

A Study in the Gospel of Jesus Christ - Lesson One – What is the Gospel?

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Resources: D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 2007.

Discussion Question #1: What are some ways (in general) that people might describe the gospel?

For some, the gospel may be understood as steps or a formula to personal salvation. It may be understood as being a good American citizen. Others may believe it is practicing good works. However, the true gospel of Jesus Christ is much deeper and more powerful than personal prosperity, social action, or political good. The goal of this series is to take a deeper look at the biblical meaning of the gospel and gain a better understanding that will help form and transform our thinking and living as followers of Jesus Christ. It is our prayer that the weeks spent together studying the gospel will advance the gospel in our hearts, our lives, our community, and our world.

The word gospel (*euangelion* in Greek) literally means “good news.” In the Roman world, it often had political implications, such as a military victory for the emperor. For Christians, the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed the good news of a greater kingdom and king over all the earth. It is news of an event that has changed the world forever. Jesus, the Son of God, has broken into human history.¹

Theologian Michael F. Bird defines it this way: “The gospel is the announcement that God’s kingdom has come in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord and Messiah, in fulfillment of Israel’s Scriptures. The gospel evokes faith, repentance, and discipleship; its accompanying effects include salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”²

Discussion Question #2: How is the gospel described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8?

Paul’s Preaching of the Gospel. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 offers a summary on Paul’s preaching of the gospel. Notice the way that Paul describes the gospel’s role in the life of the Corinthians, that which “you received, in which you stand, and through which you *are being saved*” (15:1-2). See how it serves not only in their initial reception of faith, but also in their continual growth and relationship with God.

Discussion Question #3: How does the gospel of Jesus Christ reveal God’s grace?

It is also important to note the rhythm of grace in these words. The good news of Jesus Christ is given and “received,” not merited (15:1-3). As Timothy Keller writes, “It is not something that we do, but something that has been done for us and something that we must respond to.”³ In this way, the gospel is the core confession of the church continually feeding and informing our faith.

¹ The theme of “good news” will be explored much more extensively in Lesson Three, *The Gospel as News*.

² Bird, Michael F. *Evangelical Theology*, 52.

³ Keller, Timothy. *Center Church*, 29.

Discussion Question #4: Why would Paul need to remind and teach the gospel to Christians?

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 in many ways functions as the climax of the letter. You can see how he uses the message of "Jesus Christ and him crucified" in response to all of the issues in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 2:2). The message of the gospel forms the beginning, present, and future for Christian identity. This is why obedience to the gospel is more than a one-time confession of faith.

Paul continues to preach and teach the gospel to the Corinthian church to counter the divisions and idols that were affecting their lives. As D.A. Carson states, "Just as Paul found it necessary to hammer away at the outworking of the gospel in every domain of the lives of the Corinthians, so we must do the same today."⁴ (D.A. Carson, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 2007). The gospel must be preached, lived, and practiced in the church in order to counter all of the false messages and idols that arise in each and every generation of the church.

Further Discussion:

What does the message of the gospel offer those who have yet to believe in Jesus as Lord?

What does the message of the gospel offer those who believe, but have drifted away from God?

What does the message of the gospel offer those who faithfully living as disciples of Jesus?

Application: On November 21, we will each take time to write a one-page letter about the gospel either for a seeker (friend, family, or neighbor), a believer in need of encouragement, or to a Christian mentor who has helped you to live out the gospel in your daily life. Take time today to start praying about it.

Next Week: Lesson Two – The Big Story

⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 2007.