

## What We Believe, Part 7: The Gospel

**1 Corinthians 15:1 ESV (Pg. 559)** Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, **2** and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. **3** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, **5** and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6** Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **7** Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **8** Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. **9** For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **10** But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. **11** Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

We believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the announcement that the eternal purpose of history has been fulfilled in the kingdom of God being brought within reach by the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ; that Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiary sacrifice to God for our sins that satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases his holy wrath while also demonstrating his mysterious love and revealing his amazing grace. We believe that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man; that there is no other name by which men must be saved; that 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 gospel.

- I. We are currently studying the the core beliefs of NRLC. We spent 5 weeks considering the doctrines of the scriptures and of the triune God. Last week, we began considering what all of this means to us as human beings.
  - A. This process began with us considering what the scriptures say about regeneration; the understanding that the Christian life begins, not with an action on our part, but on God's, wherein he makes those who are dead in their trespasses and sins alive in Christ.
  - B. Today we will add to that foundation by considering the announcement of what God both eternally planned and historically accomplished, so that men and women might be saved; the announcement of the message we call the gospel. The Greek word for "gospel" in the New Testament is euaggelion (yü-än-ge'-lë-on). The basic definition of the word is "good tidings"<sup>1</sup> (or news). But what's so good about this good news?
- II. First of all, the gospel is good news because of ***what it accomplishes***.
  - A. In our text today, Paul reiterates for the Corinthian church what the gospel, as he preached it to that 1st century church, did for them; calling it...

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2098&t=KJV>

1. **“the gospel...in which you stand”** (as opposed to falling, stumbling, and crumbling). He’s teaching them that only the gospel of Jesus Christ...
    - a) ...makes them secure before the righteous wrath of God, who is enthroned as the holy Judge of every deed done in His universe.
    - b) ...makes them fearless in the face of a culture that would persecute them.
    - c) ...makes them stand before a devil that would accuse them, a world that tries to seduce them, and a sinful flesh that wars against them.
  2. It is a gospel **“by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”**
    - a) Paul is saying that the gospel has the power, not only to initially justify sinful people, but that the Holy Spirit also uses it to continually reshape us into the image of Jesus, so that we’ll begin to reflect Jesus’ righteousness, not only in our position, but also in our function. Therefore, the gospel both initially **and** progressively saves us.
    - b) It does this as we unrelentingly and increasingly **believe it** to be the truth. Paul said “hold fast” to the Gospel as he preached it. The word used here is the Greek *katechō* (kā-te’-khō); it means “to hold fast, keep secure, keep firm possession of.”<sup>2</sup>
- B. Paul’s point is that we must hold fast **only** to the gospel! If we add to it by insisting on religious qualifications; or water it down, making it less offensive to our human sensitivities or catering to our unbelief; or if we alter it so it’s end goal is human-centered, robbing God of his due glory, then **we have no gospel at all**. Belief in such a non-biblical monstrosity is empty, vain and worthless.
- III. **Mark 1:14 ESV** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming **the gospel of God, 15** and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.**”
- A. The Christ-prescribed prerequisite to believing the gospel is **repentance**. What is repentance? It means “to change one’s mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins”<sup>3</sup>
1. All of us have a worldview when we are first confronted by the gospel; one that has us as the center of all worth, righteousness, truth and priority. But to repent means to actively change our minds and acknowledge that...
    - a) God **alone** is worthy, righteous, true, and glorious far above anything else.
    - b) We must acknowledge that our self-centeredness is actually the highest order of crime in the universe. By it, we have sought to dethrone God and deny him the praise and glory which only he is due. It’s actually treason! Because of this, God stands not as a friend of ours, but as our adversary!
    - c) We must abandon our self-promotion and self-righteousness and forsake every attitude and behavior that “vetoes” God, and seek to bring him glory.
  2. But to “amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins”, we must beg for his mercy and help, to become what we cannot on our own. We must ask him to cause us to hate the sin we once treasured, so we can treasure him instead.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G2722&t=KJV>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3340&t=KJV>

- B. It is only with this preparatory effort that we can “believe the Gospel”. But in order to believe the Gospel, we must know **what it is** we are being commanded to believe. “A man cannot believe what he does not know... I hold no man’s faith to be sure faith, unless he knows what he believes. If he says, ‘I believe’ and does not know what he believes, how can that be true faith.” C.H. Spurgeon<sup>4</sup>
1. This is really important! Paul said that what he had preached to the Corinthians at the beginning was of “first importance”.
  2. Similarly, he rebuked the Galatians because they had abandoned what he had taught them at first and embraced “a different gospel which is really no gospel at all”. (Gal. 1:6-7)
- C. What did the gospel that Jesus commanded men and women to believe consist of according to Paul? The gospel is essentially a story which several elements:
1. First, “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures”. We learn at least two things from this passage.
    - a) First, that Jesus died, not because he was guilty, or because he was framed, rather, he died a planned death for a glorious purpose; to redeem fallen humanity from the curse of sin. He died so that even the most guilty among our race could be forgiven and reconciled to the Father.
      - (1) His death was **Substitutionary** in that Jesus, the righteous One, took a beating, suffering mockery and insults, wore a crown of thorns, carried a cross, was stripped naked, spat upon, and eventually nailed through his hands and feet for people who were ungrateful, and unworthy of such a grand display of perfect love. He died horrifically in the place of those proud rebels, so that they could live eternally.
      - (2) But his death was also **Propitiary**, which means that by it, Christ satisfied all of God’s wrath that the elect had stored up against themselves for the Day of Judgement. The boiling cauldron of God’s justice, instead of being poured out on us, was poured out on him instead, so that we could walk in tender fellowship with the Father.
    - b) Next we learn that all of these events were predicted hundreds of years previous in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament. In Romans 16, Paul says that the gospel is the “revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages **but has now been disclosed** and through the prophetic writings **has been made known** to all nations” (Romans 16:25-26)
      - (1) After his resurrection, Jesus comes upon two depressed disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are kept from recognizing him, and Jesus asked them why they were upset. They tell him that the One they thought was the long-awaited messiah is dead, and now it looks like some cruel prankster has stolen his body! Watch what Jesus says...
      - (2) **Luke 24:25 ESV** And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and **slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!** **26** Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” **27** And **beginning with Moses and all the Prophets**, he interpreted to them in **all the Scriptures** the things concerning himself.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0107.htm>

2. Next Paul tells us “that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”.
- a) Paul’s point in emphasizing that Christ “was buried” is to say Jesus Christ actually, **as a matter of historical fact**, died. There have been many skeptics to challenge this fact, but none have survived serious scrutiny.
    - (1) One of the most popular theories embraced by desperate agnostics, some Hindus, and Ahmadi Muslims is the “swoon hypothesis”; stating that Christ didn’t, in fact, die; but was revived somehow in the tomb through drugs, special ointments, or the cool, damp air in the tomb.<sup>5</sup>
    - (2) But we know that Jesus was beaten, resulting in a severe loss of blood, after which he was forced to carry the crossbeam of a Roman cross weighing upwards of 100 lbs.<sup>6</sup>. He was hung on a cross for six hours, and, if that wasn’t enough, had a Roman lance thrust into his side, most likely piercing his heart.<sup>7</sup> Who could survive that?
    - (3) The truth is that there is no serious archeologist, or ancient near east scholar (Christian or otherwise) that doubts that Christ was a historical figure who died by crucifixion in first-century Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>
  - b) But Paul makes even a larger point about the fact that Jesus Christ, though empirically, clinically dead, was raised from the dead after three full days. This also was “in accordance with the Scriptures”. Like Jesus’ death, the apologetic arguments for this historical fact are unassailable to anyone who looks at it with the smallest modicum of logic.
    - (1) I wish time allowed me to detail the vast evidence for Christ’s actual, physical resurrection from the dead, but you should consider the testimonies of Simon Greenleaf, Josh McDowell, and Lee Strobel, all three of them highly educated atheists, at the top of their fields, who set out to “once and for all” disprove the resurrection...instead all three were converted to Christ when they saw the vast evidence for it!
    - (2) Paul says that all of the apostles, along with over 500 others, and even the Apostle himself, saw the risen King of Kings with their own eyes. There is no doubt that he has been raised, the real thing to consider is what that **means** to you and I who have believed.
3. The passage we read at the beginning was the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15, a chapter devoted entirely to Paul’s defense of the resurrection as historical fact, and as highly relevant truth for believers.
- a) **1 Corinthians 15:21 ESV** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. **22** For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. **23** But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swoon\\_hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swoon_hypothesis)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/deathjesus.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Qureshi, Nabeel; Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus; pp. 147-154 (esp. pg. 153) © 2014, 2016 Zondervan

- b) The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a guarantee to all who put their trust in him that death holds absolutely no terror for us! As he rose from his grave, so will all who place their trust in his gospel.
- D. Are you beginning to see why Christians call the gospel, “good news”. Through Christ’s death we have been forgiven of even the most heinous of crimes, and brought into fellowship and communion with the living God. Through his resurrection, we have been granted eternal life and the promise of physical resurrection from the dead at the last day. We have been told that we “stand” by this gospel, and that we are being further progressively saved from the dominion of our old fallen natures by it. I don’t see a “downside”, do you?
- IV. The last thing we must ask is, to whom is this gospel (good news) available? Look a Paul’s description of his own encounter with the risen Jesus again: **1 Corinthians 15:8 ESV** Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. **9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle**, because I persecuted the church of God. **10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.** On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.
- A. Paul stands with his mouth agape, amazed at the fact that he has been chosen and saved by God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Why? Because he knows exactly who he was when Jesus found him.
1. He can’t deny it! Jesus caught him in the very act on the road to Damascus. He was going to arrest, imprison, and possibly execute members of Jesus’ church.
  2. But instead, he was arrested by the grace of God! He became the prisoner of the Lord! The Lord slew his religious pride and intellectual arrogance on the day and he became a disciple of the living Christ, just like those he was persecuting!
- B. His words here echo what he told Timothy in another definition of what the Gospel is: **1 Timothy 1:15 ESV** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.** **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.
1. What do you have to do to believe the gospel? Just acknowledge like Paul, that you are among the chief of sinners. Acknowledge like Paul that you are utterly unworthy of the grace and kindness that he would pour out on you.
    - a) You can’t impress God anyway, so you might as well be honest. He won’t even look at your resume - he’ll stick it right in the shredder!
    - b) If you get the benefits of the gospel it’s because you came to him as the old hymn, “Rock of Ages” puts it, **“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling, Naked, come to Thee for dress. Helpless, look to Thee for grace. Vile, I to the fountain fly. Wash me, savior, or I die.”**<sup>9</sup> Empty-handed, naked, helpless, vile. It is the only way to come to Christ. You have nothing he wants; but he has everything you need.

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<sup>9</sup> Public Domain; Toplady, Augustus - [https://hymnary.org/text/rock\\_of\\_ages\\_cleft\\_for\\_me\\_let\\_me\\_hide](https://hymnary.org/text/rock_of_ages_cleft_for_me_let_me_hide)

2. To receive the benefits of the gospel, what is required is belief: You must believe that you are more sinful, broken and helpless than you ever imagined; but you must also believe that Christ is more loving, forgiving, gracious, and powerful than you ever dreamed. He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him. (Hebrews 7:25)
  3. And when you come to him. He makes you into what he wants you to be. It is something you never could be on your own. The old persecutor became an Apostle, and he wrote the majority of the New Testament.
- C. He never set out to do such a thing! On the contrary he says, ***But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*** He knew that ***what*** he was, he was only by the grace of God. May God make us all ever so aware that we might be ever so humble.
- V. Our constant aim at NRLC is that everything we preach is the same gospel, stated in different ways. If you ever think you need something new, something more novel, something more poetic, amusing, or practical; then my friend you haven't the first clue about how badly you desperately need this gospel!
- A. When the Holy Spirit reveals it to you, you won't tire of it. In fact, you won't be able to live without it! This gospel is the spiritual bread Christ spoke of when he said, ***Matthew 4:4 ESV Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*** Are you ***living*** by the gospel?
  - B. But more than just what we preach, we want everything that takes place in our hearts, families and church to proceed from and be related to the gospel, as we read in our statement.
  - C. The gospel is everything. Without it, we're just a club. Without it, you're just a run-of-the-mill religious zealot. Without it, we have no answers for the world. Without it, we should eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.
  - D. But with it, we are loved, forgiven and accepted. With it, we are made members of one another; part of an eternal family! With it, we have purpose! With it, there is hope for the worst corners of the world. With it, not even death can terrify us!
  - E. The words of Jesus from 2,000 years ago still apply: ***Mark 1:15b ESV "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."***