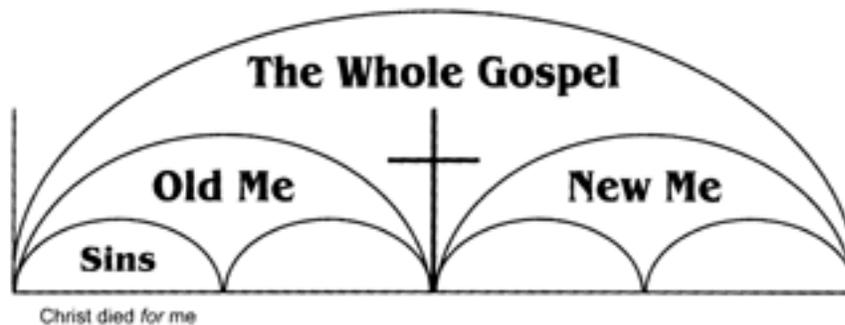


## The Power of the Gospel

# 4

## A Gospel of Rest

In the last lesson, we examined the method by which God engineered our salvation – the substitution of Christ upon the Cross. In this lesson, we continue to dig deep into the first fourth of the Gospel, the part that deals with our sins.



The Gospel is totally unlike any religion in the world. The work of salvation is not something we must work hard to attain. It is already complete. It is something we receive as a free gift.

### The Gift of Salvation

**Read John 4:10-14**

**Read John 10:28**

There is a strong religious streak that runs through humankind. This religious thinking expresses itself in many creeds and ideologies, but at the base of every religion in the world is one common concept: you must work hard to become the ideal human being and thus gain salvation.

**Read again Romans 6:23**

Note how Paul says that the “wages” of sin is death but the “gift” of God is eternal life. Salvation is not “wages” you receive at the end of the day because you have worked hard for it. Salvation is a gift (see **Revelation 22:17**).

**Read Romans 4:1-5**

In this passage, Paul shows clearly the difference between receiving a wage and receiving a gift. A wage is an obligation by an employer to pay an employee. The employer is not being generous. He is not giving a gift to his employee. The employee has earned his wage, and if he doesn't get it, he can take the employer to court. The employer is legally *under obligation* to the employee to pay the promised wage.

Let's take a look at how *The Message* renders **Romans 4:4-5**:

“If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something that only *God* can do, and you trust him to do it – you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked – well, that trusting-him-to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, *by God*. Sheer gift.”

The way of dead religion is to work hard to get salvation. But if a person could earn their salvation, God would be under obligation to that person. It would be like wages at the end of a hard day's work. But God's way of salvation is to credit us with the righteousness of Christ. All of the righteousness that Jesus has stored up in the bank of heaven has been credited to your name.

**Read Romans 4:22-25**

**Read Titus 3:4-5**

We receive righteousness as a free gift from God. A worker does not need to love his employer in order to get his wages. But someone who has been forgiven, even though deserving punishment, is bonded to his Savior through love (**Luke 7:47**).

As the *Amplified Bible* renders **2 Corinthians 9:15**:

“Now thanks be to God for His Gift, [precious] beyond telling – His indescribable, inexpressible, free Gift!”

## **An End to Boasting**

**Read Galatians 6:14**

God chose this way of salvation to nullify any chance of boasting. No one will be able to stand before God and say: “I'm here because I am better than others.” No, the Gospel reduces us all to one condition – the need for God's grace.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-9**

**Read Romans 3:22-24**

All boasting in your own righteousness and accomplishments has been abolished by the Gospel. The only boasting that remains is a boasting about the grace of God. This kind of boasting (which is what we usually call “praising God”) is actually encouraged by the Bible.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:30-31**

Paul had been a religious man. He had tried to obey God's law through his own self-effort. He had a high level of righteousness, as judged by outward standards (read **Philippians 3:4-6**), although by God's standards he later came to see himself as "the worst of sinners" (**1 Timothy 1:15-16**). For when Paul discovered the Gospel, his whole outlook on life changed.

### Read Philippians 3:7-9

Look at Paul's words, as paraphrased in *The Message*:

"The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash – along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant – dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ – *God's* righteousness."

## Repentance from Dead Works

Repentance is the pivot point of the Gospel. It is through repentance that you gain access to all that is contained in the Gospel. So let's quickly define what the Bible means by repentance:

Repentance is a change of direction. It involves a turning *from* something – sin, self, the world – as well as a turning *to* something – God himself.

Repentance is an ongoing experience in the Christian life. Whenever the Holy Spirit challenges your heart regarding an area of your life that does not match God's plan for you, your response should be one of repentance. But the first step in repentance – the most elementary repentance of all – is what the Bible calls "repentance from dead works" (KJV).

### Read Hebrews 6:1-2

The Gospel's bold declaration is that our own "petty, inferior brand of righteousness" is not good enough to be accepted by God. In fact, the Bible calls any attempt to get our own righteousness "dead works."

### Read Hebrews 9:14 Read Romans 11:6

Empty religion is like an inoculation against God's salvation. When we inoculate someone against a disease, we inject a weakened or dead strain of the disease into their blood. This builds up a resistance in the bloodstream against the disease.

In the same way, many people have been inoculated against the Gospel by dead

religion. A weakened or dead version of the Gospel has caused them to be blinded to the real thing. For this reason, in order to receive God's gift of salvation, we must first repent from trying to get righteousness through our own efforts.

### Read Ephesians again 2:8-9

The Bible clearly draws the line. Anything that comes from your effort in an attempt to gain points with God is totally rejected. Any righteousness that you try to offer out of your own distorted sense of right and wrong is tainted with self-centeredness. God's salvation is "not *from yourselves*...[and] not *by works*, so that no one can boast."

But then, if we read on to the next verse, we see a very peculiar thing happen. It seems as if Paul goes on to contradict himself.

### Read Ephesians 2:10

In one breath, Paul says "not by works," then in the next breath he says that we have been created "to do good works." The key expression in verse 9 is "not *by works*." In other words, it is not *through* your own effort that salvation is achieved. There is a very big difference between works as a *means* to salvation, and works as a *product* of salvation (note **James 2:14-17**).

God has called you to do good works, but this flows out of the gift of righteousness you have received. The Gospel switches you from a "get" mentality to a "have" mentality, and this has a direct impact on how you live and act. The Bible says you have *already* been blessed with every spiritual blessing (**Ephesians 1:3**). You have *already* been given everything you need for life and godliness (**2 Peter 1:3**). You have *already* been declared "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (**Romans 8:17**). Now you are to discover the scope of your inheritance in Christ and live in its reality.

## A New Orientation

### Read Romans 11:6

The entire orientation of your life has shifted. Your whole motivation toward God and toward life has changed. The Bible's term for this new direction of life is "grace." You now live a grace-oriented lifestyle, rather than a works-oriented lifestyle. But the impact of God's grace in your life *produces* good works.

### Read Titus 2:11

God's grace *teaches* you to say "No!" to ungodliness and worldly passions. The godly lifestyle that flows from God's grace is the "good works" Paul talks about in **Ephesians 2:10** – "good works...*prepared in advance* for us to do."

Do you remember in Lesson 102-01 how we saw that Paul wanted us to understand "God's grace in all its truth" (**Colossians 1:6**)? As long as you are open to God's grace, that grace will have forceful and dynamic impact on your life (note

**1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9).**

### Read Romans 5:1-2

Paul says we have “gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” You need an ongoing revelation of this grace “in all its truth.” For it is this grace which now shapes your life. The works you now do are *because* of God’s grace operating in your life. This is the foundation of the Gospel and the foundation of your Christian life.

### Read 2 Corinthians 9:8

## The Sabbath Rest

### Read Hebrews 4:9-10

In the Old Testament, God told the people of Israel to observe one day of rest each week. That day was “holy to the Lord” (**Exodus 20:8-11**). The Bible says that this Sabbath rest was a picture of the spiritual rest that now belongs to you in Christ.

### Read Colossians 2:16-17

In verse 17, Paul says that the Sabbath was “a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” The rest pictured in the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ. God wants you to live the Christian life from a position of rest. The Old Testament people failed to learn the lesson God was teaching them in the Sabbath. We do not want to make the same mistake.

### Read Hebrews 4:1-11

In this passage, the writer to the Hebrews is seeking to establish a clear understanding of 1) why God instituted the Sabbath and 2) what it means to us now. He uses the picture of the people of Israel entering into the promised land as a picture of entering into a Sabbath rest (note **Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:4-5**). Note what he says:

- **Verse 1:** “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it” – We are warned not to make the same mistake as the Israelites who died in the wilderness (see also **verse 11**).
- **Verse 2:** “...the message they heard was of no value to them, because [they] did not combine it with faith” – Those Israelites died because of disobedience (**verse 6**) and because they did not believe in the rest God had prepared for them (**verse 2**).
- **Verse 9:** “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” – The writer to the Hebrews begins to show how the picture of the Sabbath is a picture of the rest that God has prepared for the Christian.

- **Verse 10:** “...for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his” – This is the crux of the message the writer is bringing in this passage: The Christian life is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Just as God created the world in six days, then rested on the seventh because the work was complete (see **verse 4**), so we too now rest *because the work is complete!*

### Read again Hebrews 4:7

What is the sabbath day for the Christian? Some insist it is still the Saturday, while others insist that it has been changed to the Sunday. According to Scripture, *both* are wrong.

The sabbath day for the Christian is “*Today*.” The promise of “entering into his rest” is open to you *every day*. Of course, we set aside a day each week to meet together as Christians (see **Hebrews 10:25**). For most Christians, this is a Sunday. But never lose sight of the fact that, for the Christian, the spiritual significance of the sabbath rest is to be fulfilled each and every day!

## Seated with Christ

### Read Ephesians 2:6-7

This passage of Scripture is one of the most remarkable descriptions of the Christian life. At the point of your receiving Christ by faith, the Bible says God has “translated” (KJV) you from “the dominion of darkness...into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (**Colossians 1:13**). But much more than that, you were also translated from the earthly realm of life to the heavenly realm. You are now “seated with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

Being seated is a position of rest. The fact that Christ is seated means that there is nothing further for Christ to do except reign (note **Ephesians 1:19-22; Hebrews 1:3**). The fact that you are seated in Christ means that there is nothing further for you to do except reign!

Now wonder Paul talks of the “incomparable riches of his grace, expressed to us in Christ Jesus.” It is after establishing the fact that you are now seated with Christ because of the richness of God’s mercy (see **verses 4-5**) that Paul goes on to say that it is “by grace you have been saved.” Do you notice that Paul is talking here about much more than just being saved from hell or even being saved to eternal life. He is talking about being saved and elevated to a position of rest in Christ, at the right hand of God! That is the incredible grace that has been extended to you!

Imagine for a moment that you are seated next to Christ. You say to him, “Lord, this is wonderful! But I feel like something’s wrong. After all, I don’t deserve this!” And the Lord says to you, “That’s right, you don’t deserve it.”

“But, Lord!” you say. “There must be something I can do to earn all of this! After

all, there's no such thing as a free lunch. Everything I've been taught in my upbringing insists that I have to earn my way in life!"

"No," says the Lord. "There's nothing you can do."

"But," you stammer, "surely there's *something* I can do to earn your favor?"

"No, there's nothing."

"Can't I serve you for a few years on the mission field? Or maybe preach on the street corner?"

"There's nothing left for you to do."

"Not just a tiny, little thing?"

The Lord shakes his head.

"You mean, there's *nothing* I can do?"

"It's all been done already," says the Lord.

You sit there and shake your head in wonder as the realization begins to wash over you. Everything has already been done. There is nothing left for you to do – not one good work which could be added to the package of salvation that God has prepared for you. You look at where you are sitting – in a position of glory, with the authority of the throne of heaven surrounding you. You look ahead and see the vista of eternity opening before you, packed full of discoveries awaiting you. Tears begin to well up in your eyes as you turn back to the Lord Jesus.

"Lord," you say. "This overwhelms me. What amazing love you've expressed to me! You've pulled me from the gutter of life and seated me next to you! How can I ever repay you?"

"You can't," says the Lord, smiling. "It's a gift."

"Yes, Lord," you say. "I see now the wonder of the gift that you have given me. But is there anything, *anything*, that I can do for you – *just to show you how much I love you?*"

And the Lord turns toward you, his eyes gazing straight into yours. "Now, my child, you are ready. You have everything because I have given you everything. But just as I had everything, yet gave up all my rights to reach a dying world, so now I call you to follow in my footsteps..."

### Read Philippians 2:5-8

We are called to have the same attitude as that of the Lord Jesus. This is the meaning of "following" Jesus. Note how Paul says that Jesus had everything (see **2 Corinthians 8:9**). He was equal with God (**John 10:30**). He was clothed in the glory of heaven (see **John 17:5,24**). Yet he "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." He "emptied himself" (KJV), but this act of emptying

himself was not for himself, but for others.

*The Message* expresses **Philippians 2:5-8** in this way:

“Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.”

Just as Christ’s life was not defined by “grasping after” equality with God, so your life in Christ is not defined by “grasping after” the throne. You are already there! You are in a position of rest because God has done it all for you. But now, like Christ, you have the privilege of expressing your love for God and for a dying world by revoking the comfort of that position. Like Christ, you walk on the earth as a son of God, but like him, you also have become the servant of all (**Philippians 2:7; Matthew 20:28**). The good works you do are because you have everything, not because you are struggling to get anything. They are *works of grace*.

## In Conclusion

What is at issue here is your motivation. What motivates you to do the right thing? Is it because you are seeking to earn points with God, or is it because you have realized the incredible mercy God has expressed to you in the Gospel.

Just think about it. If I have everything in Christ, where is the striving? Where is the “grasping”? Where is the power struggle? Where is the jealousy or contention? Oh that God may give each and every Christian a revelation of what each of us already has in Christ!

Our sincere prayer is that you will discover afresh the “grace of rest” today. You start the Christian life in a position of rest. And it is from this position of rest that you now walk with God and “do good works, which God prepared in advance for [you] to do.”