

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration

Lesson 2: The Nature of the Gospel

What is your most important possession? (Romans 9:1-5; the gift of the gospel to others)

I. Setting the Stage

A. *Some Parameters/Boundaries*

1. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is at the center and heart of the Christian faith.
2. All biblically faithful assumptions, concepts, or consequences that make up this Gospel must be regarded as essential to the Christian faith.
3. Any teachings, beliefs, or opinions contrary to the biblically faithful assumptions, concepts, or consequences that make up this Gospel are to be considered non-Christian and, therefore, false.
4. All doctrines or matters not directly bearing upon this Gospel must be regarded as non-essential and should be resolved in the arena of debate and study in the context of mutual respect and biblical love.

[Illustration: *Kerygma vs. Didache*]

B. *The Significance of the Gospel*

1. Personally (How has the Gospel changed your life?)
2. Corporately
 - a) Provides the ground for unity in the Body of Christ
 - b) Promotes doctrinal priority"In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, charity. In all things, Jesus Christ." Chrysostom

C. *Important Distinctions:*

1. Our experience of the Gospel (subjective, situational, personal)
2. Our understanding of the Gospel (historically/culturally conditioned, relative to our experience)
3. The Gospel *in se* (objective, universal) "There is a core of gospel truth that neither culture nor context can alter."

II. The Nature of the Gospel

"We affirm that the Gospel entrusted to the Church is, in the first instance, God's Gospel (Mark 1:14; Rom. 1:1). God is its author and he reveals it to us in and by his Word. Its authority and truth rest on him alone. We deny that the truth or authority of the Gospel derives from any human insight or invention (Gal. 1:1-11). We also deny that the truth or authority of the Gospel rests on the authority of any particular church or human institution."

A. *A Question of Ownership: "Who's Gospel is it, anyway?"*

1. Rom. 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."
 - a) While the gospel is *about* God, it is the gospel that is *from* God and *possessed by* God to which the Apostle Paul was called to a lifetime of devotion.
2. It's important to note that Christianity is a revealed religion (John 1:1; Heb. 1:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:24-25).

B. *Exploring the Relationship between Truth and Authority*

1. Because the Scriptures are God-breathed, they are necessarily true and, therefore, authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Because God is the author of the Gospel, it carries the weight of its author.
2. The authority of the Gospel is acknowledged, not created, by the Church. The Church gains its authority from the Scriptures, not *vice versa*. Authority is intrinsic to God and His Word. All other authority, including the Church and its leaders, is derived (Rom. 13:1-12, Matt. 28:18-20).

3. Jesus' entire life here on earth was testifying to absolute truth and he claimed that "everyone on the side of truth listens to me." Pilate responds, like most today, with a sneer of skepticism "What is truth?" (Jn. 18:37-38).
 4. "Jesus' absolute claim that he is the way, the truth, and the life means categorically that anything that contradicts what he says is by definition false" (Ravi Zacharias).
- C. *The Real McCoy: Only One True Gospel (Gal. 1: 1-12)*
1. Verse 1 "sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father."
 - a) Paul acknowledges that his authority comes from Christ and God (cf., 2 Cor. 10:8).
 - b) The apostolic witness to the Gospel truth was received without mediation, viz., directly from God Himself (cf., vv. 15-16).
 - c) Christ is set apart from the category of mere, ordinary men.
 2. Verse 7 "which is really no gospel at all."
 - a) Paul explicitly affirms there is only one true Gospel. All others are counterfeit and, therefore, categorically false (cf., Eph. 4:3-6).
 3. "Consider the source!" Verses 8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned . . . If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"
 - a) It is the message of the Gospel that is true, not the messenger.
 - b) Even Satan and his demons are disguised as "an angel of light" or "servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:14-15).
 - c) Was Paul being judgmental? Paul's judgment was universal and absolute, "eternally condemned."
 4. Verses 11-12 "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."
 - a) Paul explicitly denies that the Gospel is merely human in origin "not something that man made"
 - b) Paul explicitly denies that the Gospel was received by tradition "did not receive it from any man"
 - c) Paul explicitly denies that he was coached or trained in the Gospel
 - d) Paul explicitly affirms that the Gospel he preached (and subsequently penned in the NT) was a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. This revelation was unexpected, distinct, and unparalleled (Acts 9 and the Damascus road experience). However, our response to the revealed Gospel is unique to us.
- D. *What are the Consequences of a Different Gospel or a Plurality of Gospels?*
1. Your belief is in vain and so is your hope in eternal life (1 Cor. 15:2)
 2. A different gospel means Christ died in vain (Gal. 2:21)