

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News

The NEWS

Christians often tell people to believe the Gospel. But what is the Gospel?

The word Gospel literally means “good news”, and in this case it is the good news about Jesus Christ. But this good news begins with some very bad news. This bad news is sin and its consequences.

THE BAD NEWS

Sin is disobedience to the laws of the one and only God, the one who created this whole universe. His commands are found in many places in the Bible, most notably in the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1-17)¹ and the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament (Matthew 5-7). So, for example, to blaspheme, to steal, to kill, or even to hate others, are sins against God. Any form of behaviour which goes against what the Bible teaches is sin. Sin is universal. That is, everybody has sinned, however good they may seem to us (Romans 3:9-23).

The consequences of sin are various and serious. First of all sin wrecks our lives in so many ways, from the breaking of promises to child abuse, from theft to war, and much else beside. And it is also evident that sin has a powerful hold over all of us. So often we find it hard to stop behaviour that we know is bad both for ourselves and others.

But sin has another serious consequence, and that is the judgment of God. God is perfect and just, and cannot and will not tolerate sin. He has declared that one day He will judge us for our behaviour. On that day all of us must face God’s judgment, whether we believe in Him or not (Hebrews 9:27). And that judgment is to be feared. He has the power to cast us into Hell.

THE GOOD NEWS

But the good news is that God our creator cares about us. He would rather bring us to Heaven than send us to Hell. The Bible tells us, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), and “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

While people were held bound in sin, God acted, and He acted in a most amazing way. God came to earth Himself in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ, 2000 years ago, an event we celebrate as Christmas (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20; John 1:1-18). This Jesus lived a perfect life. He is the one exception to the fact, mentioned above, that “all have sinned”. He also died a sacrificial death, nailed to a wooden cross, eventually triumphing over sin and death by rising from the dead (Luke 23:26- 24:49; John 19:16- 21:24).

It is Christ’s death that makes it possible for sin to be forgiven, for He bore the punishment for our sin. It is also His resurrection and His living presence in this world through His Holy Spirit that makes the fight against sin a realistic possibility. It is His sinless life, death and resurrection that make it possible for us to reach Heaven. This is the Gospel.

¹ These references in brackets are to passages to be found in the Bible.

YOU AND THE GOSPEL

But how can you benefit from that Gospel? It is most important that you first recognise that you are sinful, and don't deserve this perfect God's interest in you. You must also realize that you cannot earn His forgiveness. It does not matter how hard you try; you cannot work your way to Heaven. Salvation from sin is free. It is a gift. You are powerless to save yourself. That is something God alone can do.

You should then ask God to forgive and save you. This prayer does not need to be in a set form, but it does need to be your heartfelt desire for God's forgiveness and help. God will listen to the prayer of those who seek Him (Romans 10:13). You should throw yourself upon His mercy, and tell Him that you desire a new life and freedom from sin. In other words you should repent. That is, recognise the purity of God, be sorry for your sins, and desire to turn from them to Christ.

And of course you must believe this Gospel, which means you must believe in who this Jesus is, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. You must believe in his sacrificial death and amazing resurrection. But belief must show itself too in trust in Jesus Christ. Belief in this Gospel is not just a belief in certain facts about Jesus; it is also trust, dependence on the living Christ. It is casting your life upon Him; it is giving your life to Him daily and following Him. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).