

The Power of the Gospel

2

The Starting Point

In this lesson, we're going to examine the starting point of the Gospel – how we enter into God's plan of salvation. It is like a baby's first step, but it is an important one. For this is the foundation for everything that will follow.

As we saw in the last lesson, the Gospel has been designed to:

- *Introduce* us to Christ – “from first”
- *Establish* us in Christ – “to last”

We also saw how the Gospel has two distinct halves:

- The Gospel deals *totally* with the “old me”
- The Gospel deals *totally* with the “new me”

As we study this module, we will discover that those two halves can also be divided into two parts each. Thus, the Gospel is actually made up of four quarters:



We will begin focusing on the first quarter of the Gospel today.

A Revelation of Jesus

Read Acts 2:36-37

Everything in the Christian life begins with a revelation of Jesus. Jesus is called “the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” He is the one who starts everything off in your life and he is the one who completes it.

Read Hebrews 12:2

Here Jesus is called “the author and the finisher of our faith” (KJV). As we look at the first quarter of the Gospel, we are discovering Jesus as the one who starts the whole process of salvation off for us. He is the author of the Gospel.

No Other Way**Read Acts 4:12**

The world is full of ideas. Everyone recognizes that there is a “human predicament” – that things are not as they should be. But the ideas as to how this predicament should be solved are countless.

The Gospel reveals that Jesus is the only way out of the human predicament. In **John 14:6**, Jesus declared:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father *except through me.*”

The Gospel is absolute. It allows for no solution outside itself. It brokers no compromise with any other philosophy or methodology. It is a “small gate” and a “narrow way.” This is because it is totally focused on Christ and his work on the Cross.

If someone has a serious illness, such as cancer, no sane doctor would simply say, “Take a couple of aspirin and see me in the morning.” A terminal illness requires radical action.

In the same way, the Bible describes the human condition in terminal terms. You were “dead in your transgressions and sins” (**Ephesians 2:1**), “objects of [God’s] wrath” (**Ephesians 2:3**), “alienated from God and...enemies [of God] in your minds” (**Colossians 1:21**). So serious is this problem that God required a radical solution. That radical solution is the Gospel.

The Gospel is different from every religion, philosophy and code of ethics in the world. Like a magnifying glass, the Gospel focuses the power of God onto human need through a single person, Jesus Christ. This is a stumbling block to some people, but it is also the secret to the effectiveness of the Gospel.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

The Gospel is “narrow” in the same way that surgery is “narrow.” It is a narrow option because there is *no other way* to deal with the problem.

The Narrow Answer

Two words summarize the entire message of the Gospel:

➔ In Christ

Read Ephesians 1:3-14

The whole Gospel is concentrated on the person of Christ. When you receive Christ, everything comes in that one package. You are saved “in Christ.” You are brought near to God “in Christ.” And the entire Christian life is lived “in Christ.”

Read Romans 6:23

The answer God brings is found “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The entire package of salvation is wrapped up in Christ!

Note in the verse above how the bad news comes before the good news. Here are two other examples of this bad news/good news pattern in Scripture:

Read Romans 3:23-24**Read Hebrews 9:27-28**

The Gospel is a bad news/good news story. And as bad as the bad news is, so the good news is just as good. To understand how the Gospel works and why it focuses exclusively through Jesus Christ, you must first understand the problem it has been designed to solve. To fully appreciate the good news, you need to understand the bad news behind it. So, before we look at the good news, let’s take a look at the bad news side of the Gospel.

First the Bad News**Read Romans 3:10-12**

Even the best person in the world has sinned. The Gospel declares that we *all* deserve God’s judgment. This is the first thing to understand about the Gospel. The predicament it describes is *all-inclusive*.

Read again Romans 3:23

The Bible’s diagnosis of the human problem is that “*all* have sinned and *fall short of the glory of God*.” God’s standard of measuring the problem is not our own relative values but the absolute standard of God’s glory. God doesn’t define sin as just “doing wrong things.” He defines it as “falling short of his glory.”

This flies in the face of the most common excuses people in the West give against embracing the Gospel:

- Oh, I’ve nothing to worry about, as long as my good outweighs my bad.
- Oh, I’m just as good as the next person.

Most people measure their goodness against the goodness of other people. Many think they don’t have a problem with God because they compare favorably with those around them. But this is not how God sees you.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:12

Imagine a pair of gigantic scales. Most people imagine that God places their good

deeds on one side and their bad deeds on another, and, hopefully, the good weighs heavier. But this is not how God views it. Imagine instead that he places you, together with your righteousness, on one end of the scales, and on the other end he places his own righteousness. *Now* let's see how the scales tip. See what difference this makes to how you view your life?

Read Romans 1:29-32

And just when you thought the news couldn't get any worse, the Bible says that:

- God holds you accountable for your sin *in its totality* (**1 Thessalonians 2:16; Ecclesiastes 3:15**)
- God holds you accountable for *each* act of sin (**Matthew 12:36; Psalm 90:8**)

Read Romans 14:12

Read Hebrews 4:13

The Bible says that we are accountable to God for everything we do wrong. God will judge *all* sin – *without* exception. It is for this reason that the problem of sin is targeted so aggressively and comprehensively by the Gospel. For the bad news is the foundation for the good news. The antidote is found in understanding the disease.

The Barrier of Sin

We often talk about ourselves having problems. But do you ever stop to think that God has problems too. The greatest problem he has ever had was you! Your sin screamed out for God's attention.

Read Isaiah 59:3

Sin separates us from God. In his eyes, there is no such thing as being more good than bad. Even a little evil stains the good in us and demands the judgment of God. He sees the inside, the rotten core that most others only see occasionally.

Read Isaiah 64:6

Take for example, a half-rotting melon. If you were to cut the melon open and see maggots worming through most of the melon, would you simply cut out the rancid, maggot-ridden portions and begin eating what was left? Would you say, "At least the good outweighs the bad?"

Again, think of a dress that, because of a fall, gets covered with smudges of dirt, excrement and food leftovers. When you look at that dress, what do you see? "Hey, but the dirty smudges only cover 20% of the dress," someone says. "The dress is really 80% clean. And the stench is not *that* bad."

But no matter what anyone might tell you, you know that a half-clean dress is still dirty. It's the same with God. God is not looking to see if your good will outweigh

your bad. He is looking at the whole you. He sees the sin that infests our lives. He smells the stench of our iniquity. Yet, somehow, we often think that God can “turn a blind eye” to our sin, just because he loves us. Yes, God does love us. But he will not leave us in our filthy condition.

The Good News

Read Romans 5:6-8

The good news of the Gospel is that God sent Jesus to take our judgment. We were not only sinners; we were *powerless* sinners – powerless to save ourselves or to change ourselves. And so on the Cross, Jesus became for us everything we could not be. He didn’t just save us. He *became* salvation for us. This is the core of the Gospel message.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:30

A serious problem requires a serious solution. You don’t treat a life-threatening illness with half-measures. The Cross was God’s scalpel, cutting to the root cause of the human predicament.

On the Cross, the love of God and the holiness of God intersected. God’s holiness demanded judgment against us, but God’s love sent Jesus to pay the penalty in full. Both God’s holy standard and his loving compassion were satisfied. The barrier of sin, which had blocked out access to God, was completely removed in Christ.

Read Isaiah 1:18

Read Psalm 103:12

Peace with God

Read Colossians 1:20

The good news of the Gospel – and the focus of the first quarter of the Gospel – is that through the Cross we now have peace with God. Another way of saying this is that we have been “justified” by the blood of Christ.

Justification means that all of the court records in heaven that were against you have been wiped clean. You have not just been forgiven (which means an admission of guilt), the guilt itself has been wiped away. You no longer have a criminal record in heaven. There is no longer any judgment hanging over your head.

Read Romans 8:1

Read Romans 8:33-34

The blood of Christ not only cleanses you from all sin. His blood also wipes out the basis of every accusation! Satan is called the “accuser of the brothers” (**Revelation 12:10**) and he continually seeks to accuse you before God. But he has no right to condemn. Sin is a matter between you and God. It has nothing to do with Satan. Only God can condemn you and God has already justified you!

Read 1 John 3:19-20

This is the incredible good news of the Gospel. The barrier of sin that stood between you and God has been completely done away with! You now have immediate and personal access into the presence of God (**Hebrews 4:16**). That means you can enter the presence of God at any time, without shame and without fear, all because of the Cross of Christ.

This is one of the hardest things for a new believer to grasp. Yet we are dealing here with the essential fundamentals of the Gospel. It can come only by revelation through the Holy Spirit, but when it comes, it transforms your life. This “peace with God” is the foundation of your ongoing intimate relationship with God.

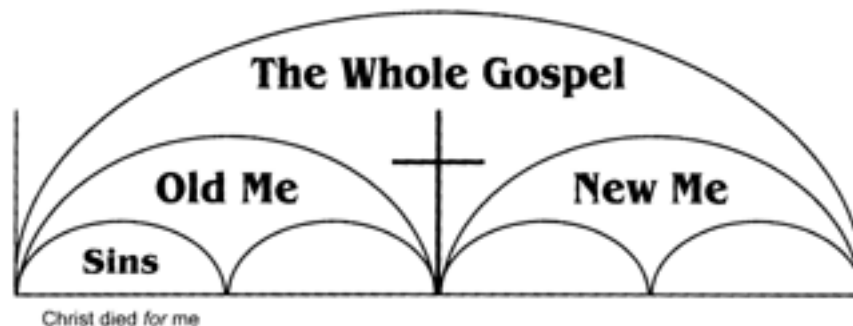
The First Quarter of the Gospel

Have you fully grasped what this means? The judgment hanging over your head is gone! The death penalty has been removed! You have free access, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, into the holy presence of God!

If this was all there was – if this was the sum total of the Gospel message – that would be enough for us to praise God for all eternity. But wait, there’s more!

We are still looking only at the first fourth of the Gospel message. And that is enough to overwhelm us! What more could God possibly have in store?

Let’s look at our Gospel diagram again and fill in some of the blanks:



The first part of the Gospel deals with the issue of *sins* in your life. God’s answer to the sin problem is: “Christ died for you!” This one fact unlocks the power of forgiveness in the Gospel. Your faith in this fact brings you immediate and continual access to God.

Everything we have been studying in this lesson is simply the “first” part of our “from first to last” experience in Christ. This is the starting point of our faith in Christ. We have only just begun to run the race!