

# Biblical Evangelism



Rob Ventura

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# Biblical Evangelism

## 1. The Need for Biblical Evangelism

*Could a mariner sit idly by  
if he heard the drowning cry?  
Could a doctor sit in comfort  
and just let his patients die?  
Could a fireman sit idle,  
that men burn and give no hand?  
Can you sit at ease in Zion  
with the world around you damned?*

—Leonard Ravenhill

You don't need to look very far to realize something is horribly wrong in our world. Depression, suicides, school shootings, drug overdoses, murder, and divorce rates are at an all-time high. Then there is abortion, transgenderism, the homosexual movement, same-sex marriage, the adverse marginalization of the Christian faith in culture, especially in the West, and the various false beliefs that fill people's minds, such as humanism, secularism, atheism, relativism, and postmodernism. Underlying all of these problems is the more profound matter, theologically speaking, that men and women who are not true Christians are spiritually lost, blind, dead in trespasses and sins, "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). There is a sad condition that hangs over the streets and homes of many like a deadly fog. It is persistent. It is lethal. It is grim.

There are many theories proposed regarding the cause of our current situation in the world and just as many theories detailing how to fix it. Thankfully, the Bible diagnoses the problem and gives us its own solution, one which we can know is accurate and certain. It's not a complicated solution. In fact, it's something every Christian can engage in and is called to. It doesn't cost much money. Indeed, it is free. In most cases, it doesn't require a whole lot of training or schooling. People such as the tombstone demoniac in the Bible engaged in it from the moment of his conversion (Luk 8:26-39). But what solution am I talking about? I am talking, of course, about biblical evangelism.

### *What Is Biblical Evangelism?*

To illustrate why this solution is “simple” yet imperative, let's consider both what biblical evangelism is, and is not. If someone were to ask you to define evangelism, what would you say? What would you include in the definition? What would you leave out? As we will see, how we define evangelism will have profound practical implications on how we practice it. Poor definitions of evangelism can keep people from doing it at all, or even worse, they could inspire the unbiblical and compromised types of evangelism that are so in vogue today.

For example, how many readers think evangelism means seeing converts? Or growing our churches? Or winning souls? Or getting people to say a prayer? The ideas of decisions, results, altar calls, and “sinner's prayers” are deeply engrained in the minds of most Christians living in America, but this

has created a severe problem. This kind of evangelism only worsens [our society] by creating large numbers of false converts in churches and neighborhoods, making the task that much harder. It also leads to idolatry since the Jesus that is presented is no longer like the One we see in the Bible. He is packaged and marketed more as a life coach, therapist, or someone to get us through tough stretches of life rather than the Almighty God Who is mighty to “save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21).

But thankfully, there is another way, and one that is biblical. The word “evangelism” comes from a Greek word that means “to declare, bring, or preach good news.” Thus, at its core, to evangelize is simply “to proclaim good news.”

In the Bible, its meaning is more narrowly focused on “telling or sharing the good news or the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.”<sup>1</sup> That’s it! Biblical evangelism is that straightforward. When we are evangelizing, we are “gospelizing,”<sup>2</sup> which is to say we are spreading the message about Jesus, the Savior.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that evangelism can assume many forms: personal witnessing one-on-one, parents evangelizing their children at home, tract distribution, standing on a soapbox in the public square, going door to door, or both home and foreign missions. Also, my definition will show that there is a difference between giving one’s testimony and evangelism. Sharing a testimony is a good thing that may lead to evangelism, but it does not by itself give the content of the gospel which is Christ Himself. Living a holy life before others is crucial and testifies to the power of the gospel, but it alone is not evangelism.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/what-evangelism>.

Such a definition as this should help recalibrate how we see the practice of evangelism since evangelism happens even if people aren't saved. It is no longer about whether we can force or manipulate someone into believing what we share with them. Instead, we joyfully leave the results to God, knowing that "salvation is of the LORD" (Jon 2:9). Success in evangelism is not about numbers *but faithfulness to share the gospel message*. It is about delivering and announcing—not converting.

This, of course, is not to say that we aren't eager to see souls saved. Heaven rejoices at the salvation of one repentant sinner, and we do as well (Luk 15:10). It also doesn't mean we do not earnestly entreat people to repent and believe when we evangelize. Like Paul, our aim when evangelizing should be to plead with others to be reconciled to God (2Co 5:20). We must fervently pray and weep for souls. But it is up to God to give spiritual life. We can beseech and weep, but unless God moves on the person who hears the gospel and opens their heart (Act 16:14), nothing will happen. *Faithfulness in sharing the gospel is our job, not producing numbers.*

Doesn't such a view of evangelism free up the reader to want to share the gospel? Doesn't it motivate you to be involved in this most sacred task? Isn't it liberating to know that the only failure in evangelism is not doing it? If you have faithfully shared the gospel according to God's Word, then you were successful. You were faithful to the call to evangelize your neighbor—who, biblically speaking,

is anyone near you. Hence, the reason why our biblical definition is so crucial.

### *Why Is Evangelism Necessary?*

This leads us back to where we began our discussion at the start of the chapter. Biblical evangelism is critical at any time, but this is especially true today in the period and culture in which we live. There is a great need for evangelism because the gospel is the only lasting, eternal remedy for the lost.

As we consider the need for evangelism, we should note that our society is similar to the one that Paul addressed in his letter to the Romans. Pagans, unbelievers, and fornicators lived side by side with very religious Jews, and they were all lost and heading to hell. This is what we find in the world. There are very religious people among us, but much of their religion is nominal. At the same time, there is much non-religious activity that occupies the attention of many, such as the idolatrous worship of sports and entertainment, along with an increase in occultic practices. If we can see how Paul approached such a situation with a view to seeing sinners made right with God through Jesus, we can apply it to our context.

*First*, the apostle reminds us that all people are guilty before God and under His just condemnation: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18).

*Second*, Paul reminds us that there's another sector of society that isn't into sexual deviancy or paganism but still desperately needs the Savior. He addresses such people in Romans 2. These are the people who are outraged by violence and drugs, yet they approach it from an angle of self-righteous disinterest. These are the cults, formalists, and religious Pharisees. They are trying to get to heaven based on their own merit or worth. These are zealous Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or, tragically, even some people in the professing Christian church. This is a type of dead orthodoxy or false religion; it is outward religion without inward regeneration of the heart. They think their religion, tradition, and rituals can save them. Not so, says Paul. Such folks are in no better condition than the sinners they look down upon. In Romans 3:10-18, Paul then summarizes the situation concerning all people, whether religious or not:

“There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God...There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Having written this, thankfully, Paul doesn't leave us without hope. He doesn't simply describe the scene and then throw up his hands in great despair and grim pessimism. Rather, he tells us that the remedy is the gospel, and so, even though “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” such fallen sinners through the gospel can be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23-24). This is what Paul calls “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom

1:16). Such a gospel is full, wide, and free to all (I will speak about this more in the next chapter<sup>3</sup>). It is for Jew or Gentile, pagan or self-righteous Pharisee. This is why he told us back in Romans 1 that he is “not ashamed”<sup>4</sup> or embarrassed about the gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16). And why should he be since the gospel is the instrument through which the saving power of God operates in order to rescue men and women from their sins (1Co 1:18)? It is the plain preaching of the gospel that is the means through which God’s omnipotence works to bring spiritually dead sinners to new life in His Son. As the great Puritan William Gurnall said, the gospel is “the chariot wherein the Spirit rides victoriously when He makes His entrance into the hearts of men.” This is why the gospel is the only message worth proclaiming. This is why Paul was not ashamed of it.

But this leads to a new problem. Now that we know the gospel is the great remedy for lost souls, how will it spread? How can people actually be saved by it? Paul doesn’t leave us guessing. He tells us exactly how this gospel is to be spread.

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<sup>3</sup> The chapter referred to is in the full-length book from which this booklet was adapted by permission. Get your copy of Rob Ventura’s *Equipped to Evangelize: A Biblical Foundation* from Christian Focus Publications, [www.christianfocus.com](http://www.christianfocus.com).

<sup>4</sup> The word *ashamed* here in the Greek text is a present tense verb indicating habitual disposition. The point is, Paul was not at all ashamed of the gospel, nor would he ever be—the gospel, which was centered on the doing, the dying, and the rising of Jesus Christ our Lord on our behalf.

## *The Fourfold Call to Evangelize*

It won't surprise anyone to hear that the Apostle Paul was the model evangelist, aside from Jesus Christ Himself. Paul doesn't merely emphasize the importance of speaking to the lost about Jesus, which is true enough, but he says his life's work is to do so (1Co 9:17-22). Even as he gives us the marvelous predestinarian passages of Romans 9 and Ephesians 1, he also sees himself as having a vital part to play when it comes to the saving of souls.<sup>5</sup> What is more, he wants to make sure nothing hinders him from this. I have "made myself a servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (1Co 9:19). He tells us that he wants to win "the Jews" (1Co 9:20). He also wants to win "the weak" (1Co 9:22). Paul was thoroughly convinced that he was a conduit through which people were won to God (1Co 3:5). He even tells us that he seeks to win souls in any or every way, or "by all means" (1Co 9:22).

Such a background into Paul's mindset helps us to understand better what is meant by his fourfold "how" call to evangelize when he writes in Romans 10:14-15a: "*How* then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and *how* shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and *how* shall they hear without a preacher? And *how* shall they preach, except they be sent?" Here Paul tells us that people have to call on Christ in order to be saved

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<sup>5</sup> This highlights an important point: biblical Calvinism is no hindrance to biblical evangelism. The biblical doctrine of election was no deterrent for Paul's widespread evangelizing. In fact, it was the very impetus for it.

for “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13). This is the idea of believing in Christ alone for salvation. “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). But true faith expresses itself by calling on Christ. The point is, you don’t call on someone you don’t believe in, and you certainly can’t call on someone you’ve never heard of. But “how shall they hear without a preacher?” And “how shall they preach, except they be sent?”<sup>6</sup> The answer to these questions is: they cannot. This is the crucial part that evangelism plays, and specifically, the part of human agency in connection to it. God uses means to convert people. The means God uses is that of us sharing the gospel with others so that they might hear its truth.

We see this, for example, in Paul’s letters, where an emphasis on “hearing” is found in many. Writing to the Romans, Paul says, “So then faith cometh *by hearing*, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). When writing to the Thessalonians, he says, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God *which ye heard of us*, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1Th 2:13). Again, when writing to the Galatians, Paul says, “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the *hearing of faith*” (Gal 3:2)? And to the Ephesians he says, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye *heard the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph

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<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, I understand that this sending is done through a local church (cf. Acts 13:1-3).

1:13). Hearing requires someone speaking. It presupposes that a human being will make contact with another human being and share with them the message of life that is found in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Christians must be involved in evangelism because this is God's way of spreading the gospel, which is the great remedy for lost souls. This is God's means of them hearing about Jesus, the only Savior of sinners.

### *For Reflection and Discussion*

1. What is the definition of biblical evangelism?
2. What are some wrong methods of evangelism and why?
3. Why is it essential for us to be involved in evangelism?
4. In what ways can you be involved in it?

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<sup>7</sup> This "contact" can be through written as well as spoken means. Some are saved by simply reading the Word of God or a book about the gospel. In any case, the hearing or the reading of the Word is necessary (cf. James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

## 2. The Message of Biblical Evangelism

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

—The Apostle Paul in Romans 1:16

Now, let's tackle the most vital question: What exactly is the "gospel"? According to the Bible, what are the main aspects of this word, which means "good news?"<sup>8</sup> Unlike previous generations, our present age is relatively uneducated concerning this crucial question. In a time like ours, the irony is stark—the most important message in all the universe is almost entirely unknown to many outside the church and, sadly, even to some within it.

In asking your unsaved neighbors what the gospel is, you might hear, "It's the words of Jesus." Or, "It's the various books of the Bible." Some might

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<sup>8</sup> The term *gospel* is found in the Septuagint, where it refers to the Old Testament footmen who announced the "good news" of freedom from Babylonian captivity in the sixth century B.C. (Isa 52:7-10; Rom 10:15). The heralds zealously announced the joyful news before the people. The term "gospel" was not invented by Paul but was already used by the Romans to refer to Roman imperial propaganda. There was what was called the "good news" or "the gospel" of the Caesars, referring to a birth announcement or a rise to power of an emperor, bringing hope to the whole population.

The gospel that we share with others is much grander and more glorious than these examples. Our gospel is God's decree of freedom, not merely from physical enemies and oppression, as with the Hebrew exiles, but from spiritual enemies and oppression. The good news we proclaim is not about a mere man, such as Caesar, but rather about the all-powerful God-man, Jesus Christ, Who alone is to be worshiped. [Adapted with modification from my commentary on Romans, Mentor Books, p. 24]

think it means helping the poor or being kind to those who hurt you. Others might just shrug and admit they don't know.

Such confusion underscores the urgency of addressing this matter correctly, since the gospel is God's declaration from heaven of how individuals can be made right with Him through Jesus Christ the Lord. This chapter is dedicated to furthering the knowledge and clarity we need when communicating the gospel to the lost. Remember, the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom 1:16). However, if we miscommunicate it, everything else about our evangelism will not matter. So, what exactly do we tell others when we share the gospel with them? What are its key elements in its fuller theological sense? Broadly speaking, we can say that the major components of the gospel boil down to four core components: *God, the Righteous; Man, the Rebel; Jesus, the Redeemer; and Our Right Response to the Message.*

### *The Gospel Is about God, the Righteous*

When it comes to evangelism, the starting point of our message is essential. It can be easy for us to miss the mark here. For instance, should we start with sin? Or what about starting with man himself? While specific contexts may necessitate these beginnings, subjects such as sin and man can only be properly understood in their relationship to God. For instance, according to Scripture, sin is lawlessness (1Jo 3:4). It is, according to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, "any want [lack] of conformity unto or transgression of, the law of God" (Q. 14). God and

His moral law, the Ten Commandments, are the standards of holiness for all people in all places, and at all times. They are the measurements of His righteousness. Consequently, sin cannot be rightly understood until one knows about the God of the Bible in Whom there “is no darkness at all” (1Jo 1:5), and His holy inflexible law, which brings “the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). God’s law also promises eternal punishment in hell. This is because there is an eternal penalty connected to breaking it (Rom 6:23). Therefore, Luther was right when he said that the function of the law is “not to justify but to terrify.”

The same is true of man. Man cannot understand himself until he first understands his relationship to God, his Creator. Man is a created being (Gen 2:7). He is not the master of his own destiny nor the definer of right and wrong. As a creature of God, man is obliged to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mar 12:30). Moreover, he is required to keep God’s law perfectly, perpetually, and personally if he would ever be accepted by Him (Gal 3:10; Jam 2:10). *However, man has failed to do this.* This is why the gospel message must initially focus on God and His law against whom man has sinned so that he can first see the bad news of his lost condition.

Consider Romans 1:18. After mentioning the gospel in the previous words of Romans 1:16-17, Paul now states, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” Notice here that along with beginning with God, Paul doesn’t start his gospel proclamation by

saying, “God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives.” Instead, he begins by declaring that because God is holy and man is *unholy*, His wrath is not merely toward him, but more literally, from the Greek text, it is *upon him*. In Romans 1:18, Paul explains why it is that every single person in the world needs the gospel, which is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek” (Rom 1:16). He also shows why it is that all people need “the righteousness of God” (Rom 1:17) credited to their account to cover their unrighteousness, which righteousness is revealed in the gospel, received by faith alone, and is the perfect righteousness of Christ (Jer 23:6; Rom 5:15-19; 1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21; Phi 3:9).

In addition to God’s wrath against the sinner, the Bible also reveals that the God of the Bible is holy, just, and our ultimate Judge. The Psalms declare, “The LORD our God is holy” (Psa 99:9), and sinless angels cry out before God in glory night and day, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3). Further, Psalm 89:14 states that “justice and judgment” are the foundation of God’s throne. And the Psalmist also says in Psalm 96:13 that God will “judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”

These aspects of God are unpopular with modern listeners. However, they are crucial when sharing the gospel. If people don’t recognize God for Who He is in truth, then they will never understand the dire condition they are in or the profound love He showed in sending His Son, Jesus, to die for sinners

like them. Too often, people try to present God as down-to-earth, relatable, and buddy-like so that individuals will be “attracted” to Him. However, the Bible never presents God in this manner. Rather, according to the Bible, God is utterly unique, unlike anyone else in the universe. He is not like man; He is the Creator, while everything else is created by Him (Psa 50:21). We must tell the lost about the biblical God. We must begin where Paul began his gospel presentation with the fact that outside of Christ, God is angry with us “every day” (Psa 7:11) because of our sin against His holy Person and law. We must emphasize the fact that one day everyone will appear before “the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2Co 5:10). Only then will the unsaved realize their desperate, deplorable, and hopeless situation before the holy God of the Bible, “with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13), and that only He Himself can deliver them from it. Only then will sinners greatly value and fully appreciate God’s amazing grace and His glorious remedy for their enormous malady.

### *The Gospel Is about Man, the Rebel*

This leads us to our next crucial aspect when sharing the gospel: it’s not only a message about God; it’s also a message about man. But what are we to say when it comes to man? Are we to tell unsaved individuals (both men and women) that they are basically good, and already on their way to heaven, and that they just need a little spiritual nudge in the right direction to be right with God? Or should we

tell them they just need to try a little harder, be a little nicer, attend church more regularly, and then assure them that all will be well with them at last?

It might surprise some, but the Bible never encourages these things, nor does it ever aim to build up their self-esteem. Instead, it provides a stark and accurate assessment of their lost spiritual state. The Bible is a book of realism. It is the only book in all the world that presents *us* in truth. It alone gives us God's anthropology, showing unsaved humanity in all its native ugliness and total depravity. It shows that regardless of people's backgrounds, education, wealth, age, upbringing, skin color, gender, vocation, charisma, or anything else, they are inherently wicked by nature and practice. They are lost and "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1), self-absorbed, going astray as soon as they are born, and "speaking lies" (Psa 58:3). They are darkened in their understanding, "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:18). They are separated from God because of their sins against Him (Isa 59:2). Although they know that God exists because their consciences and creation testify to it (Rom 1:19), they are nonetheless living in rebellion to Him, not serving or living for Him. Instead, they are seeking out many schemes (Ecc 7:29), as they live at "enmity against God" (Rom 8:7), turning "every one to his own way" (Isa 53:6). Consequently, they are all under His just wrath (Joh 3:36; Rom 1:18).

This is the world we live in. These are the people we mingle with daily. This is humanity's condition apart from God's salvation.

This is the fact about rebellious mankind. It isn't pleasant, *but it's true nonetheless*. This is the bad news. Not only is God a righteous judge, but we are wicked lawbreakers who rightly deserve hell. To faithfully present the biblical gospel, we must make this part clear and upfront. People must understand the dreadful reality of their condition and the dire position they are in because of it. We must lovingly communicate to men and women the severity of the situation. When sharing the gospel, we must get to this point with our hearers.

### *The Gospel Is about Jesus, the Redeemer*

Thankfully, the biblical gospel doesn't stop with us telling unbelievers that God must punish them in hell forever for their sins. Instead, having told them the bad news *first*, we now get to tell them the "good news," which makes it good news indeed! This good news is centered on Jesus, God's Son (Rom 1:1-4), and in His substitutionary, sin-bearing work for the guilty (Isa 53:6; 1Co 15:1-4; 2Co 5:21).

This is the heart of the gospel—*its core*. But here, too, we must understand what we need to communicate to the lost. When it comes to the good news of Jesus, two essential aspects must be established with the unbeliever: His person and His work.

*The person of Jesus Christ* means much more than Him just being a religious leader with many profound things to say. And it's more than just acknowledging that He did many wonderful things on the earth. Rather, borrowing language from one historic confession of faith,<sup>9</sup> we see that Jesus Christ is:

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<sup>9</sup> *The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith*, 8.2.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon himself man's nature with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

What a superb statement! In summary, it teaches us that Jesus Christ is very God of very God, the second person of the Trinity. It teaches us that He is the Supreme Being Who became a man.

We see these matters declared multiple places in Scripture. At Jesus' birth, we are told, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest" (Luk 1:32). The apostle John tells us concerning Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (Joh 1:1, 14). Paul describes Jesus in Romans 9:5, by saying that "Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." Additionally, he says to Timothy,

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1Ti 3:16).

However, understanding these grand truths about Jesus isn't enough when it comes to the biblical gospel. It is utterly astonishing that God the Son would willingly incarnate Himself (take on flesh). But *why* would He do so? What was the glorious purpose behind it? This brings us next to *the work of Jesus Christ*.

After telling us in Romans 3:19-20 that God's law shows that all people outside of Christ are guilty before Him and that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight,” Paul then follows the pattern of bad news first, then good news, and summarizes the gospel message in Romans 3:23-25, when he says:

*For all* [i.e., each and every person, Jew or Gentile] *have sinned* [that is, broken God's commandments in thought, word, and in deed], *and come short of the glory* [not just a law of God, but the moral glory and excellence] *of God; Being justified* [or declared and reckoned not guilty, i.e., forgiven] *freely* [without any cost or charge to us, without any works or merit or any performance on our part but simply as a gift] *by His grace* [or God's unmerited favor and kindness to those who do not deserve such things] *through the redemption* [that is, the payment price which was made to satisfy God's divine justice for our sins against Him] *that is in* [the preposition “in” identifying the unique agent of our redemption; connected to, and paid for exclusively by] *Christ* [the messiah]

*Jesus: whom God [that is to say, God the Father] hath set forth to be a propitiation [a wrath-absorber who stopped His divine anger against us by His wrath-absorbing sacrifice in our place, which wrath-absorbing sacrifice Jesus was] by His blood, [that is, the blood of Christ, which speaks about His death which was the exclusive basis of the propitiation] through faith [not our good deeds, not baptism, not our law keeping, but “through faith” which puts forth the instrumental means by which God applies Jesus’ work to our account].<sup>10</sup>*

Our salvation (our deliverance from God’s judgment) comes through the payment of death, but it wasn’t just anyone’s death—it was the death of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Only the God-man could fulfill the momentous task of bearing an eternal hell for us. Because God’s justice demands that we must be punished for our sins, Jesus took that penalty in our stead. This is what is meant by “propitiation...in his blood.” The point is, Jesus has appeased God’s wrath towards sinners by taking their sins upon His sinless self and enduring the full weight of divine wrath and punishment for them at the cross. Through Jesus, our sin and consequence before the Almighty is removed (Mat 26:28). Through Jesus, the offended God is now reconciled to us (Rom 5:11). *But how can we know this for sure?*

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead validates the completion and acceptance of His atoning work for us

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<sup>10</sup> This exposition comes from my commentary on Romans: *Expository Outlines and Observations on Romans*, also available from Christian Focus Publications, [www.christianfocus.com](http://www.christianfocus.com).

on the cross by His Father in heaven. Yes, Jesus died! But death and the grave could not hold Him! On the third day, He rose again marking God's stamp of approval on Christ's sacrifice (Rom 4:25). Again, the historic *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* highlights this truth, stating that Jesus

underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us; enduring most grievous sorrows in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, and remained in the state of the dead, yet saw no corruption: on the third day he arose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered, with which he also ascended into heaven (8.4).

This is *what* makes the gospel “good news.” This is *why* the gospel is great news! The gospel addresses the most serious problem we face: God is holy, we are not. His holiness and justice demands He punish our sins. However, in love, grace, and mercy, He provided a substitute—Jesus, who paid our sin penalty in full 2000 years ago at Calvary. This is why Jesus declared from the cross, “It is finished!” (Joh 19:30). This is why the biblical gospel is not a message of what we must do to be made right with God. Rather it is a proclamation of what Jesus has already done to accomplish this for us. In this sense, then, we could say that the gospel is not a *what*, but a *Who*! It is a message that ultimately revolves around God's Son; thus, Calvin was right when

he said, “The whole gospel is contained in Christ.”<sup>11</sup>  
Praise be to God!

### *The Gospel Is about Our Right Response to the Message*

In considering the gospel, we must understand how the lost receive the benefits of Jesus’ person and work. Is this automatic for them? Is it merely hearing the message that does it? Or is it by simply “accepting Jesus,” as many tell us in our day? According to the Bible, what are the true terms with which sinners must comply? This leads us to the crucial fourth and final step: the response.

The gospel has a summons connected to it. It is not merely informational, but it is rather a royal call from God, requiring sinners to take specific actions—namely, to repent of their sins and believe the good news about Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Repentance and belief are two sides of the same coin of responsibility which are laid upon all who hear the gospel. They are twin graces. As Sinclair Ferguson aptly puts it, they are “marriage partners and never separated.”<sup>13</sup> Repentance and faith are intertwined in such a way that, when one is mentioned in Scripture, the other is always implied. True repentance cannot occur without faith in Christ’s ability to remove and forgive sins, and genuine belief in Christ as Savior necessitates turning away from one’s sins altogether. Therefore, according to the Bible, the human response to the gospel is a call for sinners to both repent and believe.

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<sup>11</sup> John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 262.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, we should remember that from the divine perspective, repentance and faith are gifts that God in mercy grants to sinners (Act 5:31; 11:18; Phi 1:29; 2Ti 2:25).

<sup>13</sup> Blanchard, 201.

Let's explore these terms more thoroughly. First, *what do I mean by repentance?* In today's world, the concept of repentance needs clarification. In an age like ours, we cannot assume that everyone we speak to knows what we mean when we use such a word. According to the Bible, repentance involves a change of mind and direction in life. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life where out of a true sense of utter helplessness and un-doneness before God and His perfect law, he turns from the error of his ways back to the God Whom he has sinned against. Repentance is an actual turning *to* God *from* our rebellion, much like the Thessalonians did. Paul mentions them in the following way: "and how ye 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, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:9-10).

It is an "about-face," characterized by grief over and repudiation of all sin with a desire to forsake it. The Puritans described it as, "a vomiting of the soul." Repentance means to break off from our past way of life and turn to Jesus Christ in humble submission and gratitude. Or, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says in question 87, it is a "saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience."

Second, *what about belief?* Other words for this are just as helpful to understand its concepts, such as faith and trust. Belief in Christ is not just a head knowledge and assent of Who He is and what He's done for us. It is also a complete confidence in and a resting upon Who He is and what He's done on our behalf. As

Spurgeon helpfully said, “It will not save me to know that Christ is *a* Savior; but it will save me to trust Him to be *my* Savior.”<sup>14</sup> True saving faith is not a “leap in the dark.” Instead, it is based on actual facts grounded in solid evidence concerning Jesus as put forth in the Word of God. This trust in Christ is based on the promises of God’s Word: “Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Joh 3:16). And “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Act 16:31). Faith is a gift of God which allows an individual to lay hold of Christ and to cast oneself wholly upon Him for mercy and pardon. It is the means or channel through which salvation is received (Eph 2:8). It is not the human contribution of a sinner seeking salvation, but rather it is the heart’s response to and a reception of God’s goodness toward us in Jesus Christ the Lord (Joh 1:12-13; Rom 5:17; 10:8-11; Col 2:6). In the words of the Puritan Thomas Manton, faith has two hands. With one, it stretches out for Christ. With the other, it pushes away all that comes between Christ and the soul. Again, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* gets the matter right when it says in question 86, “Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.”

Scripture consistently commands both repentance and belief.<sup>15</sup> For example, John the Baptist urged the people not only to “Repent” (Mat 3:2), but he also said to them “that they should “believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Act 19:4). Additionally, in Acts 20:21 we see the apostle

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<sup>14</sup> Blanchard, 203.

<sup>15</sup> See John 1:12; 20:31; Acts 3:19; 10:43; 13:38-39; 17:30; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 15:1-2; Galatians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:16.

Paul going house to house, doing what? The narrative says that he was, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God [the offended party] and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ [the only Savior of sinners].” Jesus Himself also preached, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mar 1:15).

These two commands are inseparable and foundational parts of the gospel message, requiring a response from all who hear it. To be saved, individuals must repent of their sins and believe on Christ alone for life and salvation; these are the hinges upon which the door of salvation freely flies open to them.

### *Are All Four Parts Necessary?*

In practice, it goes without saying, it may not always be possible to communicate all four parts of the gospel. Sometimes, individuals may already be familiar with some aspects of the message, so it won't be necessary to go over all of it again with them. Time constraints may also limit the opportunity to share everything. In some cases, all that will be needed is a clear and concise call to believe on Christ. This is seen, for example, with the Philippian jailer (Act 16:25-34). After he asks Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved, they don't respond to him by saying, “Well, first let me tell you about God, then yourself, then Christ, and so forth.” No! Instead, this man was already under deep conviction of sin. He's already in a repentant posture; hence, again, he says, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Further, recall that before this time Paul had been proclaiming in his streets of Philippi “the way of salvation” (Act 16:17), so it very well could be that he had already gotten some of the gospel

message. Thus, the apostle simply tells him, “Believe on...Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (v. 31).

In other instances, especially with family members or neighbors, we may take a slower and more thorough approach to this matter. We could walk through each of the four components of the gospel message in a comprehensive fashion while sitting for coffee or tea.

Each situation will be different, and each will require sensitivity and Holy Spirit discernment concerning which aspects of the gospel are to be shared. In this chapter, we’ve covered the central parts of the gospel message. But when you share the gospel with others, don’t feel constrained to present it in a canned manner. We are not working through a script. Instead, find out where people are and preach the gospel to them accordingly. If all four parts are needed, then great. If not, prayerfully and humbly share what you can and trust the Lord with the outcome.

The important thing to remember is that the gospel’s transformational power lies in *God’s work, not your presentation*. Therefore, be faithful and unashamed to share it and leave the results to Him.

### *For Reflection and Discussion*

1. What does the word *gospel* mean?
2. What are the four major components of the gospel?
3. How would you define *repentance* biblically?
4. How would you define *faith* biblically?

∞ We hope you have been encouraged by this extract from *Equipped to Evangelize: A Biblical Foundation* by Rob Ventura. Obtain a copy of the entire book from Christian Focus Publications, [www.christianfocus.com](http://www.christianfocus.com).