

# Appendix 4

## THE GOSPEL

We have referred in this book several times to the *Gospel writers* and *gospel witnesses*, but what is this word ‘Gospel’ or ‘gospel’ exactly? Our English word has been linked with the old English *god* (good), and *spell* (news) or, ‘good news’, but in the original Greek language in Roman culture it had to do with victory. A ‘Gospel’ (one of the four canonical Gospels) is a true account of Christ’s victory, which is God’s victory over Satan (as David Pawson explains vividly in his recent book *Come with me through Mark*<sup>1</sup>). The ‘gospel’ as preached (e.g. in the Acts of the Apostles, and as described by Paul), is the good news of salvation in Christ, available to all who genuinely seek Him, and who turn to Him in faith and repentance. There are many good books and pamphlets which set out the gospel in a clear and concise manner. Rather than emulate these in the next few pages, the reader may wish to see what the Bible itself says about the gospel. This will take the form of a short Bible study to examine what God’s word lays down on this vitally important matter. These are not, it should be added, ‘proof texts’, they are the author’s own selection and ideally should be read as part of a wider reading of an entire Gospel. Many Christians think that the Gospel of Luke is a good one to start on.

The whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, shows how we humans were created for a relationship with our Creator God, which, frankly, we do not deserve. It shows how humans rebelled against God, something that is true for each individual as well as society as a whole. The Bible calls this rebellion ‘sin’. Having given all mankind consciences, he also gave his chosen people a body of law (*torah*) which they were to observe.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Come with me through Mark* Terra Nova Publications ISBN 9781901949667

## THE EMPTY PROMISE OF GODISM

There is only one way to peace and a right relationship with God, and God proved to us that we cannot earn our way to a right relationship with Him. We are by nature rebels — sinners.

The Bible shows that God determined on a plan of salvation from the earliest of times. His plan would be most costly to Himself, as it involved surrendering His own greatly beloved Son to meet our deepest need. And as Jesus is one person of the ‘godhead’ it ultimately means that God *Himself* paid the price. Only by costly sacrifice could we humans begin to see the enormity of the crime of our rebellion against our Holy and spotless Creator. The only sacrifice that could possibly be acceptable to God was His own dear sinless Son. That is why Jesus had to die in our place (for the ‘wages’ of sin is death — see Romans 6:23). The cross of the Lord Jesus now stands between us and the wrath of God. By accepting the free gift of salvation earned for us by the Lord Jesus, we become part of His family - *saved from* the penalty of our sin and *saved to* a new life of worship and service as His own people.

### **A one verse ‘Gospel’**

Acts 16:31 — **“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”** You cannot get more straightforward than that!

There are a few points to note about it:

#### **1. An act of faith: “Believe in ....”**

What is faith? It is not just saying that you believe. It is believing ‘in’ — an act of will, surrender, commitment and real trust. Other translations render this (perhaps more correctly) as ‘believe on’ which helps to double-emphasise this foundational aspect of believing.

## 2. **The object of faith — ‘the Lord Jesus ...’**

To whom do we trust and commit our lives? — Jesus. He was a human being and His name means Saviour. The Lord — His title — is a divine title; He is God’s Son.

## 3. **The outcome of faith: ‘and you will be saved.’**

What does it mean to be saved?

**NOW** it means:

- forgiveness of all our sins and a clear conscience
- friendship instead of enmity with God
- being a member of God’s kingdom and family, instead of being under Satan’s dominion
- the gift of His Spirit and His power to be different

**THEN** it will mean:

- going to heaven instead of hell when we die
- having a new body in heaven like Christ’s risen body
- being made perfect and full of glory
- seeing Christ, worshipping God face to face

**ETERNAL LIFE** is the term that links the NOW and the THEN together.

### **Some key Bible Passages which explain the gospel**

#### 1. **Born again**

New life in Christ is so radical that it is not *like* being born again, it *is* being spiritually reborn See John 3:1–21 (see also Ephesians 4:22–24; 1 Peter 1:23; Colossians 3:3).

#### 2. **Salvation**

We are ‘saved’ by God’s gift — the Bible calls this grace — and grace is God’s free unmerited favour. It cannot be earned in any way. This, frankly, is a stumbling block to many. Note that grace cannot be effective *apart* from a seeker’s personal faith in Jesus Christ. (See Romans 3:21–26; Acts 2:38–41; Acts 8:36; 1 Corinthians 11:29; Hebrews 4:2).

### 3. **Atonement**

To ‘atone’ for some wrong done to another means to make amends for that wrong. In the Christian sense the idea of atonement is that we humans have wronged God by sinning against Him, and it is the Lord Jesus who makes atonement for that sin by taking our guilt upon Himself. So, Jesus’ death on the cross in our place is *the* atonement — the acceptable sacrifice to God. Once our sins are atoned for by Jesus, we become ‘at-one’ (by no means a definition of the word *atone*, but quite helpful, nevertheless!) with God (see Ephesians 2:1–10; 1 John 2:2; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 9:24–29).

### 4. **How to be Saved**

No matter how sinful we have been, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for us and if we repent (i.e. genuinely turn away from our rebellion against God), God will forgive us. What do we need to do in order to accept God’s free gift of salvation? As it has been said, we need to go through three simple steps, A, B and C: **(A)** Admit our need of salvation; **(B)** Believe in the Lord Jesus; **(C)** Commit our lives to Him. At a practical level, this means consciously praying to God, asking His forgiveness for past sins and His power to live a new life for Him.

Once we are saved, do we stop sinning? Sadly we do not completely stop sinning this side of heaven. The old sinful nature tries to reassert itself as God’s enemy (and our enemy) the devil, tries to make us rebel against God. But being a Christian in the sense of John 3:18 does help us to *sin less*. As we go on in the Christian life, God graciously and patiently reveals to us areas of our lives where we need specifically to yield to Him. So God slowly and surely (and perceptibly) makes us more like Christ. When, after having become a Christian, we sin, we need to repent of (turn away from) that sin and ask His forgiveness. We might think of

this in terms of a child and its parent — although a child might rebel against its parent, this does not alter the fact that the child is, and always will be, the child of its parent. This is, perhaps, a poor analogy (in that our sonship as Christians is by adoption and grace, and it relates in a special way to the concept of inheritance) but if we are truly of Jesus' flock, go on believing in Him and walking in obedience, we can have confidence that He will not lose us (cp. John 6:37). It may however be possible for those who have at some point professed faith in Jesus to simply walk away from Him and so to place themselves back under judgement of God. This is a controversial debate within the church so we will not seek to be definitive about it, merely to observe what the Lord Jesus Himself said (Matthew 10:33), **“whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”**

The Lord Jesus Himself referred to the fact that His followers would continue, from time to time, to sin (see John 13:10) and would therefore need to be ‘washed’ in respect of these later sins. Plainly, it is not His desire that Christians sin, but He has recognised that we are ‘flesh’ and therefore weak, and will sometimes yield to temptation. This is not the same, it should be added, as living in a state of complete and permanent rebellion against God. It is difficult to see how a true believer could continue to live in this way, but Christians can become misled, or have wrong notions. These deficiencies the Lord Jesus has made provision for. Once we have been saved (i.e. our whole being is ‘clean’ and does not need to be cleaned again, which is the meaning of John 13:10) which Jesus likens to having been bathed, we will continue to journey through life during which our ‘feet’ will become soiled (i.e. we occasionally sin). We do not need to be bathed again, but we do need to ‘wash our

feet' (repent of particular, known sins). Once we repent of such known sins, God has made wonderful provision for us to be restored (see Lamentations 3: 22–23; Gal 6:1; 1 John 1:9 and Proverbs 28:13).

Exactly how do we go through steps A, B and C? There is no 'approved' form of words for a prayer asking the Lord Jesus to save us and make us part of His family. God looks more on the heart than any precise words used. But the following prayer may be helpful to those who truly want to commit their lives to the Lord Jesus:

***Dear Heavenly Father, I sadly recognise and acknowledge that I have rebelled against your right to be my God. I am a sinner.***

***I do believe that Jesus came to this world to be my Saviour and He has died in my place. Please forgive me for all my past sins. I turn from them to you, now. Please take me into your family and may Jesus now be my Lord, as well as my Saviour. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I can live in His power for you, my Lord and my Saviour.***

***From now on I will acknowledge you publicly as my Lord and ask your strength to follow you each day. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for hearing my prayer and saving me. Please help me to remain close to you from this day forward. I humbly ask all these things in the Lord Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.***

Anyone who has prayed such a prayer for the first time (and it may be good, though by no means necessary, to do this with a trusted Christian friend) should immediately do two things. Firstly, find a good church, one that will help to build you up as you grow in the Christian faith. Ask God to help you find such a church, quickly. Second, let at least one other person know that you are now a Christian,

preferably someone who will not be hostile to the idea! It is important that you learn to let other people know about your new life, and it will help to make the step more real to you. And don't feel overwhelmed by the step you have just taken, the God who planned from pre-history to bring His Son into the world to be our Saviour, is more than a match for any opposition you may face or any inadequacies you may feel!

### **Welcome to the family of Christ!**

As soon as is reasonably practicable, a new believer should be baptised, so as to make a public confession of the change that has come upon them, but above all in order to respond in obedience to the call of Jesus. Part of His commission to His church is to baptise, so the call to baptism is part of the preached gospel.

### **In conclusion**

In conclusion we might say that a true Christian is someone who has made a conscious decision to follow Christ and to become His true disciple. Such a person then walks through life with Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, as well as their teacher and friend (if they go on believing in Him, and walking in obedience). They will 'pick up their cross' daily, as they seek to follow Him, recognising that to be a true disciple will occasionally call for real sacrifices (in terms of time, money, relationships and, in some cases, life itself) but will daily require a struggle with what we sometimes call *the world, the flesh and the devil* — i.e. difficulties and temptations. These come from three different directions: (1) from this world, which tends to be anti-Christian in practice, if not in profession (and the word 'world' in this sense has to do with all that is opposed to God); (2) from 'the flesh'

## THE EMPTY PROMISE OF GODISM

— ourselves, and our own inclinations which all too often place ourselves at the helm of our lives, rather than allowing Jesus our Lord to take the helm; (3) from our real spiritual enemy, Satan, and his demons, who will from time to time seek to attack us, trying to make us doubt God, doubt our salvation and encourage us into sin. As regards Satan we should not be unduly afraid. He Who is in us (Jesus) is much greater than he who is in the world (the devil). What power the devil has is strictly limited, in spite of appearances to the contrary. The devil is more likely to cause us problems if we deliberately sin or deliberately turn our backs on Jesus.