



Wednesday Meeting

7:30pm, 15th April, 2020

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Meeting Topic:

WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL?

by Tony Ide

Notes/References:

Please read the following edited excerpts from Paul Ellis' book "The Gospel in 10 Words" in preparation for this meeting:

The angel said the gospel would bring great joy to all people. Those who receive the gospel ought to be the happiest, most joyful people in the world. Yet many believers are far from joyful. They may be smiling on the outside, but on the inside they are anxious, insecure, and battling with guilt and condemnation. Fearful of upsetting a touchy God they are trying to do the right thing and make themselves pleasing to the Lord. But since they are never sure if they have done enough they have no peace. Others are running hard after the favor of God but they never seem to arrive. God's forgiveness, acceptance, provision and so on— always seem just out of reach. Squeezed between the demands of a holy God who expects nothing short of perfection and the flawed performance of their own broken lives, Christians can be among the most neurotic people on the planet. Each time they stumble they promise Jesus they will try harder next time but it's no use. They feel like frauds and wonder what will happen to them when their shortcomings are eventually exposed.

The tragedy is that most people in this situation know something is wrong but they think the fault lies with themselves. After all, they are constantly hearing they are not working hard enough. Some Christians are nearly sweating blood for Jesus, and all it's doing is making them sick and tired. The problem is not effort or desire, it's their gospel. It's contaminated and it's making them ill. The gospel is good news. This is what the word "gospel" literally means: good news. By definition, any gospel that leaves you fearful of an angry and judgmental God is no gospel at all. It is not good news. Any gospel that leaves you insecure and uncertain, forever wondering, Am I accepted? Am I forgiven? is not good news. The number one reason why many Christians are joyless and tired is because they have never heard the gospel.



The scriptures are the gospel truth but they are not the gospel. The Bible contains the good news but it also contains much that is not the good news. Unless you know how to tell the difference you're going to be confused. The red letters of Jesus are not the gospel. Everything Jesus said was good but not everything he said was good news. Neither was it all meant for you. Jesus preached the law to those who lived under the law on the far side of the cross. We are not under the law but grace (Romans 6: 14). We are living under a completely different covenant to the Jews of Jesus' day. Words meant for them are not necessarily meant for you. The law is good and has its proper purpose but it is bad news not good news. The purpose of the law is to reveal sin and condemn the self-righteous. The exhortation to "turn from sin" is not the good news. It is an ancient works-oriented message that will leave you sin-focused and introspective. It is the message of Moses and John the Baptist. It is the message of most of the Old Testament. It is not the gospel of grace we find in the New Testament epistles. Finally, the gospel is not an article of faith. It is not something that magically springs to life if you believe in it hard enough. It is not the fruit of wishful thinking. The good news is not the good book, the good law, or the good words of the good Teacher. The good news is news—it is the announcement of the glad tidings of a happy God.

The gospel is the glad and merry news that God is good, he loves you, and he will happily give up everything he has so he can have you. Contrary to popular belief, God is not mad at you. He is not even in a bad mood. The good news declares that God is happy, he is for you, and he wants to share his life with you forever. Jesus is proof of this. The veracity of the gospel is evidenced in his death and resurrection. On the cross God showed that he loved us while we were sinners and that he would rather die than live without us. And through the resurrection he proved that nothing—not even death—can separate us from the love that is ours in Jesus Christ. We stand secure, not on our feeble promises to him, but on his unconditional and unbreakable promises to us. And that's it: God loves you and wants to be with you.

The Love Gift

The gospel is so simple that it's hard for our grown-up minds to grasp. The gospel that Jesus preached begins like this: "For God so loved that he gave ..." The gospel is first and foremost a declaration of love backed up with a gift. It's the announcement of a love-gift and the gift is Jesus. Right here is where many miss it. Jesus is not only the Savior, he is God with us. Our minds can barely begin to unpack the significance of this revelation. God is with us. He is not up there but down here. He is not against us but for us. If he has already given us his Son, what will he withhold from us? Wow! This is the gospel that takes your breath away leaving you speechless in marveling adoration. He will never leave or abandon us. What relief! What peace! This is green pastures beside still waters. This is home. This is our rest. The gospel is bigger and better than you think. Since God is infinitely good and infinitely big, and since there is always more for us to discover about him, there is always more to the good news than we can ever think or imagine. What is the gospel? It is the revelation of God's love through Jesus Christ.



Whatever your need, your answer is found in Christ alone. He is the Love who loves us and the Grace who helps us in our time of need. You can know the Bible from cover to cover and not know the gospel. Read the written word through any lens other than the Living Word – Jesus - and you'll end up with a counterfeit gospel and lifeless religion.

In contrast with the dead religion of man, the living gospel of grace is totally supernatural. But here's the important part. The one thing that can stop you from walking in the love and grace of God is your own dismissive incredulity and unbelief. The only thing that can render worthless the exceeding riches of God's grace is unbelief. Unbelief prays, "God, please do this, and that, and the other thing," but faith looks to the finished work of the cross and says, "Lord, you have done it all." Unbelief gives—" Lord, look at what I've done/ built/ brought for you"— but faith receives—" Look at what you have done for us." Unbelief toils and accomplishes nothing; faith understands that everything comes to us by grace for free. Unbelief tries but faith trusts.

History's greatest preachers have always proclaimed a simple gospel with few words and much power. Paul brought the kingdom of heaven to the pagan city of Corinth with nothing more than a five-word gospel—" Jesus Christ and him crucified"— backed up with the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter needed only twelve words to declare to his fellow Jews the good news: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Three thousand believed and were saved the same day. John needed only seven words to herald the end of the old covenant and the dawn of the new: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." And Jesus needed just nine words to reveal himself as the end of all our searching: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John Calvin: "The Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become the sons of God."

The gospel of grace is wholly unlike the rule-based religion many of us are familiar with. Religion is complicated but grace is simple. Religion is vague but grace is crystal clear. Religion finds fault and does nothing to help, but the grace of God propels you triumphantly through life's toughest challenges. Religion will give you a headache and leave you sick and tired, but grace gives strength to the weary and life to the dead. Religion seeks to bridle the free but grace liberates the prisoner and the oppressed. In union with Christ you are loved, forgiven, saved, accepted, holy, righteous, dead to sin, new, and royal.

The gospel is not Jesus-plus-you or Jesus-plus-whatever-doctrine-is-in-vogue. It's just Jesus. His is the only name by which we can receive forgiveness and acceptance and holiness and all the other manifestations of grace. The gospel changes us. It delivers us from who we were and empowers us to be who we were always meant to be. It does this not by giving us instructions or telling us what to do but by revealing the true nature of God.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ... (John 3: 16)

Ellis, Paul. The Gospel in Ten Words (Kindle Locations 189-191). KingsPress. Kindle Edition.



Questions for discussion:

1. What comes to mind when you think of “the gospel”? Can you summarize the gospel in one short sentence?
 - Write something in your own words...
2. If the gospel means good news, is it possible that some people in the church have never heard it?
 - How have we mixed bad news with good news? what are some examples?
 - What price tags have we attached to the free grace of God?
3. Paul says the one thing that can stop you from walking in the love and grace of God is unbelief.
 - What is an unbelieving believer?
 - How do Christians exhibit unbelief in the goodness of God?
 - In what ways / areas of life are you learning to trust God more?
4. Read Romans 1:16-17
 - In what ways have you experienced the power of the Gospel?
 - How does it help you live by faith?