

## The Gospel Changes Everything *Believing the Gospel*

We are in a four-week series on the Gospel. If we really see the Gospel as presented in the Scriptures, it changes everything. Last week our topic was *Understanding the Gospel*. The three central truths we considered were:

**1) God is our Creator and we are all accountable to him.** Every person must one day give account of themselves to this God. The writer of the book of Hebrews notes that it is appointed unto all once to die and then comes the judgment.

**2) Every person is a sinner and stands before God guilty and condemned.** I guess it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that our lives aren't what they should be. If we are honest with ourselves and have any concept of justice/righteousness, we have to admit we have fallen short.

The Bible uses many different words to describe what sin is. Some of these are rebellion, trespass or transgression, going astray, missing the mark, disobedience, and unrighteousness. Sin is a violation of God's law, of his will.

It is essentially selfishness and self-exaltation. Robert Pyne writes:

The Bible employs what one scholar called "a mournfully numerous group of words" to speak of sin, but they all point to its common essence as prideful rebellion.

This really illustrates the sin of Adam and Eve, doesn't it? It was a rebellion against God's rule over their lives. Satan, embodied in the serpent, enticed our first parents with an appeal to pride and self-exaltation. "God has said 'don't eat' because he wants all the glory for himself. Don't listen to him. You can be just like God!"

The early church father, philosopher and theologian, Augustine, wrote:

Sin is believing the lie that you are self-created, self-dependent, and self-sustained.

But God holds us accountable. As a result we fall under his judgment. Paul writes in Romans 6 that "the wages of sin is death." That's the penalty for our rebellion.

That's the dilemma we are in before God. Death is required. But it must be a death that will satisfy God's justice.

**3) God gave his Son to be our substitute and God judged him in our place.**

God has solved the "problem" of his justice. He intervened in time/space/history in the Incarnation: God becoming man. Jesus came to do what you and I cannot do. He came and died in our place.

Then, as evidence that his sacrifice was sufficient to satisfy the justice of God, God raised him from the dead. The resurrection is the proof that Jesus' death was enough; nothing more has to be done nor can be done.

That's the Gospel – a truth about God, a truth about man (you and me) and a truth about Jesus Christ. There is yet one more truth that must be considered in understanding the Gospel – a response:

**4) My response to the Gospel is to repent and believe.**

It is not enough to understand the first three truths or even to accept them as true. I must personally respond through repentance and faith. Before we look at what those mean, let me talk a little about the result of such a response.

The outcome of this response to the Gospel is what we call *conversion*.

Conversion is not only a life-changing experience; it is an eternity-changing experience. It literally means taking a U-turn for eternity. The Scriptures describe this change in many different ways. It's a change:

- From death to life
- From an enemy at war to a friend at peace
- From darkness to light
- From the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ
- From God's eternal wrath to eternal life
- From slavery to freedom

Conversion is an issue of destiny! Conversion is also an identity-changing experience. Augustine, was in Milan when God touched his heart and changed his life; he was converted to Christ. He then left his former life of license to sin; he even had an illegitimate son. When he returned home, his former girlfriend called to him: "Augustine, Augustine, it is I." He turned and said, "Yes, but it is not I."

So just what does conversion mean? The Hebrew and Greek terms for conversion mean basically “to turn.” Paul, writing to the believers in Thessalonica, notes:

...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. – *I Thessalonians 1:9-10*

In the positive sense, conversion means turning toward something or someone. In the Scriptures, this is what we call “faith.” In a salvation dimension, it is a turn towards God.

Negatively, it means turning from something or someone. This concept is that of repentance. The Biblical terms for repentance suggest a change of mind, of judgment, purpose and conduct.

Let’s look a little deeper at the two aspects of conversion that involve our participation in response to the saving grace of God.

Repentance is a change in attitude and action. Have you ever found yourself driving down a highway and coming to the realization that you are going in the wrong direction? What do you do? You stop and turn around – you change from the direction you were heading. That is repentance.

Larry Moyer makes some helpful observations about repentance:

Repentance means to change one’s mind about whatever is keeping one from trusting Christ and trust Him as the only means of salvation. Some may have to change their minds about their very concept of God. That is, they have to realize that He is indeed God and Christ is indeed His Son. Others may have to realize that their works cannot save them.

Still others may have to change their minds about the seriousness of particular sins, admitting to God that they are indeed sins. But once an individual has changed his or her mind about whatever is keeping them from trusting Christ and trusts Him for salvation, both faith and repentance have taken place.”

Part of the problem in understanding repentance comes from faulty descriptions of repentance as ever-flowing tears, pleading and begging for forgiveness and grace. While there may well be some emotional response associated with repentance –

and that is also affected by one's emotional make-up, the deepest level of response is that of the will. It is a decision to change one's mind.

It's a surrendering of one's wrongful direction in life. It means an abandonment of whatever means apart from Christ one is counting on for eternity. The difficulty some have of entering the doorway of the kingdom of God is like the experience of the boy who got his hand caught inside an expensive vase.

His upset parents applied soap suds and cooking oil, without success. When they seemed resigned to break the vase as the only means to free the hand, the frightened boy cried, "Would it help if I let loose of the penny I am holding?"

Repentance is the negative side of conversion – a turning away from. The positive side – the turning to – is faith.

Faith, in the Bible, is not so much defined as it is described and illustrated. The writer of Hebrews gives such a description.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.  
– *Hebrews 11:1*

Hope: not wishful thinking; not positive thinking; but rather guaranteed certainty. W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says that faith is primarily "firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing." He writes:

The main elements in faith in its relation to the invisible God...are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgment of God's revelation or truth; (2) a personal surrender to Him; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender.

So, I want you to think on three descriptive words that are characteristic of faith. The first one is **Belief**.

**Belief** – Belief is the "what-ness" of faith. It means that there is some content out there, apart from us, in which to believe.

The question was asked in the third grade Sunday School class: "What is faith?" Little Johnny raised his hand and then blurted out: "It's believing something you know isn't true!"

Amazing how many people might describe faith this way. “Faith” in that case is merely a sentiment to which one commits themselves against their better judgment.

In other words, faith is something for which we possess little, if any, evidence. It’s like choosing to believe in UFOs or Bigfoot. Belief becomes simply what one wants to believe in.

But this fails to recognize the historical reliability of the Scriptures. On the historical-critical level, there is no document in all of ancient literature that can claim the overwhelming manuscript evidence that the New Testament possesses.

In the Scriptures, truth is revealed about God and what he has done in Christ. That’s why when the Apostle Paul talks about the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus, he ties it to the historical, physical, resurrection of Christ, an event rooted in real time, real history.

There are truth claims that lie at the base of faith – a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgment of God’s revelation or truth.

It is the belief that God is who he declares himself to be, that his word is true, that he is worthy of our allegiance, that everything he has said he would do, he will do.

A second characteristic of faith from a biblical perspective is **Trust** – trust in the person of Jesus Christ. Faith is foremost centered in a person, not a creed, not a doctrinal statement, but a person.

Let me illustrate this with the New Testament writings of John the Apostle. The Greek word for “believing” occurs 98 times, and in every instance except one (I John 5:4), it is a verb. For John, faith was an active trust in Christ as much as a content of belief. If belief is the “what-ness” of faith, trust is the “who-ness” of faith. This is faith that is personal, rooted in trust of a person.

John Paton was a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides in the Pacific. He struggled to find a word for “believe” in the sense of trust, in the language of the South Sea Islanders, for whom he was translating the New Testament.

Finally he found the solution by translating the answer of Paul and Silas to the question of the Philippian jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” He translated the answer this way: “Lean your whole weight upon the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.”

So faith is an active, on-going trust in Jesus. It is a reliance upon him, a leaning upon him. This means that we guard against our trust being in anything else to gain or sustain our salvation other than the work of Christ on the cross for us.

Trust in something is only as good as that something is trustworthy. You place your trust in Christ, you lean your whole weight upon him, because he is trustworthy. As you learn about Jesus, as you examine his life, you will come to the conviction that he is worthy of your trust. This is the only way that surrender is reasonable.

The final descriptive word for biblical faith is **COMMITMENT**. It is the act of the human will that dedicates one's life – all that one is, all that one has, all that one will ever be, to the one true God who became flesh in Jesus Christ.

A.W. Tozer writes:

We can prove our faith by our commitment to it, and in no other way. Any belief that does not command the one who holds it is not a real belief; it is a pseudo belief only.

If you would believe and trust, you must commit.

Putting this all together then, faith is belief in the content of the truth of God, trust in the person of Jesus, and commitment of one's will to all that God desires and requires. It is an active reliance upon, trust in, and commitment to all that God has revealed about himself.

Once again, I caution you to not mistake faith as the moving force in one's conversion. Another theologian of a century ago, **B.B. Warfield**, wrote:

It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith.

A.W. Pink put it this way: "Faith is extending an empty hand to God to receive His gift of grace."

This video really distills all of this down to the most basic issue that is addressed when we die. **Video – The Parachute**

Now, every one of us here this morning is in one of two places. Either you have believed in the Gospel, the good news of Jesus' death for you and his resurrection, you have placed your trust in Christ for salvation, you have committed your life to him – or you have not.

The Apostle John writes:

And this is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. – *1 John 5:11-12*

Perhaps you are here today and have never placed your trust in Christ. You have not believed in him and what he has done on your behalf. God loves you dearly and sent his Son to die in your place, for your sins. But it means nothing unless you commit yourself to him, trusting in him for your salvation.

If this is where you are today, would you trust in him? Right where you are seated, in the quietness of your heart, admit that you are incapable of saving yourself, that apart from Christ, you will die in your sin. This is a decision that will forever change your destiny. God wants to forgive you; he offers his life to you, but you must accept this gift he offers by trusting in him.