

Series: Basic Evangelism

Title: The Gospel

Text: Mark 16:15

Date: September 18, 2022

The word “gospel” is a famous one within Christianity. Rightfully so. Paul used the word as a title for the Christian message. He said, “For I am not ashamed of the *gospel*, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). The word “gospel” is a fitting word for the message of Christ. The Greek word rendered “gospel” (*euaggélion*) was a compound one. It was comprised of two words that literally meant “good message.”

In the first-century world, the word was used of public announcements. To receive news, people in ancient times relied on heralds. Customarily, towns had a town crier who would stand in public places, announcing news. During times of war, famine, or sickness, citizens would wait in the town square for updates. If news was favorable, it was considered “gospel” — good news.

Christians have been called to function like ancient heralds. Each is called to go into cities and circles of influences, proclaiming the good news of Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples, saying, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15). In order to be a witness, believers must be well acquainted with the content of the gospel. In what follows, we will analyze five components of the Christian message. To tell others of Christ, you must have a basic familiarity with them. In addition, it is helpful to know passages of Scripture to share in regard to each one. Let’s examine five components of the gospel. After doing so, I will provide advice regarding how one can remember and implement them in witnessing encounters.

START

Many don’t start their witnessing encounters in the best place. Sure, there is always benefit in sharing any sort of gospel truth with anyone. Any mention of sin, the cross, or the need for faith in Christ can be used mightily by the Lord. However, many in modern society are hardened to Christian truth because the church doesn’t give adequate attention to first things. What do I mean? Many unbelievers are tone deaf to talk about sin, the cross, and Jesus because they aren’t certain about God in the first place, nor are they convinced that mankind serves much of a purpose in the world.

The prevalence of both evolutionary theory and secular humanism has spiritually inoculated a great number of people. Yes, the gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The mere mention of Christ, His crucifixion, or His resurrection can bring conversion. Nothing can stop the power of regeneration. However, the Lord can use the truth of creation to break icy hearts and enlighten deceived minds. In some witnessing encounters, it is first helpful to start with truth about how the world was formed and why humanity exists.

In more and more witnessing encounters, I find myself saying something like, “There is a God and you are made for a forever relationship with Him.” It seems many people aren’t really interested in a lot of what we say about the Bible because they are blinded by the belief that there is no purpose to life. They assume humankind is a random accident, the happenstance result of colliding particles.

Even for those who do believe in some sort of first cause or divine being, they don’t exhibit much confidence that one can know anything about God. They are what we would call “agnostic.” The word comes from a Greek term that literally meant “no knowledge.” Agnostics believe one can’t have absolute knowledge about the divine. At best, such people adhere to a Thomas-Jefferson-like deism. They believe their god is a god of love, and they believe moral imperatives and education are important for the well-being of society. However, they deny any

plausibility that one can make absolute truth claims concerning God and God's will for humanity.

Scripture teaches that "...the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). In twenty-first century American society, the lies of macroevolutionary theory and the values of secular humanism are two of the foremost means through which Satan is blinding people from God's truth. To share the gospel nowadays, it is often helpful to start with the beginning of the Bible. Creation scientist Ken Ham has said, "If one preaches the gospel without the message of the Creator, and the origin of sin and death, then one preaches it without the foundational knowledge that is necessary to understand the rest of the gospel."¹

To witness well in twenty-first century society, it is often necessary to talk about first things first. One must go back to the beginning and share the truth of Creation. People need to know there is a God, that He made all things, and that He made every man, woman, boy, and girl for a purpose. Scripture teaches that the Lord made humankind to be different than the animal kingdom. Each is made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). As a result, each has a special soul capacity whereby he or she can relate to God.

Scripture says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.' So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Genesis 1:26-27). Theologians and Bible teachers often debate what is involved with the image of God in mankind. Some place emphasis on man's ability to create, produce, and work. Others make much of man's intellectual and emotional capacities. I think we can best sum up the image of God construct by saying humankind is made to relate to God and reflect His glory on the Earth.

As you prepare to be a gospel witness, be thinking about these things. Know that you may need to start your witnessing encounters with the subject of creation. Many are blind and hardened to the truth because they assume there isn't much purpose in human existence. However, when eyes are opened to the logic of creation, many become more ready to hear about Christ.

SIN

In order to present the gospel in power, it is also necessary to talk about sin. The subject isn't a popular one nowadays, but it is integral to the gospel message. In fact, sin is the very reason Jesus came to Earth. He wouldn't have had to live and die if mankind wasn't sinful.

This is where many modern preachers and evangelists go wrong. Hoping to attract people to Christ with a more positive message, some skip over the subject of sin. They place emphasis on the need to believe in God or Jesus, but they bypass all talk about human brokenness. In the end, their gospel appeals aren't in tune with the reality of the human condition. The Bible is clear that all are stained and sullied by sin. When praying at the dedication of the temple, Solomon admitted, "...there is no one who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). Proverbs 20:9 says, "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am cleansed from my sin?'" In Romans 3:10, Paul proclaimed, "There is no one righteous, not even one." In Romans 3:23, he said, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." James, the half brother of Jesus, observed that "...we all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2).

Can you see from Scripture that sin is a problem common to us all? It is the plague at the heart of the human condition. On top of being made aware of the problem from Scripture, our own common experience will teach us that sin is real. Consider world events, watch the news, scroll through social media, or reflect on your own failures and struggles. How can one deny the reality of sin?

¹ Ham, Ken. *Why Won't They Listen?* (Green Forest, AK: Master Books, 2002), Kindle Edition.

A simple look at Jesus' preaching reveals how important this topic is. When He shared the gospel, He said, "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Most contemporary Christians who evangelize are good at using the latter half of Jesus' appeal in their gospel presentations. Few remark on the first half. What does it mean to repent? Furthermore, why did Jesus call people to repent?

The word "repent" may seem like a churchy word that belongs in the vocabulary of dogmatic zealots. It is worth noting that the Greek word underlying English translations of the New Testament is one that simply meant "to change." As used by Jesus, it spoke of a change of direction. It indicated that His hearers need to turn from their sin and trust in Him for salvation. To scrub our gospel witness of the mention of sin is to alter the message Jesus preached. Obviously, there is great folly in attempting to create a better message than the one He shared.

Additionally, silence regarding sin makes our gospel appeals meaningless. One will not see his or her need for salvation apart from knowledge of this matter. Why does a person need to be saved, if he or she is not guilty of sin? The reason so many are cold and calloused toward gospel proclamations nowadays is because many don't see why they need salvation. One has rightly said, "Salvation is for people who hate their sin. It is for individuals who understand that they have lived in rebellion against a holy God. It is for those who want to turn around, to live for God's glory."²

When I think of these things, I think of physical sicknesses and the remedies applied to them. We all know what it is like to be sick or injured. In addition, we know what it is like to seek medical attention. I recently injured myself when attempting a home repair project. My bloody wound needed treatment. Swelling led to great discomfort, but I tried to avoid a trip to the doctor's office. It was only when my pain became unbearable that I finally reached out to my physician. I needed help with something I couldn't handle on my own.

Such is a great way of thinking about sin and the gospel. Many are rejecting Christ nowadays because they are unaware of the gravity of sin. They've heard appeals to "believe in Jesus" or "follow God," but they see little need. Most have nice homes, fine cars, good families, decent jobs, a smorgasbord of entertainment opportunities, and a plethora of extracurricular pursuits. Their lives seem fulfilling and pleasing. Why would they ever need anything else?

An awareness of sin can break through the barriers that have blinded many to their need for God. When one becomes aware that he or she is guilty of sin, he or she will be more likely to seek forgiveness. This is why Jesus died — "to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Sinners will likely not seek salvation unless they are made aware that they have sinned.

SEPARATION

Closely related to the concept of sin is the concept of separation. The issue deals with one's inability to have a relationship with God through his or her own efforts. Scripture teaches that sin renders all humans completely incapable of pleasing God. It erects a barriers that totally alienates men and women from the Lord.

The Psalmist understood these realities. When he reflected on the subject of sin, he was compelled to sing, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18, KJV). The prophet Isaiah was attuned to such things as well. When he preached to sinners, he said, "But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen" (Isaiah 59:2). Likewise the prophet Habakkuk acknowledged the way sin alienates people from their Creator. In praying to the Lord, he said, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing" (Habakkuk 1:13).

² Iain H., Murray. *John MacArthur Servant of the Word and Flock*. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth and Trust, 2011), 114-115.

A look at the New Testament reveals similar truth. One of the foremost passages on Christian salvation within the Bible is found in the second chapter of Ephesians. Paul began that chapter by saying, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1-2). The apostle’s words were intended to underscore the fact non-saved people have no ability to span the gulf of separation between God and sinful man. Jesus is the only remedy for the separation sin creates. Cultural refinement, good moral behavior, religious activity, education, or charitable deeds can never alleviate the penalty of sin. Something more is needed.

Later in Ephesians 2, Paul remarked on the futility of human achievement even further. In speaking of salvation, he said, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Notice that good works are ultimately profitless in securing salvation. A bigger and better remedy is needed. The separation brought on by sin cannot be assuaged through human performance or manmade remedies. Charles Spurgeon, the great London preacher, once said, “If salvation can be by the works of the law, why did our Lord Jesus die to save us?”³

In our church, we often sing a song that says, “I was a wretch; I remember who I was; I was lost, I was blind; I was running out of time; Sin separated; The breach was far too wide; But from the far side of the chasm; you held me in your sight; So, you made a way; across the great divide; left behind Heaven’s throne; to build it here inside.”⁴ I love that song because of the emphasis it places on how Jesus took care of the separation brought on by sin.

Do you see why this subject is important in witnessing? If people aren’t aware of the way sin separates them from God, they may try to remedy the problem of sin with worthless antidotes — good works, man-centered religion, and more. Worst yet, many may not see their need for salvation at all. In your attempts at sharing the gospel with others, be sensitive to speak of how sinful humanity is separated from a holy God. When people realize that they can’t span sin’s gulf on their own, they will be more prone to call out to Jesus for help.

SUBSTITUTE

Substitution is a fourth component of gospel truth. It involves Jesus’ offering of Himself for our sins. Scripture teaches God’s people are saved because God’s Son lived, died, and was raised on their behalf. He did something for them that they could not do for themselves. The prophet Isaiah declared, “...he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

This aspect of salvation is critical. Some never grasp what it means to be a Christian, because they never understand the principle of substitution. They assume Christianity is about good works, better behavior, or charitable deeds. Their focus is on what they can do for God, instead of what God has done for them. Some even champion “believing” in God or Jesus, but they never experience true salvation because the object of their belief is misplaced. They trust in a religious experience, a church creed, or a cultural vision of Jesus, but they don’t have a firm faith in the substitutionary life and death of Jesus.

The New Testament is clear that the righteousness of God is credited to God’s people because of what Christ has done. Paul told the Corinthians, “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Peter said, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made

³ Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1880; 26. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 246.

⁴ “Thank You Jesus for the Blood,” track 3 on Charity Gail, *Endless Praise*, 2021.

alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Christian salvation involves a great exchange. At the moment of regeneration and faith, a person receives the full benefits and blessings of Christ’s life. Though one is a sinner who deserves death and alienation from God, Jesus’ work serves as a substitute for sin and all of sin’s consequences. Commenting on these realities, Spurgeon said, “The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus was the reservoir into which all the sin of the human race ran, from this quarter, and that, and that, and that, and that. All the sin of his people rolled in a torrent unto him, and gathered as in a great lake. In him was no sin, and yet the Lord made him to be sin for us.”⁵

This topic of substitution is personal for me. For years, I didn’t comprehend the gospel because of my inability to see truth related to this matter. I envisioned Christianity as being a matter of man or woman trying to earn favor with God. Because I thought I had to somehow make myself right before the Lord, I was cold toward the thought of religion. I knew I wasn’t good and I had no confidence in my ability to be good. Everything changed when I heard the gospel message of substitution. Light broke through when I realized Jesus’ performance on my behalf secured my freedom and forgiveness.

Gospel presentations that don’t emphasize this point aren’t true gospel presentations. In personal witnessing encounters, make sure you share the good news of substitution. You don’t have to use the word substitute, but make sure you speak of the concept. Tell people that Jesus lived for them, died for them, and was raised for them. Being a Christian isn’t about what man can do for God; rather, it is all about what God did for man.

SALVATION

Salvation is the final component of the Christian message. When the apostles ministered, they declared, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Many are well-acquainted with this aspect of the gospel. Words like “salvation” and “saved” are often used in reference to Christianity. However, it is helpful to consider what is actually involved with such things. The word translated “saved” in the New Testament is one that meant “to rescue” or “to deliver.”

Salvation involves a rescue, but what are Christians actually rescued from? The answer is simple. Remember the Garden of Eden. The first sin brought separation and alienation from God (Genesis 3:20-24). It resulted in all types of horrible consequences (Genesis 3:8-19). Christian salvation provides deliverance from such things. When one is saved, he or she is rescued from sin and sin’s penalty. In addition, one receives assurance of a future, full deliverance from sin in which the consequences of sin will be completely removed forever in the New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1-8).

Important to the concept of salvation is the issue of “faith.” Remember the apostles’ preaching. They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus” (Acts 16:31). The apostles’ summons to salvation was in alignment with that of Jesus. Like their Lord (Mark 1:15), they proclaimed that belief in the work of Christ was necessary for salvation. It is important to realize that such belief is not a mere mental assent to a set of facts. Instead, it involves a deep trust or reliance in divine realities. In regard to Christian salvation, it entails a confidence in the person and work of Christ. Scripture speaks of such faith and its role in salvation by saying, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift” (Ephesians 2:8).

In order to witness well, one must extend an offer to salvation. One must tell people that there is rescue and deliverance from humanity’s greatest predicament — sin. However, one must be clear to explain the true path to salvation — faith. It is a soul confidence or reliance in Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection that brings rescue from sin and all of its consequences. As you share the gospel, make sure you are clear on such things.

MAKING IT PRACTICAL

⁵ Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1880; 26. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 163.

Now that we have covered the basic components of the gospel, we are equipped to share the message of Christ. However, it is important to consider a few practical matters that will help us be effective in witnessing. The gospel isn't just something to be stored in our heads. We have to be well-prepared to share it. Let me offer four tips for sharing the gospel in your witnessing encounters.

Memorize the Components

To be an effective witness, you need to remember the basic components of the gospel. It's hard to share the gospel if you don't really know it. Work to remember the realities of start, sin, separation, substitute, and salvation. You don't need to repeat those words verbatim when witnessing, but you do need to be able to share the concepts related to them. To help you, I've created a device to aid memorization. Using the human hand, I've associated each finger with a different gospel component. Maybe you could use the device to help you memory.

1. Start:

The index points up, reminding you that you are made for God, the one who resides in Heaven. It is also the finger used for the number "1," reminding you that you start your gospel presentation with this concept.

3. Separation:

The middle finger is in the middle of the hand, dividing the other fingers, reminding you that sin separates you from God.

4. Substitute:

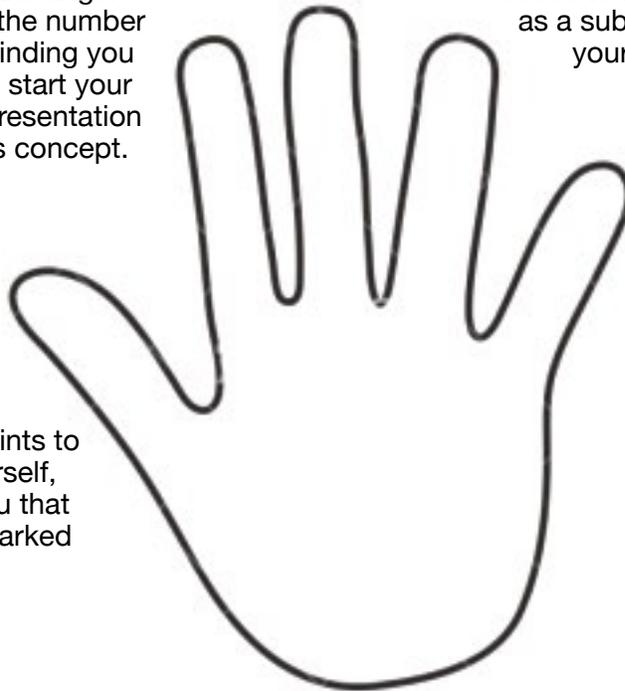
The ring finger is often associated with marriage and love, reminding you that God's love sent Jesus to live and die as a substitute for your sins.

5. Salvation:

The pinkie is the last finger on the hand, reminding you that faith is the final component in gospel presentations.

2. Sin:

The thumb points to back to yourself, reminding you that mankind is marked by sin.



Memorize Scripture

The Bible commends the practice of Scripture memory as a profitable exercise for our spiritual lives (Psalm 119:11). Consequently, it is profitable to remember Scripture so that we can recite it when sharing the gospel. This practice is beneficial, since the Word of God is powerful (Romans 1:16), and since it has the supernatural ability to create faith in the hearts of those who hear it (Romans 10:17). Above I have given a number of Scripture references with each

gospel component. Maybe you could memorize some of them; or, you could study and find some verses you would like to use.

Be Prepared with A Two-Sentence Presentation

I've found it helpful to be prepared with a two-sentence statement that encapsulates the gospel. Life will present various encounters that give opportunity to witness. Scripture says God's children should be ready to "...ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks...for a reason for the hope that is in" them (1 Peter 3:15). I myself use this tactic regularly. When conversations and interactions give an open door, I say something like, "You know, each of us is made for a relationship with God, but our imperfection and sin separates us from Him. The good news is that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to live and die for us so that whoever believes and trusts in Him will be saved." Being armed to share a similar script in a conversational way will open many doors for gospel seed sowing. Using the five components of the gospel, craft your own brief gospel presentation.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Of the five gospel components, which ones do we sometimes neglect?
2. Of the five gospel components, which ones are most important to emphasize? Or, are they all equally important?
3. Do you find it difficult to memorize Scripture? Do you feel you can remember and share the five gospel components? What are some tools and tactics that have helped you with remembering such things?
4. Write out your two-sentence gospel presentation, including the five gospel components. Be prepared to share it with others.