

Clarifying the Gospel and Correcting Some Gospel Errors

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. NASB

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Long ago in the American culture a distinction was made between those who call themselves Christians and those who really believe and adhere to the essential beliefs of the Christianity. Too many people were thinking that they were Christians simply because they lived in a Christian nation, or were a member of a Christian church, or because of a whole host of other criteria that people may think affords them the benefits of Christianity. A close examination of the Bible shows these criteria to be false criteria and do NOT afford anyone the salvation of God and the eternal life which is offered in Christ. This distinction became known as being an “*Evangelical*.” This was to say that one believed and identified with the “*Evangel*,” that is, the “*Gospel*” of Jesus Christ, the central message of the Christian Faith. But it seems that over the last 50 years or so the lines have been blurred once again by our postmodern culture and this vital distinction needs to be clarified once again. So what does it mean to be an “Evangelical Christian?” Can it be said of someone who meets one or more of the following criteria, that they are an Evangelical?

- Goes to church on Sunday and is committed to regular attendance at their church
- Lives a good moral life and doesn't associate with people with bad morals
- A very giving person and makes many personal sacrifices for the benefit of others who are less fortunate
- Gives mental assent to the existence of God and the historical facts about Jesus and the cross

All of these things may have some reflection in them of Christianity and in fact are elements of biblical teaching, but in and of themselves fall woefully short of qualifying one as an “*Evangelical Christian*.” In every case, these criteria miss the mark because they do NOT meet the fundamental requirements held forth in the teaching of Christ, which is found only in the Holy Scripture, the Bible, God's Word.

How has the Gospel been compromised in our generation?

As is the case with every generation since the church was formed, the Gospel and its elements have been under attack. The way this happens is by a very subtle redefining of the elements over time, and by this the enemy of the Gospel (Satan himself), perverts the truth until it is stripped of its essential nature and thus robbed of its power to save. This is how the devil works, he is a liar and his attacks are always and continually directed against the truth of God's Word. This was the way sin was conceived, by his twisting of the truth at the tempting of Eve.

Genesis 3:1-5 - 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, **"Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"** 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the

garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.' " 4 **And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** NASB

So we see that the old serpent is still to this day up to his deceitful ways, again and again twisting and perverting the word of God. In this modern age he is attacking the Gospel and seeking to redefine it. Consider how the gospel has been redefined in several ways.

1. The essential problem of man's sin has been redefined as, we have a "low self-esteem" and do not see ourselves for the good people that we really are – Usually this message is accompanied by the idea that we are created in God's image and extremely valuable in His sight. Therefore, we should see the divine example of love in the life of Jesus and seek to imitate it and be the good people who we truly created to be. This is the old lie of salvation by good works, but no one can be saved by good deeds. Although there are important elements of truth in this message, its problem is that it denies the fundamental problem of a **corrupt human nature** that the Bible says we have fallen into and that all mankind possess from birth. Further, it bypasses the remedy for sin which God has provided, which is the **substitutionary atonement** of Christ upon the cross and the **need for regeneration** (being born again by the Spirit of God). Apart from regeneration, repentance and faith in Christ, we do not even possess the ability to be good people or do what is right in the sight of God.

John 3:3 - 3 Jesus answered and said to him, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."** NASB

Titus 3:5-8 - 5 He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness**, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that **being justified by His grace** we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. NASB

2. The idea that God loves everyone, and will accept everyone the way that they are, excluding the message of God's righteous judgment or often redefining it as a metaphor to speak of human suffering on earth. – This message is often missing any references to repentance or sin or judgment or Hell. Many times it goes so far as to say that all mankind will ultimately be saved (universalism) because a loving God would never assign someone to eternal suffering in Hell. This is a very subtle misconception. God is indeed very loving. In fact the Bible says that God is Love, 1 John 4:8. The problem here is that even though God does indeed love His entire creation, He will not tolerate the hardened sinners' rejection of Christ Jesus (by failing to repent and believe the Gospel) forever, but at the judgment will ultimately damn them in Hell. Furthermore, God will not accept any sinner "the way that they are" but indeed calls all mankind to repent of his sins and prove his repentance by his deeds. We can come to God with a life full of sin, but we must leave it at the foot of the cross and daily seek to be without sin in all that we do.

Acts 26:20-21 - 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that **they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.** NASB

2 Thessalonians 1:7-11 - 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution **to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel** of our Lord Jesus. 9 And **these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the**

Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed. NASB

Revelation 21:8 - 8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, **their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone**, which is the second death." NASB

3. Jesus is my buddy and will help me to change and become a good person. – When this idea is prevalent there is usually a very low view of God and His holiness and justice, and therefore a lack of reverence for God and little emphasis on dealing with sin. This message is usually accompanied by the idea that **“Christianity is a relationship not a religion.”** It is true that Christianity is fundamentally a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but when we oversimplify this truth we rob the Gospel of its power to convict the sinner and send them helplessly to the cross to find a refuge from the wrath of God. Furthermore, this relationship is afforded to the sinner upon repentance and faith in Christ, and an understanding of our great need of regeneration, apart from which no one can be saved. God’s love and fellowship are not secured by anyone unless and until they come to Christ by faith, and in repentance turn to God for deliverance from the power of sin in one’s life. And true saving faith is always followed by deeds worthy of repentance.

Romans 5:6-10 - 6 For **while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died** for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** 9 Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.** 10 For if **while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. NASB

Matthew 7:21-23 - 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but **he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.** 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who practice lawlessness.**' NASB

4. We use methods and messages which sell the Gospel short and mislead people into false assurance and false hope. - Many times people are told that they can have this relationship with Christ or be saved by walking an aisle or saying a prayer. The Bible never says we are assured salvation because we say a prayer, or do any kind of work like walking an aisle. Even baptism does NOT save us unless it is accompanied by sincere faith which is wrought in the heart by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Improper responses give people false assurance and false hope. But the Bible gives us a very clear instruction on the proper response to the Gospel. The Gospel calls people to repentance. Repentance is to turn away from sins and to God to obey Him. A sincere and wholehearted turning from our own personal sins toward God, and believing in the finished work of Christ which is our righteousness before God, is the only way to be saved. **This is the active obedience that comes from true faith in Christ. Repentance is a required element in salvation.** Without the outward evidence of repentance, the reality of faith in the heart is lacking. Repentance is the fruit of faith and the vehicle by which it is applied. It is further the product of regeneration, the divine act of God in salvation. (Matt 3:2, 3:8, Matt 4:17, Mark 1:15, 6:12, Acts 2:37-38, Luke 15:7) **God grants repentance – (Acts 5:31, 11:18, 2 Tim 2:25)**

Acts 17:30 - 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent**, NASB

Acts 20:20-21 - 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks **of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**. NASB

The blurring of the Gospel message happens in many ways and on many different stages. Therefore we must continually seek to clarify the Gospel and return to a biblical understanding of this very important issue. Dear reader, a flaw in this teaching is a serious flaw indeed. Upon it people eternal destinies are determined.

What is the central message of the Christian Faith?

When we ask this question we ask the most important question that can be asked. It is ultimate question. The answer to this question from the Bible addresses the most fundamental elements of Christianity and includes....

- The very nature of God and reality
- The human problem and the existence of evil and mortality
- The solution for the human problem
- The unveiling of immortality and the eradication of evil

Therefore when we summarize the essential message of Christianity, the *“Evangel”* or the *“Gospel,”* we can simply define these fundamentals in biblical terms. This Gospel is what **separates Christianity from all other world religions**. It is a very unique message which is totally incompatible with any other world religion and is *absolutely exclusive*. This is because Christianity presents the way of salvation through Christ alone. According to Christ there is no other way to be saved from the human problem of sin and death.

John 14:6 - 6 Jesus said to him, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me**. NASB

This is to say the Bible clearly states that mankind cannot help himself in any way except to trust in and rely upon God, who is the Self-Existent source of life and breathe and everything else. The Gospel portrays the truths of...

- **God’s divine nature and righteous judgment**– One, Self-existent, Holy, Omnipotent -

Acts 17:24-31 - 24 **"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth**, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since **He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things**; 26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for **in Him we live and move and exist**, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' 29 "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent**, 31 **because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed**, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. " NASB

Hebrews 9:27 - 27 And inasmuch as **it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment**, NASB

- Man's fallen nature** – Depraved and wholly unable to help himself from SIN and DEATH, no one who does good

Romans 5:12 - 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so **death spread to all men, because all sinned** NASB

Romans 6:23 - 23 For **the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

Jeremiah 17:9 - 9 "The **heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick;** Who can understand it? NASB

Romans 3:9-12 - 9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks **are all under sin;** 10 as it is written, "**There is none righteous, not even one;** 11 **There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;** 12 **All have turned aside,** together they have become useless; **There is none who does good, There is not even one.** " NASB
- God's gracious provision of Christ the Savior** - by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone offered freely to all, it cannot be earned

Ephesians 2:8-9 - 8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. NASB

Isaiah 53:5 - But He was pierced through **for our transgressions,** He was crushed **for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,** And by His scourging we are healed. NASB

Hebrews 10:14 - 14 For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those** who are sanctified. NASB

1 Peter 3:18 - 18 For **Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust,** in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; NASB

1 Timothy 2:5-6 - 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 **who gave Himself as a ransom for all,** the testimony borne at the proper time. NASB
- Mankind's responsibility to repent and believe** - God offers eternal life and salvation as a free gift to them that will repent of their sins and put faith (the way the bible defines it) in Jesus Christ. *Through faith in Christ mankind can be declared righteous and justified before God, not based on any merit of His own, but based on the merit of Christ.* All of the benefits of a right relationship to God are offered through Christ, including eternal life and all of the promises which, God has made through Jesus, the prophets and Apostles.

Acts 26:20-21 - 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that **they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.** NASB

Romans 3:22-24 - 22 even the **righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;** for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being **justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption** which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

John 3:36 - 6 "**He who believes in the Son has eternal life;** but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." NASB

What are we saved from?

Consider for a moment what it is that we are saved from in salvation. Usually one will answer that we are saved from the consequences of sin. These are the destruction that it works in our lives and more importantly it brings upon us death, even damnation if we are not saved. But consider that we are actually saved not from a thing like death but from the being of **God Himself**.

It is God who has been offended by sin, and it is God who will inflict His wrath upon those who continue in sin and do not believe the Gospel. Dear reader, if we do not believe the Gospel, we will fall hopelessly under the judgment of Almighty God. This we should greatly fear. You or I cannot imagine the severity of these words. They are very severe indeed. Let us be careful to heed the warnings of God in the Scripture.

Hebrews 10:26-31 - 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." 31 **It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.** NASB

Therefore let us come to Christ in true repentance from our sins and be saved from God's wrath. Christ will receive even the worst of sinners and will impart to us the gracious love of God.

There is no sin so great for God to forgive because Jesus died for them all.

Won't you trust Him today?

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,
to the Jew first and also to the Greek. NASB