as a sacrifice for our sins. The good news is that when we were living lives of rebellion against God, He sent His Holy Spirit to give us new life in order to bring us to faith and repentance. The good news is that the Spirit of Christ permanently dwells within the Christian keeping him until the last day. The good news is that through the plan of the Father, the cross of Christ, and the work of the Spirit within, all Christians will finally have eternal glory. And all this is of grace. Paul begins his letter to these very Ephesians by blessing God for all the spiritual blessings we have in Christ – election, adoption, redemption, revelation, an inheritance, and the Holy Spirit (1:4-14). He specifically writes that all this is “to the praise of His glorious grace” (1:6), and is “according to the riches of His grace” (v. 7). The grace of God establishes the kingdom – note that Paul preached the kingdom (Acts 20:25, see also 28:23,31).

5. Conclusion: *What is the Gospel?* We have used the Bible to get the evidence. Many people think the Bible is a book of instructions to follow in order to deserve eternal life. This was the attitude of the so-called rich, young ruler when he asked, “What good deed must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16ff.). The Bible begins with God creating all things good (Genesis 1:31). It goes on to relate how sin entered the world and ruined everything. God could have responded by destroying everything and starting again, but this would have been to grant the devil the victory. Instead He made a promise from the beginning to defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15), in what we call the first Gospel message. The “offspring” of the woman will “bruise his head”. The rest of Biblical history is God calling out a people for Himself from those following the devil, until Christ comes to get the great victory (see John 12:31, 16:11, Colossians 2:15). With the coming of Christ into the world and this decisive victory on the cross (“It is finished!”), God’s kingdom began to be set up. You do not have to meet certain qualifications to be a citizen in this kingdom. Sincerely confess that it is true that you have been living an evil life under the control of the devil. Believe in your heart that Jesus came from God to save you from your sinful until ways by being crucified for your sins and ask Him to have mercy on you (as in Luke 18:13). One of the criminals hanged with Jesus requested as he was dying, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). What good news he heard when his request was granted at that very moment. If you will come humbly trusting in Jesus Christ alone, you will be transferred into His eternal kingdom, on the basis of God’s grace. That is the Gospel!