

The Gospel Essentials

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The Source, Nature, and Power of the Gospel:

1. God is the Gospel's author, revealing it to us in and by his Word (Mark 1:14; Rom. 1:1). Its authority therefore comes from him and not from any particular church or human institution.
2. The Gospel is what effectually saves everyone who believes, without distinction (Rom. 1:16), by the power of God himself (1Cor. 1:18), regardless of the eloquence, technique, or rational persuasion of men (1Cor. 1:21; 2:1-5).
3. The Gospel diagnoses the universal human condition as one of sinful rebellion against God, which, if unchanged, will lead each person to eternal loss under God's condemnation. Man has no natural goodness in him (Rom 7:18), even though all men are made in the image of God; His image is distorted in us because of sin. The image must be restored through Christ (2Cor 4:4).
4. Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, and the only mediator between God and humanity (John 14:6; 1Tim. 2:5). The Bible offers no hope that sincere worshipers of other religions will be saved without personal faith in Jesus Christ.
5. The church is commanded and obligated by God to preach the Gospel to every living person (Luke 24:47; Matt. 28:18-19).

Essentials of our Faith in the Gospel (*what must we believe?*)

6. *Christ's deity*: Faith in Jesus Christ as the divine Word (or *Logos*, John 1:1), the second Person of the Trinity, co-eternal and co-essential with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Heb. 1:3).
7. *Christ's incarnate humanity* (John 1:14). Faith in the true humanity of Christ as the virgin-born descendant of David (Rom. 1:3), he had a true human nature, was subject to the Law of God (Gal. 4:5), and was like us at all points, except without sin (Heb. 2:17, 7:26-28).
8. *Christ's atonement*: In his obedience, he offered a perfect sacrifice, appeasing the Father by paying for our sins and satisfying divine justice on our behalf according to God's eternal plan. (Rom 3:25-26; 1Joh 4:10)
9. *Christ's saving work included both his life and his death in our behalf* (Gal. 3:13). His perfect obedience fulfilled all the demands of the Law of God in our behalf (Mat 5:17; Heb 4:15).
10. *Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead* (1Cor. 15:14).
11. *Justification by faith alone in Christ alone* (Rom. 3:28; 4:5; Gal. 2:16). There is only one true Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

12. *The imputation* (reckoning or counting) *both of our sins to Christ and of his righteousness to us*, whereby our sins are fully forgiven and we are fully accepted (2Cor. 5:19-21). We are not justified by the righteousness of Christ infused into us nor by any righteousness that is thought to inhere within us.

Relationship of Justification to Sanctification

13. The righteousness of Christ by which we are justified is properly his own, which he achieved apart from us, in and by his perfect obedience. This righteousness is counted, reckoned, or imputed to us by the forensic (that is, legal) declaration of God, as the sole ground of our justification. Any works that we perform at any stage of our existence do not add to the merit of Christ, nor do they earn for us any merit that contributes in any way to the ground of our justification (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

14. All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are in the process of being made holy and conformed to the image of Christ. But those consequences of justification are not its ground. God declares us just, remits our sins, and adopts us as his children, by his grace alone, and through faith alone, because of Christ alone, while we are still sinners (Rom. 4:5).

15. Saving faith results in sanctification, the transformation of life in growing conformity to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification means ongoing repentance, a life of turning from sin to serve Jesus Christ in grateful reliance on him as one's Lord and Master (Gal. 5:22-25; Rom. 8:4, 13-14). Justification cannot be divorced from our sanctifying union with Christ and our increasing conformity to his image through prayer, repentance, cross-bearing, and life in the Spirit.

16. We affirm that saving faith includes mental assent to the content of the Gospel, acknowledgment of our own sin and need, and personal trust and reliance upon Christ and his work. Saving faith is not mental acceptance of the Gospel alone, nor is justification secured by a mere outward profession of faith. Yet no element of saving faith is a meritorious work or earns salvation for us.

Doctrine and Christian Witness

17. Although true doctrine is vital for spiritual health and well-being, we are not saved by doctrine. Doctrine is necessary to inform us how we may be saved by Christ, but it is Christ who saves. Yet the doctrines of the Gospel cannot be rejected without harm. Denial of the Gospel brings spiritual ruin and exposes us to God's judgment.

18. Jesus Christ commands his followers to proclaim the Gospel to all living persons, evangelizing everyone everywhere, and discipling believers within the fellowship of the church (Eph 4:11-16). A full and faithful witness to Christ includes the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbor, without which the preaching of the Gospel appears barren.