

# The Gospel: Series Introduction

Wednesday Bible Study // January 17 – February 7, 2024

## Why This Series?

When you heard that our subject for the month of January was “the gospel,” thoughts like “been there, done that” may have crossed your mind. Such thoughts may also cross your students’ minds. And yet the gospel is a perpetually relevant message, the very central claim of our faith. Mark calls the inauguration of Jesus’ earthly ministry “the beginning of *the gospel*” (Mark 1:1). The apostles understood themselves to be heralds of *the gospel* (2 Tim 1:10-11), not debaters (1 Cor 1:20-21), baptizers (1 Cor 1:17), self-help gurus, therapists, activists, or anything else. The gospel is the unique message of Christianity, the central content of our doctrine. Consequently, its compromise is our downfall. As the apostle Paul says with emphatic redundancy, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed [*anathema*]. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed [*anathema*]” (Gal 1:8-9).

But more than doctrinal content—as important as it is—the gospel is a source of life for the Christian. It is that which gives new life (1 Pet 1:23-25) and true faith (Rom 10:17); that “by which [we] are being saved” (1 Cor 15:2); that which animates living to Christ and dying to sin (Col 3:1-4). The gospel is fuel for the middle and end of the Christian life as well as at the beginning. It is therefore essential that our students know the gospel and that their thoughts, affections, and actions are shaped by it.

Finally, the gospel is the message that divides our world. There are “those who are being saved” and “those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18); “those who are called” (1 Cor 1:24) and those who are not. Humanly speaking, the distinction hinges on one’s response to the gospel. Does one respond with repentance and faith? Or does one respond with scorn, apathy, offense, or mockery? How do your students respond? How do their parents and families respond? How do *you* respond?

Hopefully you see the monumental significance of the gospel—to nonbelievers and believers, to new Christians and mature Christians, to middle and high schoolers and their leaders. In the following sections, I’ll lay out the content of this series and our goals for the students.

## What Is This Series?

This series consists of four lessons. The first three are Bible studies; the fourth is a lesson in evangelism, which will take place during CHBC’s Missions Week.

1. **Lesson 1: The Context of the Gospel (Acts 17:22-31).** As we’ll see in Lesson 2, the gospel is a specific message concerning a particular person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and what he accomplished in history. However, that announcement must be contextualized. In this lesson, we outline the context in which the gospel comes to every person who hears. Its context can be summed up in four movements: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

2. **Lesson 2: The Content of the Gospel (Rom 1:1-4; 1 Cor 15:1-5).** In this lesson, we see from Scripture what “the gospel” really means. It is news about a person and what he accomplished in history. The gospel can be summed up in three stages of one man’s work: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.
3. **Lesson 3: The Consequences of the Gospel (1 Cor 1:26-31).** Not all who hear the gospel believe it. Those who do believe receive unspeakable benefits from the Father, chiefly eternal salvation. Those who do not believe the gospel are condemned (John 3:18). Students must understand *both* the glorious promises of the gospel and the consequences of rejecting it. These consequences are mercy for those who believe and judgment for those who do not.
4. **Lesson 4: Confessing and Contending for the Gospel.** This lesson will not be anchored in a single text. It will draw on what the students have learned in the previous lessons and will ask the students to practice sharing the gospel, discuss evangelism strategies, and pray for their lost friends and family.

## Goals For This Series

Our goals for this series are that every student would:

1. **Articulate the gospel:** Students should know what the gospel is, how it should be understood in the context of the grand narrative of God’s redemption of his people, and where they stand in relation to it (as believers or unbelievers).
2. **Believe the gospel:** We cannot cause students to believe, no matter how effective our teaching. We should entrust students to the Holy Spirit and remove obstacles that prevent students from accepting the gospel. We should urge students to believe in Christ.
3. **Cherish the gospel:** The gospel is more than a set of propositions to be known. It is a message to be cherished; it conveys a *person* who is to be loved above all things. We should strive to make the affective dimension of the gospel clear to the students and should strive to embody it ourselves.
4. **Share the gospel:** Once again, the gospel is not merely a message to be understood but a message to pass along with urgency, earnestness, and delight. We want students to be equipped and confident to share the gospel with their friends, family, and strangers.

# 1. The Context of the Gospel (Acts 17:22-31)

Wednesday Bible Study // January 17, 2024

## Main Idea

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The context of the gospel is the story of the world, which can be summarized in four movements: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Every human being is a part of this story. It is often necessary to explain this arc to non-believers so that they can understand the gospel.

## Summary

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### Outline

- I. Setting (vv. 22-23)
  - a. Paul is invited to speak in the Areopagus.
  - b. Paul considers these people “very religious.”
- II. Creation (vv. 24-26)
  - a. God is the Creator of heaven and earth.
  - b. God is the Lord of heaven and earth.
- III. Fall (vv. 27-30)
  - a. Humanity is alienated from God.
  - b. Human beings must repent before the coming judgment.
- IV. Redemption (v. 31a)
  - a. Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, will return to judge the world in righteousness.
  - b. Those who flee to Christ for refuge will be saved.
- V. Consummation (v. 31b)
  - a. Jesus was raised from the dead.
  - b. Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for the consummation of God’s new creation.

## Commentary

### Setting (vv. 22-23)

After returning to Jerusalem in Acts 15, Paul has set out again on a missionary journey with his companions. He used his delay in Athens to share the gospel with Jews in the synagogues there. To the Jews, he reasoned from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ and that he had to suffer and be raised from the dead. However, with the Gentiles, who did not believe the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament), he appeals to natural revelation and their own innate religious inclinations. Some of the philosophers were intrigued by Paul’s message, so they invited him to speak at the Areopagus, a center of learning and debate in Athens. Paul accepted their invitation and went to preach the gospel there. It is important to

observe that Paul proclaims the gospel by setting forth the grand story of which it is a part—a story which progresses from *creation*, to the *fall*, through *redemption*, and finally to *consummation*.

You'll notice that Paul begins his discourse by noting the religious practices of the Greeks. They have idols, they offer sacrifices, they are "in every way...very religious." They have set up "objects of...worship" and they even recognize that there may be some god whom they do not know yet to whom they owe worship. Hence, they have an altar dedicated "to the unknown God." In our day, we certainly don't have explicit idol worship such as what Paul witnessed in Athens. Yet, human nature remains the same. Even contemporary Chapel Hill is a very religious place—for those with eyes to see. Recognizing the ways in which "religion" is expressed—even in a militantly "secular" culture—can help us gain confidence in evangelism and start some interesting, revealing conversations.

### **Creation (vv. 24-26)**

Paul moves on from his observations about Athenian culture and religion to his primary purpose: the preaching of the gospel. But notice that he begins *from within his own worldview* by acknowledging the true and living God as Creator and Lord of all things. We assume that this method would immediately alienate his audience, and it is true that his message was not received by all (see 17:32). Yet he begins in this way, I think, to show his audience why his message is so relevant to them and every soul under heaven. Two points about Paul's method are especially instructive.

*First, the God whom he proclaims is the Creator of all things*, including those to whom Paul is speaking. God "made the world and everything in it" (v. 24). He "does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (vv. 24-25). As the Creator of all things, including those to whom Paul is speaking, God is owed *everything* by his creatures, including worship, faith, love, and obedience, and he depends on them for absolutely nothing. In fact, they depend upon him for everything (including life, breath, and everything), even if they do not acknowledge him as Creator.

*Second, the God whom he proclaims is the "Lord of heaven and earth."* That is, he has all authority. He is sovereign over all things. These assertions are elaborated later, when Paul declares that God "determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (v. 26). This God whom he proclaims is not uninvolved in the affairs of the world he made. Rather, he is intimately concerned with his world and is in complete control of it. The implication is that he should not be taken lightly or brushed aside. As Creator and Lord, he has an immediate claim on every human life. This fact is further reinforced when Paul declares that God "made...every nation of mankind." That includes the pagan (or secular) ones to whom he is witnessing.

At this point, many students will wonder whether we can still proclaim God as Creator and Lord to nonbelievers, who do not believe that such a God exists. I think such an approach can be fruitful for two reasons. First, as Christians, we really believe that such a God exists, and it does no good to hide our faith to appear relevant to nonbelievers. That God is Creator and Lord is the very ground of his relevance to every human being. This is precisely Paul's point in these verses. Second, starting with God as Creator and Lord lays the foundations for the internal coherence of the Christian faith. In an age when many view Christianity as silly, eccentric, and irrational, it is to our advantage to show the internal

logic of our faith from the outset. God uses the open statement of the truth, including the reality of a Creator who is at once transcendent and personal, to save sinners.

### **Fall (vv. 27-30)**

Paul then turns to the reality of sin. He does not say explicitly “you are transgressors of God’s law,” but he assumes this fact and expresses its consequences in other, implicit ways. He claims that God ordained that every nation “should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (v. 27). He thus presupposes that humans are by nature alienated from God due to sin. Otherwise, they would have no need to “feel their way toward him,” and there would be no uncertainty of their success (notice “perhaps,” v. 27). Furthermore, he expresses the “ignorance” of fallen humanity (v. 30), who “think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man” (v. 29). False and blasphemous ideas about God originate in sinful hearts and ignorant minds. Finally, the command to “repent” (v. 30) and the promise of judgment (v. 31), to which we will come shortly, obviously presupposes human depravity.

Furthermore, there is hidden in Paul’s discourse a profound statement about the purpose for which human beings were made. Notice that even after our fall into sin, God decrees the proliferation of the human race for a purpose: “that they should seek God, and perhaps...find him” (v. 27). The end for which all people are made and sustained is to come into fellowship with God. All things were, after all, made “for” Christ (Col 1:16). While not every man and woman will attain that fellowship, it is nonetheless powerful to explain to nonbelieving friends and family that they were made for God, and something, even in their hearts and experience, will be unfulfilled until they come into fellowship with God through Christ.

Of all the parts of Paul’s story of the world, we most often neglect the reality of human sinfulness in our evangelism. We like to speak of God’s benevolence in creation, his mercy in redemption, and his kindness in the consummation, but it is difficult for us to tell our friends and family that they are sinners, alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18), and in need of a savior. Paul informs his audience of their sinfulness implicitly, but clearly. As for us, the forthrightness with which we speak of sin and call for repentance will vary depending on our audience, but we cannot exclude these subjects from our evangelism. The sinfulness of our natures and acts and the wrath of God which they merit must be shared along with the glorious offer of forgiveness and righteousness (Rom 1:18–3:20). It is only in the context of sin, condemnation, and death that forgiveness and atonement make sense.

### **Redemption (v. 31a)**

We have seen Paul’s heavy emphasis on God as Creator and his assumption of the catastrophe of the fall and the curse to which it subjected the whole human race. In the first part of v. 31, he explains the hope that fallen humanity has before God, the Creator and Lord. A man whom God has appointed will judge the world in righteousness.

That statement may not sound much like redemption—it sounds rather like judgment! But we must understand it in light of the cosmic scope of Jesus’ work. Through his death, resurrection, present heavenly intercession, and second coming, Jesus is renewing the universe. A crucial step in that work is

the final judgment, when the ungodly will be condemned and only those who have repented (see the end of v. 30)—that is, turned from their sins and trusted in the Lord Jesus—will gain entry into the new heavens and new earth (see Rev 21–22). As ironic as it may seem, the one with all power and authority to carry out the cataclysmic judgment at the end of the age is also the one to whom we must flee “for refuge” if we wish to avoid that judgment (Heb 6:18). Redemption and judgment go together in the biblical story. (For instance, think of the episode at the Red Sea as salvation for Israel and judgment on Pharaoh and his army.) Whether one is judged or saved depends on one’s relationship to the appointed Judge.

### **Consummation (v. 31b)**

Finally, at the very end of the last verse in our passage, we come to the consummation of all things, at least by implication. Paul mentions Jesus’ resurrection, which earns some scoffs from his learned audience. But this is both the center and end of the story. By the resurrection, God has publicly, in history, “given assurance to all” of the coming judgment. This judgment is not generic. It will be carried out by a specific man named Jesus who hails from Nazareth, whom God has appointed to carry out the task. Remarkably, Jesus’ resurrection was the firstfruits of a cosmic resurrection (Matt 19:28; 2 Pet 3:13) in which the world will be renewed, God will dwell with his people, and he will consign to hell all those who did not receive the Messiah. Jesus’ resurrection shows us what the consummation of all things will be like, and it gives us assurance that we will partake of that consummation, if indeed we are united to him by faith.

### **Summary**

There are four movements to Paul’s introduction of the gospel, with a highly significant preface. Here is the story, in summary form: All people are religious by nature; they were created to worship and serve God, and this inclination to worship is evident from their experience and practice. There is only one God, who is the Creator and the Lord of all things. He made all things. As his creatures we owe him all the love and gratitude we can muster and more. Further, he rules all things. As his subjects, we owe him allegiance and honor. However, we fail to render to God what he is owed. We are alienated from him through sin. We have false ideas of who he is, so we worship idols. We are ignorant, willful, rebellious, evil people. But God has acted to bring us back into fellowship with himself. He himself has come as a man called Jesus to redeem his own people and judge the wicked. All who repent of their sins and trust in this Jesus escape the final judgment and are brought into fellowship with God, the end for which they were created. Those who do not can expect condemnation on the last day. The end toward which God is guiding all history is resurrection, in which his Son has already participated, and which is the fate of the world and all those who are redeemed.

## **Memorize**

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### **The Apostles’ Creed**

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.

**Connection:** These succinct lines of the Apostles' Creed express Paul's teaching in our passage in summary form. God is the Maker of heaven and earth. As Creator, he is also Lord. And, he has a Son, Jesus Christ, by whom he will judge the living and the dead.

### **Memory Verse: Acts 17:24-25**

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

### **Discuss**

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1. What four words (creation, fall, redemption, consummation) summarize the context, or the story, into which the gospel fits?
2. When sharing the gospel, why do you think it is important to know its context?
3. Do you think that the nonbelievers you know are “in every way very religious,” as Paul says? Why or why not? Do you notice anything in their behavior, attitudes, or values that would suggest the answer is “yes”?
4. If God is the Creator and Lord of all things, including you, me, and our nonbelieving friends and family, what does that mean for us? What does every person who has ever lived owe to God?
5. What does the passage tell us about our sinful condition? Why is it essential that the “bad news” of sin and judgment be included in the story of the gospel?
6. What does it mean to “repent”? Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus? For what sins do you need to repent today?
7. When you think of Jesus, do you think of him as a judge? Why or why not? Why is it good news for Christians that Jesus will judge the world in righteousness?
8. What from the passage or today's discussion will you continue to meditate on this week? What can you share with your family?

### **Pray**

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- Thank God for his kindness in giving us “life and breath and everything.” Thank him for his patience with you, despite your sin.
- Ask God to help you give him the worship and obedience he is owed. Ask him to help you prepare for the day on which Jesus will judge the world.

- Pray for your non-believing friends and family. Ask God to bring them to repentance and faith. Ask him to help you boldly share the gospel with them.

- *Share personal prayer requests with one another.*

**Some ideas:** What sins are you fighting? How do you want to grow in Christ? How else do you need God's help in your life? How do your friends need God's help? Which non-believers are you praying for?



## 2. The Content of the Gospel (Rom 1:1-4; 1 Cor 15:1-5)

Wednesday Bible Study // January 24, 2024

### Main Idea

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The content of the gospel is news about a person, Jesus Christ, and his work, including his righteous life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection. One must know the content of the gospel in order to receive it, stand in it, hold fast to it, proclaim it, and discern how to communicate it to non-believers.

### Summary

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#### Outline

##### Romans 1:1-4

- I. The gospel is promised beforehand through God's prophets in the Holy Scriptures.
- II. The gospel is about God's Son.
  - a. It is an announcement of historical events.
  - b. It is about Christ and his work, not about us.
- III. What does the gospel communicate about God's Son?
  - a. According to the flesh, he is descended from David.
  - b. According to the Spirit, he was declared to be the Son of God through his resurrection.
- IV. His name, "Jesus Christ our Lord," reveals his person and work.
  - a. "Jesus" means "savior."
  - b. "Christ" means "Messiah."
  - c. "Lord" means the God of Israel; the possessor of all authority.

##### 1 Corinthians 15:1-5

- I. The gospel is a message about a person and his work.
  - a. The person is Jesus Christ.
  - b. His work includes events:
    - i. Jesus' death (for our sins)
    - ii. Jesus' burial
    - iii. Jesus' resurrection
    - iv. Jesus' appearances to eyewitnesses
- II. What is left for us to do?
  - a. We receive the gospel. (We repent of sin.)
  - b. We stand firm in the gospel.
  - c. We hold fast to the gospel until the end.

## Commentary

### Romans 1:1-4

The apostle Paul introduces his letter to the Romans with a summary of “the gospel of God,” for which he was set apart as “a preacher and apostle and teacher” (2 Tim 1:11). The first thing we learn about this central message of Paul’s ministry and of the whole Bible is that God “promised [it] beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (v. 2). This might seem like a throw-away line, but it is quite significant, both for how we understand the gospel in relation to history and how we speak about the gospel to non-believers.

The first explicit (although obscure) promise of the gospel occurs in Genesis 3:15, as God pronounces curses on the serpent who deceived Eve: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The institution of marriage even prefigures an effect of the gospel *before* humanity’s fall into sin, namely the union of God’s Son and his bride (cf. Gen 2:24-25 and Eph 5:31-32). In other words, in a mysterious way, the gospel was always God’s “plan A.” For that reason, it is the organizing center of all history; it gives meaning and purpose to everything. Such a crucial message should cause us to pay attention. Where do we begin learning about the content of this message?

According to what we’ve read so far, we begin to learn about the events of the gospel in the Old Testament (OT). (Remember, Paul is in the process of composing letters that would be collected along with other documents to compose the New Testament [NT]. For him, “the Holy Scriptures” refers to what we call “the OT.”) Jesus himself saw the gospel prefigured and promised in its pages (Luke 24:25-27):

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Paul will claim later that the OT is “able to make you wise for salvation *through faith in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 3:15). The OT and NT are therefore not disjoint compositions. They are united because they testify to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The OT communicates Jesus as promised; the NT communicates him as the fulfillment of the OT’s promises (2 Cor 1:20). The gospel, then, is the central and organizing theme of the Bible and of all of history.

Additionally, that the gospel was promised in the OT raises an important apologetic point. The OT was written long before Jesus’ life and ministry. It contains many prophecies of future events, some of which were fulfilled before Christ’s advent, but many of which were not. Then, Jesus arrived and fulfilled the prophecies written long before he was alive. How can a non-believer explain fulfilled prophecy? Christians have a straightforward explanation: God sovereignly ordained all of history and graciously communicated how he would act in advance. Non-believers should reckon with the unity of the Scriptures and the force of predictive prophecy. There is apologetic value to the promise-fulfillment shape of Scripture. In conversations with some non-believers, it will be useful to ask them to consider the historical fact of fulfilled prophecy and how they account for the biblical data.

Having established that the gospel was promised in the OT, we will move on to what we’ve assumed so far: the content of the gospel. According to the apostle Paul, “the gospel of God” is about

“his Son” (v. 3). As we will see, we can divide the content of the gospel into two categories: *who* the gospel is about and *what* this person has done. Theologians refer to these categories as the *person* and *work* of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the gospel is fundamentally an announcement of events. After all, the word “gospel” simply means “good news,” and “news” refers to events that have happened in the past.

It is important to underline that the gospel is about Christ and his work, not us and ours. The gospel is not an announcement about how good we are, nor the works we must do to be saved. That the gospel is entirely focused on Christ undercuts many false perceptions about the central message of Christianity. This fact should also instruct us. In our own lives of discipleship to Christ, our obedience, effort, and action comes in light of who God is in Christ and what he has done for us in Christ—in short, it comes in light of the gospel.

Paul has told us that the gospel is about God’s Son. But *what* about God’s Son, exactly? In vv. 3-4, we learn two things about God’s Son. First, he was descended from David according to the flesh. Why is this relevant to the proclamation of the gospel? Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God made promises to and about one of David’s sons. God said (1 Chr 17:11-14),

When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.

Some say that the “offspring” to whom God refers is Solomon, who built God’s temple in Jerusalem. It is certainly true that Solomon fulfills this prophecy, in a sense. The Bible itself acknowledges this (1 Kgs 8:12-21)! Yet there are parts of God’s promise that Solomon certainly did not fulfill. Solomon’s sons, the kings of Judah, were remarkably wicked, and were thus exiled from the land that God had given them. For hundreds of years, there was no one to sit on David’s throne. The throne was not, in this sense, “established forever”—that is, of course, until “something greater than Solomon” arrived (Luke 11:31). Jesus is the “offspring” of David in whom God’s promises of an eternal kingdom are fulfilled.

In addition to this important piece of historical context, Paul’s claim that Jesus is David’s son according to the flesh is crucial because it affirms that Jesus is really and truly a human being. God’s eternal Word really “became flesh” (John 1:14). The author to the Hebrews succinctly explains why the Son of God had to assume a human nature in order to save humanity (Heb 2:14-17):

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The eternal Son of God became a human being to save human beings, which he accomplished through the events of his life as related in the gospel itself! Let’s turn now to those events.

The second thing we learn in vv. 3-4 about God's Son is that he was declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection according to the Spirit. There is a deep mystery associated with this statement. On the one hand, Jesus is the Son of God by nature. He is eternally Son, so he does not *become* the Son in this declaration. Rather, his resurrection is God's "stamp of approval" on his life and work; God's public manifestation of Jesus' identity; God's vindication (or justification, see 1 Tim 3:16) of Jesus' claims and person. On the other hand, according to his human nature, Jesus' resurrection marks a definitive change in his status. Prior to his resurrection, he was in a state of *humiliation*. He was a "man of sorrows" (Isa 53:3), he had "nowhere to lay his head" (Matt 8:20), he was reviled and ultimately killed on the cross. In his resurrection, however, he entered the state of *exaltation*. All authority in heaven and on earth was given to him (Matt 28:19). All things were put under his feet (Ps 8:6; Heb 1:13). Jesus' resurrection and enthronement fulfill humanity's original mandate to subdue the earth and rule it (Gen 1:26-28). So, while we cannot say that Jesus' nature as the eternal Son of God changed, we can say that according to his human nature he was "appointed the heir of all things" (Heb 1:2). "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs" (Heb 1:3-4).

Lest we get lost in the details of Christ's person and work according to the flesh and Spirit, let me summarize what we've seen so far. The gospel concerning God's Son is fundamentally a proclamation of his atoning death and victorious resurrection as Lord of all.

There is one more phrase to investigate in these verses: "Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 4), the unique man whom Paul identifies as "God's Son." These four words are a fitting conclusion to Paul's summary of the gospel, not only because they identify the person of God's Son, but also because they reveal who Jesus is and what his work means.

- *Jesus* means "savior." (Remember, an angel instructed Joseph to name his son Jesus because "he will save his people from their sins," Matt 1:21.) So, Jesus is a savior from sin.
- *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messiah," the title of the servant of the Lord prefigured in the OT who would save Israel from her enemies and rule her. So, Jesus is the fulfillment of all OT prophecy concerning the Messiah.
- Finally, *Lord* can be taken in three senses. First, it means one who possesses authority. Second, the claim that "Jesus is Lord" would have been heard by the readers of Paul's letter as a direct challenge to the Roman claim that "Caesar is Lord." In other words, the true sovereign ruler is not Caesar, but Jesus Christ. Third, the Greek word for "Lord" translates "Adonai," the Hebrew word that was often substituted for YHWH, the divine name. Paul is therefore identifying Jesus Christ with YHWH, the one true God, the Maker of heaven and earth.

"Jesus Christ our Lord," then, designates Jesus as the one true God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who became a man to serve as Israel's Messiah, that is, to rule his people and save them from their sins. "Jesus Christ our Lord" is in itself a summary of the gospel.

## **1 Corinthians 15:1-5**

In these verses Paul sets out to remind the Corinthian church of the gospel he preached to them, which is “of first importance” (v. 3). What was the message that he delivered? As we investigate these verses, we will see the same content that we saw in Rom 1:1-4, expressed in slightly different ways.

First, we notice that the gospel which Paul delivered is an announcement of news about a specific person. The subject of Paul’s one-sentence summary of the gospel is “Christ” (v. 3). The pronoun “he” substitutes for “Christ” in vv. 4 and 5, but still functions as the grammatical subject. The gospel, then, is a message about a man, Jesus Christ.

Specifically, it is about this man’s accomplishments. He “died for our sins,” “he was buried,” “he was raised on the third day,” and “he appeared” to the apostles (vv. 3-5). These are the same events related in Rom 1:1-4 (although some are implicit in the Romans passage). Interestingly, Jesus’ public appearances to his chosen eyewitnesses (Cephas and the twelve), those tasked with spreading the message of the gospel around the world, are included in Paul’s summary of the gospel. This fact carries massive apologetic value: Jesus’ death and resurrection, the center of the gospel message, were historical events that were witnessed and eventually propagated by a large group of people. The historical testimony concerning Jesus’ resurrection is a *public* fact, accessible to all.

As we saw in Rom 1:1-4, the key events of Jesus’ life occurred “in accordance with the Scriptures” (v. 3). That is, they were “promised beforehand through [God’s] prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2). This claim lends further credibility to the events of Christ’s life. God told all people what he would do in Christ long before he accomplished salvation.

We have emphasized so far that the gospel is an announcement of news concerning one man, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have done so in order to stress what the gospel is *not*: it is not a form of self-help advice; it is not an announcement of our inherent goodness and lovability; it is not a prescribed set of good works that the church must accomplish in the world; it is not a call to generic kindness; it is not a “law” which we must fulfill in order to be justified. The gospel, pure and simple, is news about what God has done in Jesus Christ to redeem his people through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. But as we stress that the gospel is about God’s action in Christ, one might wonder what the gospel requires of us. Paul answers that question in vv. 1-2.

As those to whom the announcement of the gospel has come, we are called upon to receive it, stand in it, and hold fast to it. *To receive the gospel* is to believe it—that is, not merely to acknowledge the truth of the events it relates but to trust in the one who accomplished salvation for sinners. *To stand in the gospel* is to trust anew in Jesus each day, and to discern how your reception of the grace of God in the gospel matters for every moment of your life. *To hold fast to the gospel* is to contend for it, to esteem it as more glorious than all else, and to resist anyone and anything that could shake your hope in the gospel, until the very end. Our response to the gospel should be confident and joyous reception, renewed each day until our death against every so-called gospel that wants to claim our hope, trust, and worship.

## **Summary**

The gospel is a message of what God has done in Christ to save sinners. Specifically, it includes the events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, his present ministry as ruler and judge of all things, and his

function as savior of all who turn from their sins and trust in him. All people are called upon to receive, stand in, and hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Memorize

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### The Apostles' Creed

We believe in in Jesus Christ, [God's] only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**Connection:** These succinct lines of the Apostles' creed express the gospel "concerning [God's] Son" (Rom 1:3). They summarize the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, through which we are saved.

### Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 2:8

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel."

## Discuss

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1. According to Rom 1:1-4 and 1 Cor 15:1-5, who is the gospel all about?
2. According to Rom 1:1-4 and 1 Cor 15:1-5, what message about Jesus does the gospel convey?
3. Why is it important that Jesus was "descended from David"? (See 1 Chr 17:11-14.)
4. Why is it important that Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God" through his resurrection? What is the resurrected Christ doing right now? (See Ps 8:6; Heb 7:25.)
5. How can the fact that the gospel was promised long before Jesus accomplished it, "in accordance with the Scriptures," help you explain the truth of the gospel to your friends? What about the fact that after Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to Peter and the apostles?
6. So, Jesus lived, died for sinners, and was raised. What do these past events have to do with you, your friends, your family, and the world today? (Check out some of these texts: Matt 28:18; Col 2:13-15; Rom 8:11; Col 3:1-4; 1 Cor 15:50-58; Phil 2:9-11; 2 Tim 4:1; Acts 10:42, 17:31.)
7. How should we respond to the gospel? Put another way, according to Paul, how does the Corinthian church respond to it? (See 1 Cor 15:1-2.) Have you responded to the gospel by receiving it, standing in it, and holding fast to it?
8. What false "gospel" messages do you hear at school, on social media, and elsewhere? How does the biblical gospel correct those false messages?
9. What from the passage or today's discussion will you continue to meditate on this week? What can you share with your family?

## Pray

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- Praise and thank God for providing a way of salvation for us through his Son.
- Ask God to help you receive, stand in, and hold fast to Jesus through the gospel.
- Pray for your non-believing friends and family. Ask God to bring them to repentance and faith. Ask him to help you boldly share the gospel with them.
- *Share personal prayer requests with one another.*

**Some ideas:** What sins are you repenting of? How do you need to grow in Christ? How else do you need God's help in your life? How do your friends need God's help? Which non-believers are you praying for?

## 3. The Consequences of the Gospel (1 Cor 1:26-31)

Wednesday Bible Study // January 31, 2024

### Main Idea

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The consequences of belief (or unbelief) in the gospel are manifold but may be summarized in one overarching reality: union with Christ. Those who receive Christ in the gospel are united to him. In this union, they receive his righteousness, holiness, and redemption. These gifts answer to our law-breaking, sinful, and death-bound predicament, from which we could never rescue ourselves. Those who do not believe the gospel are not united to Christ, do not receive his benefits, and are consequently condemned to suffer eternally in hell.

### Summary

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#### Outline

- I. Context (vv. 26-29)
  - a. The logic that undergirds God's way of salvation is the exclusion of human boasting and the primacy of his glory.
  - b. The redeemed creature could not and should not boast in the presence of God.
- II. Jesus' Work, Applied to Believers (vv. 30-31)
  - a. Jesus' work is applied to us through faith.
  - b. Upon believing the gospel, we are "in Christ Jesus."
  - c. In union with Christ, we receive the benefits of what Christ has done: righteousness (or justification), sanctification, and redemption.
  - d. The way in which God saves his people ensures that he alone is glorified.

### Commentary

Have you ever wondered whether there is a rationale to God's way of salvation? Sometimes, as Paul points out just before our passage, God's ways appear foolish to us (1 Cor 1:21). Yet his "foolishness" is "wiser than men" (1 Cor 1:25). He saves sinners by grace alone "so that" (vv. 29, 31) he is glorified and we are humbled.

The reason that God saves anyone in particular lies deep within the mystery of his own counsel. But in the case of the Corinthian church, and probably as a general pattern in the Church throughout history, God chooses "what is foolish," "what is weak," "what is low and despised...even things that are not" (vv. 27-28). He chooses those who are not worthy of his favor. In other words, he chooses and saves by grace alone. These three categories—the foolish, the weak, and the low/despised—"shame" their opposites—the wise, the strong, and "things that are"—because they have received the grace and mercy of the Lord.



God saves by grace for a reason. He has a “purpose” for salvation, and that purpose is intimately connected with his “grace” (2 Tim 1:9). That purpose is to glorify himself. Conversely, in the words of our text, God saves by grace “so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (v. 29). God saves sinners by grace so that he receives the glory for their salvation; boasting, for them, is excluded, unless it is a boast in what the Lord has done. The very same thing is taught in Romans 3:23-25, 27:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...Then what becomes of our boasting? *It is excluded*. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

As God, through the gospel, topples the pride of the wise and exalts the foolish, Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled: “Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isa 40:4-5).

Those who grasp the wisdom of God’s grace in Christ will embrace v. 29. How could a sinful creature boast in the presence of his Maker? As we consider how and why we are saved, our reflections and questions must end in worship:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33-36)

These meditations contextualize the primary question of this third lesson in our series on the gospel. We have discussed the gospel in terms of what Christ has done for us, but we’ve paid very little attention to the benefits or consequences of the gospel which accrue to those who believe. We should wonder, at this point, how we appropriate for ourselves what Jesus has accomplished.

The answer is simple: *through faith*. The gospel testifies to what Jesus has done. By its very nature, it demands faith, and it is through faith that we become partakers of Jesus himself. In v. 30, Paul tells us that Jesus “became to us wisdom from God.” This phrase recalls his extended discussion of wisdom and folly throughout chapter 1, particularly vv. 22-24: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Christ “becomes wisdom” “to those who are called”—those whom God renews by his Spirit and through the gospel such that they believe the gospel and receive Christ.

By “receive Christ,” I do not mean simply “receive the truth about Christ;” I mean receive Christ *himself*. Those who receive the message of Christ crucified as wisdom from God are “in Christ Jesus” (v. 30). That is, they are joined to him, and he to them, in mystical union (see John 15:1-17; 1 Cor 6:17). This is the chief benefit of the gospel. When one believes the gospel, one is united to Jesus Christ by the Spirit and through faith (Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17). Union with Christ, according to the NT, is the overarching paradigm for salvation. Christians are those whom the Spirit indwells, those who abide in vital union with Christ. This is not to minimize the other aspects of our salvation, including

justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification, and more, but simply to say that we receive none of these benefits outside of union with Christ. All these benefits come through him.

This is precisely what is taught in our text. Those who are in Christ receive from him “righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (v. 30). These three benefits are not unconnected or random. Rather, they answer our fallen predicament in its full scope.

To see how this is so, we need to investigate 1 Corinthians 15:56 briefly. The verse reads, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” In this short sentence, Paul presents our predicament in its manifold horror. As sinners, we are lawbreakers (1 John 3:4). The law, although “holy, righteous, and good” (Rom 7:12) as given by God, condemns us (Rom 3:19). But sin doesn’t merely render us guilty; it renders us polluted, unable to attain to the end for which we were made, and unworthy to stand before the holy God (Heb 12:14), who is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). The consequence of our guilt and defilement is death (Rom 6:23)—comprehending both the decay and death of our physical bodies and final, spiritual death experienced in hell’s eternal torments (Rev 20:14). After Adam sinned, all his progeny inherit this predicament (Rom 5:12, 19).

With news this bad, we should wonder, how can Christ reverse our fortunes? How can these three hindrances to our final end—the law, sin, and death—be overcome?<sup>1</sup> Jesus, like a good physician, provides the medicine suited to our condition. As sinners, we are condemned by the law—but through his work on the cross, Jesus forgives the sins of those who believe and gives them his own *righteousness* (Rom 3:24-25, 5:19; cf. v. 30). The law’s condemning power is removed (Rom 5:1, 8:1). As sinners, we are enslaved to sin (John 8:34) and unable to please God (Rom 8:7). So, Jesus gives his holiness (*sanctification*) to those who believe (1 Cor 6:11; cf. v. 30). Finally, as sinners, we are subject to physical death and eternal punishment in hell. So, Jesus *redeems* us from all our enemies, raising us bodily with him on the last day so that we will enjoy eternal life with him (1 Cor 15:12-58; cf. v. 30).

Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption: these are the benefits we receive through faith in Christ as he is proclaimed in the gospel. We have seen that Jesus is a perfect savior, perfectly suited to our deepest and most pressing needs. We should praise him for his humility, condescension, suffering, death, resurrection, and all that he accomplished on our behalf, in order that we might escape the condemnation of the law, sin, and death, and live with God forever in perfect holiness and love.

After v. 30, Paul returns to where he started: the logic of gracious salvation. Why has God acted in this way, to accomplish the salvation of his people through his Son and then give them what he has earned? The answer, once again, is “so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor 1:31). Both the accomplishment of salvation (the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus; the content of the gospel) and its application (righteousness, sanctification, and redemption through the Spirit; the consequences of the gospel) are “because of [God]” or “from [God]” (1 Cor 1:30). He is

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<sup>1</sup> Although “the law” is included in the list of hindrances to our attainment of heaven, it is important to say explicitly that it is not unequivocally evil, like sin and death are. The law, as I’ve already said, is in itself “holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12), “the embodiment of knowledge and truth” (Rom 2:20). The law condemns the non-believer because he is a sinner who transgresses the law. The believer, however, while a lawbreaker, has been set free from the law’s condemning power through Christ’s blood and righteousness. Now, in Christ, the law functions as a teacher, showing the believer how to live in a way that pleases God. In Christ, the law is not our enemy, but our friend, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. For more, read Romans 1–8 and follow Paul’s reasoning closely.

the source of our salvation, from first to last. His unilateral action to save does not take away or compromise our autonomy; rather, his saving actions spring from the depths of his love and are the preconditions for our becoming truly free (Gal 5:1). God saves graciously, apart from and irrespective of our merit (Rom 9:16), so that he gets all glory.

The spirit of this teaching on God's gracious salvation is expressed in David's prayer at the conclusion of his life, just before Solomon becomes king. According to David, *everything*, including our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, and even our good will to consecrate ourselves to him, is a gift from a glorious and gracious Father.

Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes, performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision." (1 Chr 29:10–19)

Let me conclude by summarizing the text for this lesson. We have seen that through faith in Jesus as he is conveyed through the gospel message, we receive the perfect medicine for the diseases of sin and death. We receive *righteousness* to answer our law-breaking. We receive *sanctification* to answer our sinful pollution. We receive *redemption* to answer our ultimate fate, death. We should call *all* to repent and believe the gospel so that they too can receive God's free grace and find medicine for their sickness unto death.

## Memorize

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### ***New City Catechism* Question 32**

*What do justification and sanctification mean?* Justification means our declared righteousness before God, made possible by Christ's death and resurrection for us. Sanctification means our gradual, growing righteousness, made possible by the Spirit's work in us.

**Connection:** Justification and sanctification are the two chief benefits of the gospel, given to believers in union with Christ.

## Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:30

“Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

## Discuss

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1. What is the foundational reason why God saves us by grace? (See the “so that...” statements in today’s text.) Does it bother you that we have no cause for boasting before God, and that he gets all the glory for salvation?
2. Why shouldn’t we boast in God’s presence? How should this attitude shape our relationship with him?
3. Upon believing the gospel, we are found “in Christ Jesus” (v. 30). What does that mean?
4. What benefits do we receive in our union with Christ? (See v. 30.)
5. Why do we—and all people—need the gifts that Christ gives? (Compare 1 Cor 15:56.)
6. What happens to those who do not believe the gospel, and consequently do not receive these benefits?
7. How should the knowledge that you, if you believe, are united to Christ affect your life? Is it good news to be united to Christ? As you walk the halls of school, play sports, and hang out with friends, what difference does union with Christ make?
8. How, practically, do we give God all the glory for our salvation?
9. What from the passage or today’s discussion will you continue to meditate on this week? What can you share with your family?

## Pray

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- Praise and thank God for providing a way of salvation for us through his Son and for uniting you to Christ by his grace through faith.
- Praise God for his wisdom in providing a perfect savior, perfectly suited to deliver us from sin and death.
- Ask God to help you live in light of your union with Christ and for his glory.
- Pray for your non-believing friends and family. Ask God to bring them to repentance and faith. Ask him to help you boldly share the gospel with them.
- *Share personal prayer requests with one another.*  
**Some ideas:** What sins are you repenting of? How do you need to grow in Christ? How else do you need God’s help in your life? How do your friends need God’s help? Which non-believers are you praying for?

## 4. Confessing and Contending for the Gospel

Wednesday Bible Study // February 7, 2024

### Introduction

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This week, we won't study a particular text of the Bible. Rather, drawing on what we've learned over the past three weeks, we'll (1) practice evangelism, (2) discuss evangelism strategies, and (3) pray for non-believers, whether friends, family members, or acquaintances.

### Practice, Discuss, and Pray

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1. Briefly review the three previous lessons.
  - a. What is the broad context of the gospel? Why is it helpful to explain this context to non-believers?
  - b. What is the content of the gospel? Who and what is the gospel fundamentally about?
  - c. What benefits do those who have believed the gospel receive? Why is this important for their lives?
2. Pair students with one another. Have each student practice sharing the gospel, or explaining the context of the gospel, with his or her partner. (Consider giving the students "characters:" a friend who is suffering; a friend who has asked to come to church with you; a friend you want to invite to church; a friend who says she doesn't believe in God at all; a family member who brings you to church but doesn't want to come himself; a friend who is making bad decisions; etc.)
3. Discuss the activity as a group.
  - a. What made it difficult to share the gospel with your partner? What makes it difficult to share about Jesus in school or at home?
  - b. In general, what prevents you from sharing the gospel?
  - c. How can you overcome these challenges?
  - d. How can you begin to answer some of the most common objections to the gospel that you hear from your friends and family?
4. Have each student share with the group about one non-believer in their life. This should be a person with whom the student wants to share the gospel. Pray as a group for each student and his or her non-believing friend or family member.