

THE GOSPEL IS MORE THAN “FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE”

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I. INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly little work has been done on the definition and content of the *gospel* (*euangelion, euangelizō*) in the NT. Even with titles like *The Gospel According to Jesus*¹ or *The Gospel According to Saint Paul*² the authors nowhere define what they mean by “gospel.” *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* does contain a list of sixteen truths that are “fundamental to all evangelical teaching,”³ but does not equate this in a technical sense to the term *gospel*. Throughout these books (as well as most others about the gospel), the gospel seems to be defined as “the essentials of what must be explained in evangelism” or “the facts that must be believed in order to receive everlasting life.”⁴

This is also the way the term is often used in Free Grace circles. Like Lordship/Perseverance authors, we equate the gospel with what a person must believe in order to receive everlasting life. Our definition of the *gospel* does not differ from theirs; we just have different ideas on what is essential to the gospel. For us, the gospel is often equated with “faith alone in Christ alone for everlasting life.”

¹ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says "Follow Me"?* rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). When *gospel* is looked up in this index, we find the following entry: “See Evangelism, Lordship of Christ, Salvation,” *ibid*, 298.

² William Porcher Dubose, *The Gospel According to Saint Paul* (London: Longmans Green, nd).

³ John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 23-25.

⁴ John MacArthur writes, “What is the gospel? Here we get practical. The real question we are asking is, ‘How should I evangelize my friends, family and neighbors?’” *Faith Works*, 193. He goes on to list about twenty-one things that must be shared and believed (*ibid*, 199-208).

However, a study of the term *gospel* reveals that this understanding is incorrect. Therefore, a large part of the debate between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace is wrapped up in a failure to properly define the gospel biblically. Defining the gospel won't solve the debate, but it might clarify the issue. There is also some debate within our own circles about what truths must be shared and believed for evangelism to occur. Hopefully, a proper understanding of the gospel will bring some unity within our own circles as well.

II. LEXICAL DEFINITION

A study on the term gospel begins with a lexical analysis of the word in its original contexts in both secular and biblical usage. The term translates two Greek words: *euangelion* (noun: used 76 times in 73 verses) and *euangelizō* (verb: used 54 times in 52 verses).⁵ *Euangelion* is always translated as *gospel* in the NKJV. *Euangelizō* is most often translated as *preaching the gospel*, thus it can also be translated as "bringing glad tidings, or preaching, or proclaiming good news." Context must determine the content of the good news in view.

The word family is derived from the Greek word *angelos* meaning "messenger" and the prefix *eu-* meaning "well" or "good."⁶ Therefore, *euangelion* is a *good message*, while *euangelizō* refers to *the proclamation of a good message*.

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), the noun is only found six times and means either *good news* (2 Sam 18:20, 25, 27; 2 Kgs 7:9) or *bringing good news* (2 Sam 4:10; 18:22). The noun is never used in a religious sense. When someone brought news to David that Saul was dead, the messenger thought it was *good news* (2 Sam 4:10). Similarly, the four lepers who discovered the deserted Syrian camp and began loot-

⁵ See Appendix 1.

⁶ U. Becker, "Gospel" in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of NT Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 2:107. See also C. C. Broyles, "Gospel" in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 282. and R. P. Martin, "Gospel" in Geoffrey William Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Fully rev. ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:529.

ing it said, “We are not doing right. This is a day of *good news* and we remain silent” (2 Kgs 7:9; italics added).

The verb is used in the general sense of *proclaiming good news*. When Adonijah seeks to crown himself king, he greets the messenger Jonathan with by asking for a report of *good news* (1 Kgs 1:42). Sometimes, the birth of a son was proclaimed as good news (Jer 20:15). These are nonreligious uses, but unlike the noun, the verb is occasionally used in a religious sense to declare the works of God. In Ps 40:10, David declares the faithfulness and salvation of God. In Ps 68:11; it is the decisions and commands of God which are proclaimed. So in the LXX, the terms are non-technical words used to refer to any news that is thought to be good.

In secular Greek usage, the findings are almost identical. The primary exception is that the noun is sometimes used in religious settings, where one believes he has received a gift or a word from the gods.⁷ So in both the LXX and secular Greek usage, *euangelion* and *euangelizō* are words that refer to any good news, whether religious or not. Our primary concern, however, is whether this meaning is carried out in the NT as well.

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL

While the NT words *euangelion* and *euangelizō* still refer to good news about events and circumstances, they are used almost exclusively in a religious sense, encompassing everything the Bible says about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, including the implications of these events for the one who believes.⁸

The problem, however, is that different authors in different contexts have different *good-news* truths that they emphasize. This means one of two things. Either there are numerous different *gospels* with each author having one or more *gospel*, or there is one large, diverse, multi-faceted, all-encompassing *gospel* for the entire NT (which essentially *is* the entire NT). This second approach sees the NT term *gospel* as a non-technical way to refer to any and all good news connected to Jesus Christ. This

⁷ Friedrich, “*euangelion*” in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), II:723.

⁸ See Appendix 1 for the NT data.

article defends the second approach, but the possibility of multiple gospels must be considered first.

A. MULTIPLE GOSPELS

The multiple gospel view holds that there are different gospels for different NT authors. There is “The Gospel According to Paul,” “The Gospel According to Peter,” “The Gospel According to Jesus,” “The Gospel According to Luke,” etc. Each gospel is different from, but not in conflict with, the others. Initially, the “Four Gospels” of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John seem to steer us in this direction. However, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are a well-known genre of literature in Greek and Roman culture called “gospel” and so we shouldn’t read too much into the designation of these four accounts as “gospels.”⁹

⁹ The genre of “gospel literature” is a theological biography where the author selectively reports certain events in order to convey a specific message. The imperial cult centered around a gospel account every time a new emperor was born, and was intended to encourage emperor worship. In the imperial cult,

The ruler is divine by nature. His power extends to men, to animals, to the earth, and to the sea. Nature belongs to him; wind and waves are subject to him. He works miracles and heals men. He is the savior of the world who also redeems men from their difficulties. ...He has appeared on earth as a deity in human form. He is the protective god of the state. His appearance is the cause of good fortune to the whole kingdom. Extraordinary signs accompany the course of his life. They proclaim the birth of the ruler of the world. A comet appears at his accession, and at his death signs in heaven declare his assumption into the ranks of the gods. Because the emperor is more than a common man, his ordinances are glad messages and his commands are sacred writings. What he says is a divine act and implies good and salvation for men.

...Caesar and Christ, the emperor on the throne and the despised rabbi on the cross, confront one another.

Freidrich, in Kittel, ed., *TDNT*, II:224-25. All of this *good news* about the emperor is very similar to the *good news* the NT contains about Jesus Christ.

The three synoptic gospels follow the emperor cult pattern of gospel literature. In Greek and Roman culture, the intention of a gospel was to encourage present followers of the emperor cult to worship the new emperor. The primary

Nevertheless, in each Gospel account, the various writers do seem to emphasize different *gospel* truths. Matthew tells us that Jesus taught the “gospel [good news] of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35; 24:14) which was good news about the coming earthly kingdom and seems to be primarily for Jewish people. Mark begins his account explaining that he is going to tell the *gospel* (good news) about Jesus Christ (1:1). But only a few verses later, he talks about the “gospel of God” (1:14) as preached by John the Baptist which sounds very similar to the “gospel of the kingdom” as preached by Jesus. Similar terminology is used by Jesus in Luke (16:16).

The Gospel of John, surprisingly, doesn’t contain the word *gospel* at all.¹⁰ Most Christians have never considered the fact that in the only evangelistic book of the Bible—the Gospel of John—the word *gospel* (*euangelion*) doesn’t appear even once! Neither does the verb, *preaching the gospel* (*euangelizō*). This should give us pause as to how we use the word.¹¹

Outside of the gospel genre, we find other references to particular gospels (good news messages) of various authors. For example, in Acts and the epistles, Paul refers to “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), “my gospel” (Rom 2:16; 16:25), “the gospel of your salvation”

intention of secular gospel literature is not primarily to gain converts from other religions.

In the case of the synoptics, their aim is to make disciples of believers. John’s aim, however, is to bring people to faith in Jesus for everlasting life (John 20:30-31). The fact that John nowhere uses the term *gospel* in the “Gospel of John” hints that he may not be following the typical pattern of *gospel* genre. This helps support the idea that John’s account of the life of Christ is not primarily intended to encourage present believers to obey, but to encourage unbelievers to believe in Christ.

¹⁰ John doesn’t use the term *gospel* in his epistles either. It is used three times in Revelation (10:7; 14:6 [2x]), but there refers to God’s coming judgment, not to the saving message! Luke only uses the noun twice, both in Acts (15:7; 20:24).

¹¹ If John’s Gospel has leading people to faith in Christ for eternal life as its purpose (John 20:30-31), and yet John never calls his saving message *the gospel*, should we? See note 8 for more on this. Speaking of John’s account as an *evangelistic* book is not quite proper either, since the term *evangelism* is a transliteration from the Greek *euangelizō*, “to preach the gospel.” What John does do is explain how to pass from death unto life.

(Eph 1:13), “the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15), etc. Are these different messages Paul preached in various churches, or are they all identical? And if they are identical, how do they compare with the good news that Jesus and His apostles preached as recorded in the synoptic gospels?

C. I. Scofield is one who held to different versions of the gospel for different NT authors. He distinguished between “the gospel of the kingdom,” “the gospel of the grace of God,” “the Gospel of Paul,” and the “everlasting gospel.” His conclusions are as follows:

The Gospel of the kingdom...is the good news that God purposes to set up on the earth, in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, a kingdom, political, spiritual, Israelitish, universal, over which God’s Son, David’s heir, shall be King, and which shall be, for one thousand years, the manifestation of the righteousness of God in human affairs.

The Gospel of the grace of God...is the good news that Jesus Christ, the rejected King, has died on the cross for the sins of the world, that He was raised from the dead for our justification, and that by Him all that believe are justified from all things.

The everlasting Gospel...is to be preached to the earthdwellers at the very end of the tribulation and immediately preceding the judgment of the nations. It is neither the Gospel of the kingdom, nor of grace. Though its burden is judgment, not salvation, it is good news to Israel and to those who, during the tribulation, have been saved.

That which Paul calls “my Gospel”...is the Gospel of the grace of God in its fullest development, but includes the revelation of the result of that Gospel in the outcalling of the church, her relationships, position, privilege, and responsibility.¹²

Another author, possibly following Scofield’s lead, writes that while “In the New Testament, [the term gospel is used] only of the glad tidings of Christ and His salvation...[this is not the case] in the writings of

¹² C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press American Branch, 1909), 1343.

Paul.”¹³ He goes on to equate the “gospel of the kingdom of God” with the “gospel of the kingdom of heaven” where both refer to “the rule of God in the human heart because of Christ (Luke 17:20, 21). It also refers to the kingdom in its future state during which the believers will reign with Christ forever.”¹⁴ He emphasizes that this is different from Paul’s gospel, which is the “gospel plan of salvation, its doctrines, declarations, precepts [and] promises.”¹⁵

Similarly, Friedrich distinguishes between the various gospels in the NT. The gospel of Jesus, he writes, is a

comprehensive picture of the whole activity of Jesus. His whole life was proclamation of the Gospel. ...His birth...the coming of Jesus to earth, His life and death, were the great message of peace...peace between God and man and between man and man.¹⁶

John the Baptist, on the other hand, proclaimed “the imminence of the kingdom of God.”¹⁷ Third, the disciples, apostles and evangelists preach Christ as the kingdom of God come in the flesh, so that “bodily disorders are healed and man’s relation to God is set right...Joy reigns where this Word is proclaimed.”¹⁸

It is very possible that such definitions and distinctions between the various gospels (or good news messages) in Scripture are correct. However, the downside to such distinctions is that they lead to numerous different *gospels* in the NT, which is not only confusing, but can be misleading. If there are different *gospels*, or different versions of the *good news*, how can we know which one to use in evangelism? Should we use them all? Maybe some of them weren’t even for evangelism, but were *good news* messages for the Jewish people, or for believers.

But even if we could distinguish an evangelistic gospel from a discipleship gospel, the evangelistic gospel still seems to include large amounts of information. How much of it must be shared and believed in order for enough information to be imparted so that a person might re-

¹³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary NT: King James Version* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991), 669.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Friedrich, “*euangelizomai*” Kittel, ed., *TDNT*, II:718.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 719.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 720.

ceive everlasting life? If one only has five minutes to evangelize a person on their deathbed, which of these good news messages should be shared, and how much of it must be shared?

In light of these, and other possible pitfalls, the multiple gospel view is not the best way to understand the NT data concerning the gospel.

B. THE BROAD NT GOSPEL

Some, therefore, have opted for one, all-encompassing, multi-faceted gospel. This maintains the unity of the NT, but allows the different teachers and writers to emphasize different elements of the one gospel to fit their needs and audience. In this view, the term *gospel* is a non-technical word referring to everything and anything related to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

With this understanding, the NT *gospel* contains elemental concepts that are common throughout the NT, some minor details that are listed only once, certain truths that must be shared in evangelistic endeavors, and various ideas that should be reserved for discipleship purposes.

For example, there are gospel truths which are clearly not evangelistic. For example, in Luke 1:19, the angel Gabriel declares the *gospel* to Zechariah. Most translations say that the angel is declaring glad tidings, or declaring good news, but the Greek word is *euangelizō*, to declare the *gospel*. The content of the angel's gospel is that Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, will be the mother of John, who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

No evangelist, to my knowledge, has ever claimed that knowledge of and belief in Elizabeth as the promised mother of John the Baptist is a necessary truth of evangelism. Yet it is part of the NT gospel. This example shows us that deciding what to include in witnessing is not as easy as just including everything the NT says about the gospel. In fact, by this author's count, the NT includes *fifty* truths and facts in the gospel.¹⁹ Some of them are so vague and general, that essentially, the gospel includes everything in the NT, if not everything in the entire Bible.

So to say that a person has to know and believe everything the NT calls *gospel* in order to receive everlasting life is to say that a person has to know and believe most, if not all of the Bible. If this is so, then few, if any, actually have everlasting life, and unless the entire NT has been

¹⁹ See Appendix 1.

taught and explained, nobody has ever shared the entire gospel with anybody else.

Since it is unnecessary to share the entire *gospel*, what are the essentials of the broad NT *gospel* that must be included whenever we explain to someone how they can receive everlasting life? This question can be answered in numerous ways, but the best approach would be to take each individual passage where the term *gospel* is mentioned, and see in context (1) what truths are being taught, (2) who is doing the teaching, (3) who the audience is, (4) what the audience most likely knew prior to receiving this *gospel* information,²⁰ (5) what the desired response is for the audience, and (6) what will happen to the audience if they respond as desired. Needless to say, this sort of study for all 130 uses of *euangelion* and *euangelizō* is well beyond the scope of this article.

Therefore, a more generic approach will be taken. Four key sections of Scripture have been chosen for a macro-level study of the term *gospel* and its related truths. Three of the sections are quite large, and contain multiple references to the *gospel*. But in such a way, we can answer, in broad brush strokes, the six questions stated above.

²⁰ Of the six, this is the most difficult and subjective. Yet gaining this information is important, because often a teacher will base new information on what the audience already knows. If we leave out this element, we might leave out essential truths of the gospel that are assumed, but not discussed in a particular passage.

Also, we must consider what the writer assumes his reading audience already knows, and why he writes what he does. It is my conviction that all twenty-seven books of the NT were written to people who were already believers. Therefore, unless Biblical authors explicitly state otherwise in a specific passage, they are not writing to tell people how to receive everlasting life. Since they assume a believing readership, such authors will purposefully truncate or ignore evangelistic messages and details, focusing instead on sanctification truths.

Nevertheless, one book of the NT—the Gospel of John—though written to believers, is written largely to instruct believers how to share the message of everlasting life with unbelievers. Therefore, while the entire NT should be considered to discover the *gospel* and what to share in evangelism, from a systematic theology perspective, and for practical reasons, the Gospel of John should have priority in determining what a person must believe to receive everlasting life.

IV. KEY GOSPEL PASSAGES

The passages that have been chosen consist of three NT books (Matthew, Galatians, and Romans) and 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. These have been chosen because they represent the three key books and one key text in the NT on the term *gospel*.

A. THE USE OF *GOSPEL* IN MATTHEW

The first use of the word *gospel* in the NT is in Matt 4:23, where we read that Jesus “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel [lit., good news] of the kingdom.” Jesus was teaching His message to the Jews in the region of the Galilee that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (4:17). The Jews would have understood Jesus to be saying that the OT promises to Israel were about to come true. The Messiah would come, and lead the nation of Israel to throw off Gentile domination, and become the leading nation of the world.

For Jews living under Roman occupation, this was *good news*! It was *gospel*. It was exactly what they were looking and longing for. What better news could there be? So Jesus preached a *gospel* to the Jews of Israel that the earthly kingdom was being offered.

The condition for the reception of this promise was the national repentance of Israel (4:17). Jesus said that to receive the kingdom, the Jewish people had to repent of the way they had perverted and destroyed the law of God, and return to a right relationship with Him in true obedience to the law. As an indication of their repentance, they had to be baptized, symbolizing their death to the ways of Judaism.²¹

Most Jewish people did not like this bad news element of the good news that Jesus preached, and so they rejected Christ as the Messiah, and instead of receiving the kingdom, killed Christ on the cross. As these events began to unfold, Jesus, knowing how things would turn out, pronounced woe upon Chorazin and Bethsaida (typifying the whole nation of Israel) that because they did not repent, judgment was coming (11:20-22). So the kingdom was postponed, along with the good news about it. Incidentally, Jesus teaches in Matt 24:14 that during the Tribulation, this good news of the kingdom will be preached again. During that time, the Jewish people will accept it, so that at the end of the Tribulation, they receive the promised kingdom.

²¹ For more on Israelite repentance, see David Anderson, “The National Repentance of Israel” *JOTGES* 11:21 (Autumn 1998),

That is the *gospel* message in Matthew. Scofield’s explanation of the “gospel of the kingdom” fits very well into Matthew’s use of the *gospel*. *But it is also clear that unless we spiritualize the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel according to Jesus as recorded in Matthew is not a gospel that can be offered to Gentiles in the church age.* There are certainly principles that apply to Gentiles today, especially the truth that a failure to repent of sin will lead to being cut off from God’s purposes and experiencing the wrath of God (which is what Romans 9–11 is all about). The kingdom, as used by Matthew, is not offered today to the church. Therefore, the gospel of kingdom is not something that must be included in our evangelism, or believed for the reception of everlasting life.

But although Matthew’s *gospel* was specific for the Jewish people at the time of Christ (and during the future Tribulation), from a broader NT perspective, it *is* good news for the church and the entire world as well, for it is through Matthew’s *gospel* that we learn about Jesus Christ, and how the Jewish rejection of Christ has led to the reconciliation of the world (Rom 11:15).

So there is a specific gospel in Matthew, but it is part of the broader NT gospel. But as was seen, there is little, if anything, in Matthew’s *gospel* about how to receive everlasting life, and therefore, it is questionable that Matthew should be used when explaining to people how to receive everlasting life.

A brief word about the *gospel* in Mark and Luke is appropriate here. The *gospel* in Mark and Luke also emphasize Matthew’s kingdom truths when Jewish people are the intended audience (e.g., Mark 1:14-15; 13:10; Luke 4:18; 4:43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1). However, Mark and Luke also make frequent mention of the *gospel* when mixed multitudes, Gentiles, disciples or the whole world is in view (Mark 14:9). Frequently, in these gospel offers, commitment, discipleship and cost are required of those who will respond. But in these instances, it is not everlasting life that is offered, but great reward in the life to come (Mark 8:35; 10:29). Sometimes, apart from the coming kingdom or the offer of eternal reward, the *gospel* contains truths about Christ’s birth and resurrection (Mark 16:15; Luke 1:19; 2:10; 3:18). There are occasional calls to *believe the gospel*, with the promised result not being everlasting life, but deliverance from coming wrath (Mark 1:15; 16:15-16).²²

²² Mark 1:15 may shed a lot of light on understanding Mark 16:15-16. If believing the gospel of the kingdom leads one to repentance (or the baptism of

So nowhere in Matthew (or Mark and Luke) do we find a definition for the gospel as “faith alone in Christ alone.” In fact, so far, we haven’t even seen that this truth *is* an element of the gospel. The “Gospel” of John, of course, frequently mentions that everlasting life is by faith alone in Christ alone, but as was mentioned earlier, the term *gospel* never appears in John, and so it doesn’t help us define how the NT uses the term. It should, however, make us wonder whether the good news elsewhere in the NT is equivalent to the message of life found in John.

B. THE USE OF *GOSPEL* IN GALATIANS

Any study of the term *gospel* must also consider Paul’s writings, since he uses the term more than any other biblical writer.²³ The main trouble with Paul’s use of the term is that in many cases, he seems to assume that his audience knows what he is talking about. So we must look at the few places where he seems to define the essential elements of his *gospel* and proceed from there.

The first place might be Paul’s letter to the Galatians, for it is in this letter that he defends the good news he preached. In Galatians, Paul is very concerned about a false gospel that is being preached and spread among the church. He begins his letter by warning the Christians about another gospel that is being presented among them (1:8-9). He says that he preached the true gospel to them, and anything else is a false gospel.

So the initial goal is to discover what Paul preached when he was in Galatia. But thankfully, to find this information, we do not have to go to Matthew, Romans, 1 Corinthians or even Acts, since none of these tell us what Paul preached in Galatia. Instead, Paul reminds his initial audience (and so informs later readers) what he preached to the Galatians.

After telling his readers that he is going to defend his gospel (1:8-9), he defines the gospel he preached (2:14-17). The gospel Paul preached in Galatia is that “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16).

But Paul does not stop defining his gospel in v 16. It appears from Gal 2:17-21 that after an unbeliever believes in Jesus for everlasting life,

repentance) in order to escape temporal judgment, then the salvation of 16:16 is not everlasting life, but deliverance from judgment. If Mark is written to believers (as I believe it was), then 16:15-16 is a call to believers (cf. 16:14), not unbelievers. Mark records two conditions for believers to escape wrath: (1) repent and (2) believe the good news about the kingdom offer.

²³ Sixty of the 76 uses of *euangelion* are in Pauline literature.

Paul continues to preach his gospel to them, only then, it is not a message of how to be justified, but how to live a life of freedom from sin. He talks about how we still do sin, but this doesn't prove we are not saved, nor does it mean that Christ is a minister of sin. Rather, all it means is that we are not living the crucified life.

So the good news message Paul preached in Galatia involved information for both believers and unbelievers. He told unbelievers to believe in Jesus for justification. To those who were justified by faith in Christ apart from works, he told them to live the crucified life, to live by faith that in Christ, they are dead to sin. That is the gospel Paul preached in Galatia—how unbelievers can receive everlasting life, and how believers can live free from sin.²⁴

C. THE USE OF *GOSPEL* IN ROMANS

If Romans is Paul's *mangum opus* on the *gospel*, we should expect a clear explanation about the content of the gospel he's writing about. And this is what we find. Though he does define the *gospel* in Galatians, he elaborates on it here.

Paul begins his letter right away by talking about the gospel. He wants to tell his readers what his letter is about. Verse 1 indicates that all sixteen chapters concern the gospel, not just the first three five or eight chapters. In Rom 1:1, we read, “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.” The following verses explain what he was separated to.²⁵

First, he says that this gospel he has been separated to was “promised before though His prophecies in the Holy Scriptures” (1:2). So this gospel was a topic of prophecy. But in v 3, we really get into the content of the gospel. This gospel concerns “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

So here we have several more elements in Paul's broad idea of *gospel*. It concerns Jesus Christ, who is Lord. Next, Jesus was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh. Many say that the Lordship of Christ is essential to the gospel, which here is seen to be true. But

²⁴ Galatians 3:8 also includes in the gospel the fact that in Abraham, all people will be blessed (cf. Gen 12:1-3).

²⁵ David K. Davey, “The Intrinsic Nature of the Gospel,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 148.

nobody says that His lineage from David is essential. Yet Paul includes both in his gospel. Third, we read that He was declared to be the Son of God. While this is either a reference to His deity, or to Him being the King of Israel, it primarily is a reference to the power and authority Jesus received *after* the resurrection. And nobody denies that the resurrection is central to the good news.

In v 5 Paul explains why he was separated to the gospel, and why he preached. He says that he preached this gospel “for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name.” René Lopez points out in his commentary on Romans that there are four ways this phrase “obedience to the faith” can be understood, and he makes the case, rightly I believe, that Paul is not primarily referring to initial faith in Jesus for justification, but the continual life of faith in Christ which results in obedience. He says “Obedience to believe consists of faith, and [the] obedience to follow is produced by faith.”²⁶

In other words, Paul’s gospel in Romans is not simply to tell unbelievers how to receive justification and everlasting life. Paul’s gospel in Romans includes this truth, but much more. Paul wants to emphasize how justified believers can live the life of faithful obedience to God, thereby escaping the temporal wrath of God in this life which comes upon us as a result of sin.

This is further seen by looking at Rom 1:16-17, the theme verses of Romans. The main point of these verses is that the gospel Paul preached is the power of God for salvation, or deliverance, to everyone who believes, that is, to believers. In Romans, Paul is not primarily teaching a gospel for unbelievers, but for believers! He wants to tell those who have already believed how to be delivered. Delivered from what? In v 18, we read about the “wrath of God” coming against those who practice unrighteousness.²⁷

Paul’s gospel, or good news, in Romans is a message about how all people, whether Jew or Greek, can escape the temporal discipline and judgment of God in this life. Unbelievers must believe in Jesus for justification. Believers must live a life of faith under the cross of Christ. And

²⁶ René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 34.

²⁷ For various views on how the “wrath of God” in Romans is to be understood, see Davey, “The Intrinsic Nature of the Gospel,” 157; René A. Lopez, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2002): 45-66.

of course, Romans 9–11 talk about how the Jewish people came under the wrath of God, and how they can escape it. Chapters 12–16 provide practical application for believers who want to escape wrath.

The gospel in Romans is about how both unbelievers and believers can be delivered from the temporal wrath of God: faith in Christ for justification and living by faith (resulting in obedience) for sanctification.

D. THE USE OF *GOSPEL* IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

Paul’s explanation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 is probably more controversial than any other gospel-related passage in the NT. But this is because this passage seems to explicitly define what the *gospel* is. In vv 1-2, Paul writes,

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

He writes that he is going to reiterate to them the gospel he preached when he was among them, which they had received, in which they still stand. There are no problems with this statement thus far, but the rest of v 2 brings the dilemma. Paul writes, “by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached.” This seems to imply that the gospel Paul preached, and which he is going to repeat here, explains what is necessary to believe in order to receive and retain (!) everlasting life.

Paul seems to imply that if a person doesn’t persevere in holding fast to the gospel, then they either lose their salvation, or never really believed in the first place. If Paul is defining what a person must believe in order to be justified, then apparently, they have to continue to believe it to stay justified or prove themselves justified. The only other option is that the word *saved* is not referring to being saved from eternal condemnation, but refers to some other form of deliverance. This is the best option, since the term *saved* in 1 Corinthians generally refers to being healthy or blameless at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 1:18, 21; 3:15; 5:5).

So if the gospel Paul is about to define is a message for believers, to prepare them for the Bema, then this passage is not about the essential elements that must be believed in order to receive everlasting life. Rather, it contains essential discipleship truths which effect our sanctification.

But since this understanding of 1 Corinthians 15 is probably a new concept to most people, let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the traditional view is correct, and Paul is talking about essential evangelistic truths that a person must believe in order to receive everlasting life. In vv 3-4, he begins to delineate what these essentials are. He says, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Most people, when they use this passage to define the gospel, stop at the end of v 4. Those who do so, say that based on this passage, there are three things a person must believe in order to receive everlasting life. They must believe that:

1. Christ died for our sins
2. He was buried
3. He rose again from the dead.

Some add a fourth element that we must also believe we are sinners because the first truth implies a prior belief in our own sinfulness.

But who in Christendom, except for the liberal (and now postmodern) theologians, doesn't believe these three (or four) truths? Almost everybody in most evangelical schools and churches believes that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. So if this is all that is necessary to receive everlasting life, then almost everyone in Christendom is going to heaven—even all those who believe that our own good works and faithfulness are required along with Christ's sacrifice.²⁸

Some, recognizing that God does not give everlasting life to people who are trusting in their own good works to get to heaven, in an attempt to *narrow the door* go outside of 1 Corinthians 15. They may add something about justification by faith *alone* in Christ *alone*. They must do so because that fundamental truth is not mentioned here!

But before such outside additions are allowed, we must be certain we have added everything from this passage to the definition of the gospel that Paul does. We need to make sure we have included everything from 1 Corinthians 15. Most people who use 1 Corinthians 15 as a formal definition of the gospel arbitrarily stop at v 4. But Paul does not stop

²⁸ There is nothing in 1 Cor 15:1-11 that eliminates obedience as a condition of the salvation in v 2! Indeed, if our analysis is correct, then obedience and faith are *both* required to be healthy at the Bema.

defining his gospel in v 4. He continues to define the gospel in vv 5-8. He says,

...and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

So if 1 Corinthians 15 defines what a person must believe to receive everlasting life, not only must we include the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also the appearances of Christ to Cephas, then the twelve, then to over 500 at once, then to James, then to the apostles, then last of all to Paul.

Very few people in the history of evangelism have shared all these truths with unbelievers and required them to believe all these appearances in order to receive everlasting life. But, for the sake of argument, if somebody does start including all of this in their witnessing, including the *faith alone in Christ alone* which they had to get from outside 1 Corinthians 15, they still have said nothing about the holiness of God, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, or the sinless perfection of Christ. There are many who say that if a person believes that Jesus wasn't God, or wasn't sinless, then they are not born again. But these truths aren't here either.

Do you see where this leads? As soon as someone starts adding things to the list of what a person must believe in order to have everlasting life, there is no rational stopping place. It's all subjective to how much doctrine you want to throw into the mix. Some will have three essentials, another will have five, while someone else will have eight or ten. And of course, all of these truths can be shown to be essential to the *gospel* since all of them, in one place or another in the NT, are included in the *gospel*. But, as Appendix 1 reveals, there are at least fifty NT truths related to the *gospel* and nobody says you have to proclaim all fifty.

The conclusion then is that 1 Corinthians 15 does not contain the entire good news message. There are certainly elements of it there, but it is not all there. Therefore, it is not a definitive definition of the gospel. And it especially is not an explanation of what a person must believe in order to receive everlasting life. That is not in 1 Corinthians 15 at all. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is defending the resurrection by showing that since

Christ was raised, believers will be raised also. This is good news (*gospel*) for the believer and this good news, if held on to, will make the believer healthy at the Bema.

V. WHAT IS THE *GOSPEL*?

So what is the *gospel*? It can easily be proved from Scripture that *the gospel* is more than faith alone in Christ alone. Much more. The gospel “is not a consistent and clearly definable term which we can express in a brief formula.”²⁹ The gospel includes elements of the kingdom of God on earth. It includes facts about justification, sanctification, glorification, security in heaven, contentment on earth, and eternal reward. The gospel includes all of this.

[The good news is] that God has acted for the salvation of the world in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. ...[This] does not mean only the content of what is preached, but also the act, process and execution of the proclamation. ...The content of this gospel is the history of Jesus with its individual events.³⁰

While the term *gospel* is a non-technical term for any good news, the NT usage seems to limit define it as good news for everybody, whether Jew or Gentile, believer or unbeliever, regarding the benefits and blessings which come to us from the person and work of Jesus Christ.³¹ It includes everything from “the eschatological expectation, the proclamation of the [kingdom of God]...the introduction of the Gentiles into salvation history, [and] the rejection of the ordinary religion of cult and Law.”³² This gospel contains *everything* related to the person and work of Jesus Christ, including all of the events leading up to His birth, and all the ramifications from Christ’s life, death, and resurrection for unbelievers and believers.

²⁹ See Friedrich, “*euangelion*” in Kittel, ed., *TDNT*, II:729.

³⁰ U. Becker, “Gospel” in Brown, ed., *NIDNTT*, 2:111-12.

³¹ Friedrich writes, “The heart of the good news is the story of Jesus and His suffering, death and resurrection. Everything connected with this may be preaching of the Gospel. ...If we were to sum up the content of the Gospel in a single word, it would be Jesus the Christ.” See “*euangelizomai*” in Kittel, ed., *TDNT*, II:730-31.

³² Friedrich, “*euangelizomai*,” 709-10, 717.

Based on what has been learned, it is easy to see why many evangelistic presentations can become so convoluted and involved. If someone tries to share all that the NT includes in the *gospel* they must share the entire NT (and probably the OT as well). But if we realize that much of the *gospel* focuses on sanctification truths for the believer, it becomes obvious that the entire gospel does not have to be shared in evangelism. This liberates us from worrying about whether we have shared enough.

So the real the real question then is not “How much of the gospel do you have to believe?” but rather “What do you have to believe to receive everlasting life?” If we want to know what a person must believe to receive everlasting life, we should not asks the question, “What is the gospel?” but rather, “What is the message of life?” When asked that way, the answer becomes crystal clear. The Gospel of John, which does not contain the word *gospel*, tells us over and over what people must do to receive everlasting life: believe in Jesus for everlasting life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; etc.) You do not have to believe the gospel to receive everlasting life, you only have to believe in Jesus for everlasting life.

Of course, as this study has revealed, faith in Christ for everlasting life is an element of the gospel, for what better news in Scripture is there that anyone who believes in Jesus has everlasting life? There is no better news. But there is a vast difference between saying that this truth is *part* of the gospel and saying that it *is* the gospel. Similarly, saying that one has to believe the gospel to be saved is like saying one has to believe the Bible to be saved. Such a statement is not wrong; it’s just too vague.

The NT term *gospel* is like the NT terms *saved* and *salvation*. The terms *saved* and *salvation* are too vague to refer accurately to the what a person receives when they believe in Jesus. Therefore, asking someone if they have “believed the gospel” is like asking someone if they are saved. Such a question is not technically wrong, it’s just not as clear as we could be, for without further explanation or clarification, such questions have different meanings for different people. When we tell someone to “believe the gospel” we run the risk of being seriously misunderstood.

It is better to be clear as we can, and to do that, use the the message of everlasting life as found in the only evangelistic book of the Bible: John. The message of life in John is that anyone who believes in Jesus for everlasting life, has it. This is a truth of the gospel, but it is not the entire gospel, nor must the entire gospel be believed to receive everlasting life.

When teaching, preaching or evangelizing, there is one truth of the gospel that *must* always be included. And this one truth has three parts. A person must

1. Believe
2. In Jesus
3. For everlasting life.³³

How much of the rest of the gospel you want to share depends on the person you are sharing with, the questions and issues they have, and how much time you have to share. The gospel message may truly be different every time to you share it. And that's okay, because you are being flexible to the person before you, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

But the one thing that must never be left out is that to receive everlasting life, a person must believe in Jesus Christ alone. If a person believes the rest of the gospel, but they don't believe in Jesus for everlasting life, they have not believed the one justifying element of the gospel. The gospel is more than faith alone in Christ alone, but justification for everlasting life comes only through faith alone in Christ alone.

APPENDIX 1

There chart on the following pages demonstrates fifty truths that the NT includes in its definition of the *gospel*. Though there may be some overlap of certain truths, there may also be a few that were missed.

When a double question-mark (??) appears, it means that the context of the verse is unclear as to what truth the term *gospel* is referring to.

³³ These three elements make up the "core truth of the gospel." See Bob Wilkin, "Tough Questions About Saving Faith," *The Grace Evangelical Society News* (June 1990), 1. He elsewhere writes that these are the *sine qua non*, or the three essentials in evangelism, Bob Wilkin, "Justification By Faith Alone is an Essential Part of the Gospel" *JOTGES* 18:35 (Autumn 2005), 12. Friedrich agrees when he writes that "faith is the condition of the efficacy of the Gospel." See "*euangelizomai*" in Kittel, ed., *TDNT*, II:732.

Greek Noun: <i>euangelion</i>	Greek Verb: <i>euangelizō</i>	Translated “gospel” (NKJV) unless noted below	Content of the Gospel (only new items will be added)
Matt 4:23			1. The kingdom is coming
Matt 9:35			1
	Matt 11:5		1
Matt 24:14			1 – In tribulation
Matt 26:13			1
Mark 1:1			2. The full story in Mark
Mark 1:14			1
Mark 1:15			1
Mark 8:35			1
Mark 10:29			1
Mark 13:10			1
Mark 14:9			1
Mark 16:15			2
			3. Emphasis on resurrection
			4. Believe to be saved
			5. Be baptized
	Luke 1:19	bring glad tidings	6. Mary’s virgin conception
	Luke 2:10	bring good tidings	7. Jesus born in Bethlehem
	Luke 3:18	preached	8. Jesus is coming
			9. Baptism of fire is coming
			10. Baptism of HS is coming
	Luke 4:18		1
	Luke 4:43	proclaim good news	1
	Luke 7:22		1
	Luke 8:1	bringing glad tidings	1
	Luke 9:6		1
	Luke 16:16	has been preached	1
	Luke 20:1		1?
	Acts 5:42	preaching	11. Jesus is the Messiah
	Acts 8:4	preaching the word	??
	Acts 8:25		??
	Acts 8:35	preached	12. Jesus’ humiliation/death
	Acts 8:40	preached	??
	Acts 10:36	preaching	13. Jesus is Lord
			14. Jesus was anointed
			15. Jesus healed all
			3
	Acts 13:32	declare glad tidings	3
			4
	Acts 14:7		??
	Acts 4:15	proclaim good news	16. Turn from idols to God
	Acts 14:21		??
Acts 15:7			??
	Acts 15:35	proclaim the word	??
	Acts 16:10		??

	Acts 17:18	proclaim good news	includes 3
Acts 20:24			1
Rom 1:1			13
			17. A physical descendant of David
			18. The Son of God
			3
Rom 1:9			
	Rom 1:15		19. How to live the justified life by faith
Rom 1:16			19
Rom 2:16			19
	Rom 10:15		??
Rom 10:16			??
Rom 11:28			??
Rom 15:16			??
Rom 15:19			??
	Rom 15:20		??
Rom 5:29			??
Rom 16:25			??
	1 Cor 1:17		20. The message of the cross
1 Cor 4:15			??
1 Cor 9:12			??
1 Cor 9:14			??
	1 Cor 9:16		??
1 Cor 9:18			??
	1 Cor 9:18		??
1 Cor 9:23			??
1 Cor 15:1			21. Christ died
			22. For our sins
			23. He was buried
			24. He rose from the dead
			25. the third day
			26. As Scripture teaches
			27. He appeared to Cephas
			28. He appeared to the 12
			29. He appeared to 500
			30. He appeared to James
			31. He appeared to all the apostles
			32. He appeared to Paul
	1 Cor 15:1		21-32
	1 Cor 15:2	the word...preached	21-32
2 Cor 2:12			??
2 Cor 4:3			??
2 Cor 4:4			??
2 Cor 8:18			??
2 Cor 9:13			??

2 Cor 10:14			??
	2 Cor 10:16		??
2 Cor 11:4			??
2 Cor 11:7			??
	2 Cor 11:7		??
Gal 1:6			33
Gal 1:7			33
	Gal 1:8		33
	Gal 1:9		33
Gal 1:11			33
	Gal 1:11		33
	Gal 1:16	preach	33
	Gal 1:23	proclaim good news	33
Gal 2:2			33
Gal 2:5			33
Gal 2:7			33
Gal 2:14			33. Not justified by works, but by faith in Christ (2:16)
			34. In Abraham, all people will be blessed
	Gal 4:13		33
Eph 1:13			??
	Eph 2:17	preached	??
Eph 3:6			35
	Eph 3:8	proclaim good news	35. Unsearchable riches in Christ and fellowship of the mystery
Eph 6:15			??
Eph 6:19			35
Phil 1:5			??
Phil 1:7			??
Phil 1:12			??
Phil 1:16			??
Phil 1:27			??
Phil 2:22			??
Phil 4:3			??
Phil 4:15			??
Col 1:5			36. Hope laid up for you in heaven
Col 1:23			36
1 Thess 1:5			37
1 Thess 2:2			37
1 Thess 2:4			37
1 Thess 2:8			37
1 Thess 2:9			37. That believers walk worthy of God (2:12)
1 Thess 3:2			??
	1 Thess 3:6	declared good news	38. A church’s faith and love

2 Thess 1:8			??
2 Thess 2:14			39. God chose you for salvation through sanctification, by the Spirit and belief in the truth
1 Tim 1:11			40. All are sinners, but all who believe receive everlasting life (1:15-16)
2 Tim 1:8			41. Called with a holy calling 33 42. Given in Christ before time began 43. Now given in Christ's appearing 44. He abolished death 45. He brought life and immortality to light
2 Tim 1:10			<i>inclusio</i> with 1:8
2 Tim 2:8			17 24
Phlm 1:13			??
	Heb 4:2		46. Entering God's rest (Note: Whatever <i>gospel</i> the writer of Hebrews is using, is the same <i>gospel</i> that was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness wanderings.)
	Heb 4:6	preached	56
	1 Pet 1:12		47. Sufferings of Christ 48. Glories that would follow (1:11)
	1 Pet 1:25		?? – If Peter is referring specifically to Isa 40:6-8, we have several more elements of the gospel
	1 Pet 4:6		?? – preached to the dead?
1 Pet 4:17			??
	Rev 10:7	declared	??
Rev 14:6			49. Fear, glorify, and worship God 50. Judgment has come
	Rev 14:6		49-50