

What is the Gospel? 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 serves as the bridge between the various discussions about the divisions at Corinth and their disagreement/misunderstanding about the resurrection.

Paul reminds his Corinthian friends that the gospel he preached to them will save them if they hold fast to it. He's not casting doubt on their salvation. He wants them to exercise their salvation.

And then he defines for them the gospel that he preached to them.

First: The All-Important Gospel 3a

First importance = *en protos* = prototype, etc.

- a) "*First in time or place*" - It was the first thing Paul preached to them
- b) "*Influence or honor*" - He preached it as the most important thing

Second: Defining the Gospel

Gospel = *euangelion* 'Good tidings,' or 'Good news.' We also get our English word *evangel*, *evangelist*, and *evangelical* from it.

Luke 2:10 - *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you **good news of great joy that will be for all the people.***

That's *euangelion*, but the English word, for it, the word, 'Gospel,' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word, "Godspell," a compound word formed from *gōd* ("good") + "*spel*" ("tidings" or "story"), a good story!

William Tyndale completed his translations of the whole NT from Greek into English July of 1526. In the process, he coined a lot of words that hadn't existed in the English language - *Beautiful, Fisherman, Landlady, Seashore, Stumbling block, Taskmaster, Zealous, Jehovah, Passover, Scapegoat, Atonement, Modesty, Mediocrity, Industrious, Long-suffering, Peacemakers, fisherman, castaway, and busybody.*

He also created a lot of new phrases – "*let there be light, and there was light,*" "*male and female created he them,*" "*who told thee that thou wast naked?*" "*my brother's keeper,*" "*the Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee,*" "*thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might,*" "*the salt of the earth,*" "*the powers that be,*" "*a law unto themselves,*" "*filthy lucre,*" and "*fight the good fight,*" "*city on a hill,*" "*ye of little faith,*" "*thirty pieces of silver,*" "*eye for eye,*" "*eat, drink and be merry,*" "*no man can serve two masters,*" "*blind lead the blind,*" "*seventy times seven,*"

A list of words that Wycliffe and Tyndale created can be found here -

<https://hbu.edu/museums/dunham-bible-museum/influence-in-history-and-culture/english-wordsphrases-from-early-translations/>

To prepare people for the NT in English, he wrote a little 36-page tract introducing people to the Bible in English. This is what he said about the Gospel –

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: as when David had killed Goliath the giant, came glad tidings unto the Jews, that their fearful and cruel enemy was slain, and they delivered out of all danger: for gladness whereof, they sung, danced and were joyful. In like manner is the Evangelion of God (which we call gospel, and the New Testament) joyful tidings; and as some say, a good hearing published by the apostles throughout all the world, 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 favour 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.

(Good article on Tyndale and translating the Bible – although written by a Mormon) -

<https://rsc.byu.edu/prelude-restoration/words-fitly-spoken-tyndales-english-translation-bible>

The word 'Gospel,' is used 76 times in the New Testament. The verb *euangelizō*, means "to preach (or tell) the good news." It occurs 54 times in the NT. With only a few exceptions, it refers to some aspect of the good news of salvation that is offered by God to those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

(In all, the KJV uses *gospel* 98 times; the NASB: 96 times; the ESV: 93 times; the NIV: 92 times. But the NLT uses *gospel* only 5 times).

FT in NT - Matthew 4:23 - *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **gospel** of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*

LT in NT - Revelation 14:6 - *Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal **gospel** to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.*

Third: The Parts of the Gospel 3b-4

- a) Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures
- b) He was buried

- c) He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (OT)

In its simplest form, the gospel is the good news that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised three days later, all of it, as promised and fulfilled by God.

By saying that it was accomplished, *'in accordance with the Scriptures,'* Paul ties Jesus to the Old Testament as the fulfillment of all that God promised beginning in Genesis 3:15.

As we all know, the Bible is one story – salvation/redemption/reconciliation – with one Hero, Jesus!

Fourth: The Gospel as a Secular Word

Picture: The *Calendar Inscription of Priene* was written on two tables of stone in the marketplace of the old town of Priene, Asia Minor, modern Western Turkey. The inscription is a decree issued by Rome in 9 B.C., only a few years before the birth of Jesus. It ordered a new calendar for the Roman Empire which was to begin on 23 September, the birthday of Augustus Caesar. It reads:

'It seemed good to the Greeks of Asia, in the opinion of the high priest Apollonius of Menophilus Azanitus: "Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (excelled even our anticipations), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings [εὐαγγέλιον] for the world that came by reason of him, from his birth, a new reckoning of time must begin."

Written only years before the birth of Jesus, the inscription demonstrates that the word "gospel" was a secular and political term in the Roman Empire. Understanding how the Romans interpreted 'Gospel' will help me understand what the Gospel writers and Paul meant by it.

- a) Augustus's virtue benefits mankind – Gen 12:3; Rev 5:9; 1 John 2:1-2
- b) He is the Savior, both for us and our descendants – Acts 16:31; Hb 9:26
- c) He ends war – Is 9:6; Eph 2:14
- d) He arranges all things – Ps 2; 115:3; Eph 1:11; Hb 1:2;
- e) His appearance surpasses all previous benefactors – Hb 1:1-2; Hb 1-4
- f) No one in the future can outdo him – Jn 19:30; Hb 10:12;
- g) His birthday is the beginning of goodness – 1 Chron 16:34; Ps 119:68; Lk 2:11-14; Mk 10:18
- h) The world came into existence by him (He reasoned the world into existence as a reflection of him) – Gen 1:3; Col 1:16; Hb 1:2;

- i) His birth starts time all over again – The Gregorian Calendar - B.C. = Before Christ and A.D. = in the year of our Lord (<https://www.antidote.info/en/blog/reports/bc-and-ad-bce-and-ce-whats-difference>)

It is against that backdrop of the *Calendar Inscription of Priene* that Luke, the only Greek author of the NT, writes,

Luke 2:1-6 - *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed,^[b] who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

Luke purposefully places Jesus's birth in the context of the Roman Empire at the very moment that Caesar Augustus, the king of the world, demonstrates his global authority by ordering a census for the whole world. Luke, in effect, says, "I have better news..."

Luke 2:10-11 - *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Luke is doing more than just announcing the birth of Jesus. He is using the language of the Priene inscription meant to honor the Roman emperor, to turn our attention from Rome to Bethlehem where he claims the true King of all the world and time has been born. The truly 'good news' is not about Augustus but Jesus. In effect, Luke claims that Rome is wrong, and that Jesus is the 'good news.'

In effect then, each of the Gospel writers follow the same pattern Moses employed in Genesis. In Genesis, Moses wrote a new history for Israel, a counter-story and alternate vision of reality, defined, not by the Egyptian gods but the God of Israel. The Gospel writers do the same thing. They claim that Jesus, not Augustus, is the king who heralds in a new world, who protects us from destruction, and on whom all time and reality should center.

Think about the Priene Inscription and read Paul's declaration in **Colossians 1:15-20** - *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

And so the Gospel is not first an appeal for us to do something but a declaration about what Jesus has done. He has lived, died, and been resurrected. And by his resurrection, you can be free from wrath, certain of safety and wellbeing, welcomed into his eternal kingdom.

Fifth: The Necessity of the Gospel

Interestingly, the bad news is the key to understanding and appreciating the gospel's good news and also what makes the good news so good.

We didn't need the law to make us sinners. Since Adam and Eve, we are sinners by conception. But God provided the law as a measuring stick to prove our sinfulness. According to the law, whose requirements are a reflection of God's character and so perfect, that no human being can measure up, we are all sinners (Ro 3:10; 6:23) and deserve death (destruction).

John 3:17-18 - "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And the law established only one way for sin to be eradicated; the blood sacrifice of a perfect life, which Jesus provided on the cross (Ro 8:3-4; Hb 10:5-10). Yearly sacrifices reminded the people of their sin and need for a Saviour but when Jesus came, he became that ultimate, perfect sacrifice (Hb 10:11-18), hence, the only way to God. This is where the resurrection comes in –

Romans 4:25 – (Jesus) ... was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

This good news of "*Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19) not only saves us from temporal but eternal destruction. There is no better news.

The good news is that "*he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...*" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

The good news is that we who were once enemies of God have not been made God's family (Ro 5:10; Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1).

The good news is that "*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*" (Romans 8:1).

When you think of good news, there could be no better news than the gospel of Jesus!

Sixth: The Power of the Gospel

When Paul begins chapter 15, he says that the Gospel is not something he invented, it is something that “*I also received,*” which they have now received, and which was proven by Jesus’s appearances to

- a) 5a - Cephas
- b) 5b - The twelve
- c) 6 - More than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive
- d) 7a - To James
- e) 7b - Then to all the apostles
- f) 8 - Last, to Paul

Each of their lives was changed by the Gospel and three of them, Peter, James and Paul, went on to write their own declarations of Jesus’s kingship.

Paul, who is ending his first letter to the Corinthians, opened his letter to the Romans by stating that

[Jesus is] *...declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead...(Romans 1:4)*

These guys aren’t pulling any punches. They can’t because Jesus didn’t leave them any wiggle room about who he is.

Mark 1:15 – *(Jesus) “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel”*

God’s son isn’t Augustus. It’s Jesus. And Augustus can’t save you like Jesus can save you.

*Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!*
- Martin Luther

That is what Paul has been asking the Corinthians to do throughout his letter; repent of self and sin. That’s really what the NT, after the four Gospels is all about, the outworking of this good news.

And just like the Corinthians, we can know that we are Christians because we have received the gospel, stand in it, and are thus being saved by it.

Conclusion: Is this true of you? Have you believed it? What difference is it making? Are you living in it?

Community Groups:

- 1 – Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.
- 2 - Why does the word, 'Gospel,' mean?
- 3 – Why is it of the first/most importance?
- 4 – What are the essential parts of the Gospel according to verses 3b-4?
- 5 – Why is it important that Paul tie the Gospel back to “the (OT) Scriptures”
- 6 – Read the Calendar Inscription of Priene
- 7 – How was Augustus a Savior?
- 8 – How did this proclamation/understanding of the word, 'Gospel,' shape how the NT writers used the word and how the NT readers understood the word
- 9 – How are the Gospel writers repeating the work of Moses in re-interpreting the world for their readers?
- 10 – How is Jesus a better Savior than Augustus? (Read Colossians 1:15-20).
- 11 – Why do we need the Gospel of Jesus? (John 3:17-18).
- 12 – What has Jesus’s Gospel done for us? (1 Peter 1:3-4).
- 13 – What does the resurrection prove? (Ro 1:4).
- 14 – Take time in your CG, as Tyndale says we should, to “*praise and thank God; are glad, sing and dance for joy.*”

Daily Devotion - Monday, October 3rd-Friday, October 7th

Monday, the 3rd – How/where/when did you hear this ‘good news’ about what Jesus has done for you? First, as Tyndale would say, make today a day of “*praise, thankfulness, gladness, singing, and dancing (I dare you) for joy.*” Second, tell someone. Yes, really tell someone about how you heard the good news and what it has meant to you!

Tuesday, the 4th – Think about what makes the Gospel ‘good news’? What is the bad news? How was your life ‘BC’ (before Christ) affected by the bad news? Don’t be discouraged or shamed by your sin lest you discount the power/effect/‘goodness’ of the Gospel. But do think about your life before Jesus, and then do two things: 1-Thank God for the Gospel. 2-Live in the freedom/salvation of the Gospel.

Wednesday, the 5th – The gospel is ‘good news.’ Make a mental/written list of how the Gospel has been good for/to you. Who in your life could benefit from this same goodness? Make a plan to share the good news with them.

Thursday, the 6th – Think about how the Romans/Greeks interpreted the word, ‘Gospel?’ How did the NT writers take advantage of it? How is your life demonstrating the ‘counter-culture’ of Christianity? Are there specific areas of your life that look too much like the world or in which Satan is trying to make inroads? Find and memorize Scriptures for those areas to rebuild/fortify the sanctifying walls of your life.

Friday, the 7th – How can you apply the Gospel to your interior (mind) life? How are you applying it in your home? How does it affect your work life? Think about these three areas of life and apply the ‘good news,’ i.e., the divine power of the resurrection to each of these areas.