

# Lesson 1: The Gospel

**Key concept**  
The Gospel

**Bible study**  
Selected verses

**Memory verses**  
Romans 3:22-24

## Objectives

- ❖ Understand the meaning of the gospel
- ❖ Explore the relationship between God and humanity

## Bible Study

“The gospel” is an expression often used by Christians. Are you familiar with what they mean when they use it? Or, if you do understand what it means, could you sit down and share “the gospel” over lunch with someone? In order to address these questions, this lesson will explore the meaning of this central element of the Christian faith. Briefly stated, the gospel is a message of good news and hope, and it encompasses five major topics: God, Mankind and Sin, Christ, Repentance and Faith, and the Holy Spirit.

### 1. God

#### Is Creator

God tells us in His word—the Bible—that He is the Creator of the heavens and earth and all that is within them, including you and me, and that He made us in His own image so that we could declare the glory of His works (Genesis 1:1,27; Psalm 19:1). Thus, it is critical that we recognize that we are created beings who are absolutely dependent upon God, the Creator of all, and that He made us according to His plan that He established long ago. In His love, God created us in His image to know Him, honor Him, and above all else, to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

#### Is a Merciful Father

God is a loving Father who loves to show mercy and does not want to punish us. Can you remember when you were a child and your dad told you, “Son, this is going to hurt me more than it will hurt you.” I am beginning to understand that my dad was not just saying that to make me feel better. While the spanking hurt me physically, my dad’s heart ached when he had to discipline me. He wanted to be merciful and he did not want to punish me, but he also knew that I would never understand that there are consequences to my actions if he did not actually discipline me.

## NOTES

In the same way, God says that He takes “*no pleasure in the death of the wicked, [but he desires] that they turn from their ways and live*” (Ezekiel 33:11).

### **Is a Just Judge**

The Father is also a just Judge, and therefore, He must punish those who violate His law (Exodus 34:6-7). Imagine that your mother was one of the victims in the World Trade Center attacks. When the criminals who planned the attack, who killed your mother and over 6,000 others, appeared before the judge, justice would demand a punishment. If the judge knew that the defendant committed the crime, then he would be acting unjustly by failing to punish the defendant. To satisfy justice, a punishment must be administered. The predicament that this guilty defendant faces leads us into our next topic: humans and their sin.

### **2. Mankind and Sin**

#### **Humans are sinners**

According to His plan, God gave us the freedom to be obedient to Him or disobedient. Eve ate from the one tree that God explicitly said was off limits and then Adam did as well. They were disobedient and sinned against God, and their sinful nature has been passed down to each one of us for thousands of years (Genesis 3:6-7). In fact, God tells us that not one of us is righteous, that “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23).

#### **What is sin?**

Sin is a word that has become incredibly charged in our culture. Most people that I talk to who are skeptical about Christianity have some major hang-ups with this term. It is a term that you’re going to see quite a lot in the Bible, so we need to take a few minutes and look at what it means.

Here is how I would define it: sin is building your life on something other than God. God gave us a list of commandments, the Ten Commandments, and the very first one says this: “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). Sin is taking anything (including good things like work, relationships, influence, etc.) and building your life around it rather than God.

Or, let’s put it another way. We often think of sin as doing bad things, when in reality it is taking good things and making them bad things by making them your ultimate thing. According to Exodus 20:3, we should only have one ultimate thing: God Himself.

**Lesson 1:**  
**The Gospel**  
Romans 3:22-24

---

**NOTES**

Let me illustrate from the classic film, *Chariots of Fire*. This film is the story of two runners, Harold Abrams and Eric Liddell. Harold Abrams is a Jewish young man who is trying to make it in high society in Britain. To win the gold medal in the 1924 Olympics will mean that he has made it, that he has arrived into the top tier of British society, that he'll be somebody. So he runs for fame and fortune. In many ways we can sympathize with his plight, because as a Jewish young man in Britain in the 1920s, he suffered extreme prejudice. There was a glass ceiling that would only let him rise so high, unless he could win the gold medal.

Shortly before the race, Abrams looks at his trainer and, with trepidation, says, "And now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; four feet wide, with ten lonely seconds to justify my existence. But will I?" Ten lonely seconds to justify his existence. Abrams gets his sense of self, of who he is, from winning. He has made a good thing (winning a gold medal) into a bad thing by making it his ultimate thing.

The other runner, Eric Liddell, is a Scottish missionary who runs because God made him fast, and when he runs he feels God's pleasure. He doesn't run for fame. In fact, his life isn't about his fame, but about God's fame. He is every bit as talented and competitive as Abrams. He loves to run and is passionate about it, but winning isn't ultimate for Him; God is ultimate.

So in this movie, when the event that Liddell has trained for his whole life, the 100 meters, is scheduled for a Sunday, he pulls out. He won't run on Sundays because he is being obedient to God to set that day apart as sacred for rest and worship. Do you see how loosely he holds this event? The 100-meter dash has a gripping control on one runner—Abrams—and it has absolutely no control over the other—Liddell—because one has made God his ultimate and the other has not.

This is what sin does to you. It has you in its grip because you are so focused on your god—the thing you must have, the thing you have built your life around. Therefore, man is in a terrible predicament. The Bible tells us that all of us have sinned; we have built our lives around something other than God. And, as we saw earlier, because God is just, he must punish us. In Romans 6:23, we see that God's punishment for us is death: "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

## NOTES

### 3. Christ What He did

Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died. God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to this world. In doing so, God, through his Son, took on humanity (John 1:1,14) and lived the life that we should have lived: *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous”* (Romans 5:19).

In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in every possible way, which means He faced every temptation we have ever faced. Yet, the crucial distinction is that He was without sin: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are”* (Hebrews 4:15). He never gave in to temptation.

Not only did Christ live the life we should have lived, but He also died the death that we should have died. As we discussed earlier, all of mankind since Adam and Eve has been found guilty before God and deserving a punishment of death, and Christ fulfilled this punishment for us. In his death, Jesus experienced far more than physical suffering and pain, but He received the full punishment that God had withheld from mankind since Adam and Eve’s original sin.

Jesus gave God His perfect life record and accepted man’s horrible life record. Perfection stepped into the place of imperfection, and in doing so, God magnified His justice by delivering the rightful punishment, one that had been delayed for thousands of years, to a perfect man, the God-man called Jesus Christ, the only one capable of paying the full penalty for sinful man (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 3:18).

But this is where the story really gets good. After Christ’s death on the cross, God raised Him from the dead three days later (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). This resurrection was evidence that Jesus’ sacrifice was an acceptable payment for man’s debt that he owed as a result of his sinful record and sinful heart (1 John 2:2), fully satisfying God’s justice (Romans 3:25-26). Additionally, Jesus’ resurrection represented His victory over all man’s enemies, including death and the power of sin (Romans 6:5-7). And after Christ’s resurrection, God exalted Him to heaven, seated Jesus at His right hand, and thereby declared Him Lord and Savior of the world (Hebrews 12:2).

Yet, the Good News goes beyond what Jesus has done. It also includes what He now promises to all those who receive Him as their Lord and Savior.

**NOTES**

**What He promises**

**New standing:** God has promised that we may have a new standing before Him (2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:22). As Judge, God promises to release us from the penalty of sin, if we believe in Christ, and consider us His children who are forever adopted into His family (Galatians 4:4-7). He gives our bad, sin-stained record to Christ, and He gives us Christ's perfect record of righteousness. As Father, God promises to accept and love those who believe in Jesus just as He does His own Son, for He lives within us (1 John 3:1).

What I am describing has been referred to as the Great Exchange. Christ accepted all of our sin and in return gave us His righteousness. We exchanged our sinfulness for Christ's righteousness, so that when God looks at us, He sees His Son who lives within us, making us righteous individuals in Christ.

**New Power:** We also have new freedom and power to live as sons and daughters of God. Jesus gives us His power to live the way He did. This power comes in the form of the Holy Spirit, which we will discuss in more detail in next week's lesson. But how does this happen? How can these gospel promises be fulfilled in a person's life?

**4. Repentance and Faith**

**What is repentance?**

Repentance involves a two-dimensional directional change in a person's life. First, repentance requires that a person turn away from their sin—a horizontal change. For example, imagine that you intended to drive to Mexico. When you were in San Diego, you became confused and accidentally began driving north instead of south. When you realized this fact, the best thing for you to do would be to turn your car around and head in the opposite direction.

In much the same way, repentance requires you to turn from your sin and head in the other direction, but here is where the analogy breaks down. Repentance is not telling you simply to turn in the opposite horizontal direction, but it also requires you to turn to Jesus (Mark 1:15). Thus, repentance requires a vertical directional change as well. If you do not turn to Jesus, you will be fighting a losing battle of trying to defeat the power of sin in your own strength. Jesus wants us to repent, turn from our sin and turn to Him **in faith**, relying upon his strength to live a life that is free from sin's dominion.

**NOTES**

**What is faith?**

Everyone has faith. For instance, you might say, “I have faith that my car will make this 900-mile journey.” This may be a well-reasoned faith (you have taken it to a mechanic, had it serviced, and all indicators seem positive) or it may be a “blind leap of faith” (you know nothing about cars, haven’t serviced it, but just think it will make it). Nevertheless, you put your faith in your car if you choose to get in it, even though, at the end of the day, you can’t prove that the car will make it until it actually does. This holds true with other things in which we put our faith as well. We have faith that our job will provide for our family, that our spouse will love us, that immunizations will help our children—but we don’t know for certain until these things actually happen.

**Saving faith is a decision of the will to put your trust IN Jesus**

Saving faith is a decision of the will to put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Think of John 3:16: “*whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (also Romans 3:22). So, the amount of your faith is unimportant. Quantity is irrelevant; quality, however, is extremely relevant, and quality is determined by what your faith is in.

It may be tempting to try to trust in our works. Many people think they can build a bridge that will help them cross the chasm that separates them from God, and this bridge is called the Good Works Bridge. They try desperately to serve the poor, be kind to others, and perform a host of various good works. But the chasm separating God and man is far too wide for any Good Works Bridge to span the distance.

And, what is even worse, even if a Good Works Bridge could reach across the chasm, God’s holiness would destroy us once we crossed the bridge and entered His presence. Sinful beings cannot be in the presence of a Holy God. Therefore, to solve the problem of the chasm separating God and man, God laid down His own bridge in the form of the cross, and as we walk across this bridge we are made holy through the blood of Jesus. Thus, saving faith is repenting, turning from sin and self-trust, and trusting in Jesus Christ and His promises.

**Faith isn’t in conflict with reason and intellect**

Often it is said, “Just have faith,” and what is meant is that you need to stop thinking and just believe. But Jesus didn’t ask Thomas in John 20:24-29 to turn off his brain. Instead, he encouraged him to think hard. “Thomas, put your hands in my side here and feel the wound. Think Thomas. Remember this wound that I suffered. It really is me.” Jesus says believe or have faith because of the evidence that is before you. Think.

## NOTES

### **Yet faith isn't mere intellectual belief**

You must understand that saving faith is not merely an intellectual belief. The Bible acknowledges that even demons believe that there is one true God, but they are not saved by this belief (James 2:19). But what is the difference between saving faith and belief?

Let me illustrate. The Great Blondin is often thought of as the greatest tightrope walker of all time. He was the first man to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. No one believed intellectually that it was possible because of the sheer force of the wind and mist coming off of the falls. Everyone thought it was a death mission. But, nevertheless, he made it, and he caused people to believe, intellectually, that he could do it.

But like any daredevil, he had to keep pushing it and making the stunt a little more unbelievable. During his subsequent performances, he crossed the falls on a bicycle, on stilts, and at night. He swung by one arm, turned somersaults, and stood on his head on a chair. Once he pushed a stove in a wheelbarrow and cooked an omelet. On one occasion, he crossed blindfolded in a heavy sack made of blankets.

But his greatest feat came when he asked for a volunteer to get on his back. Everyone in the crowd had an intellectual belief in Blondin, but they were not willing to trust their life to him. Except one man. Harry Colcord, his manager, volunteered. He climbed on his back and they made it across. That is the difference between mere intellectual belief and putting your faith in someone in a Biblical sense—you are entrusting your life to them. What you are doing is making a decision of the will based on the evidence.

When you repent of your sin and make a decision of the will to entrust your life to Jesus, you're then embarking on the journey of following Him. The beginning of this journey is characterized by a new birth in Christ Jesus, which we will discuss next week.

**Lesson 1:  
The Gospel**  
Romans 3:22-24

---

**Memory Verses**

*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*  
-Romans 3:22-24

---

Harbor Mid-City  
Followers Forming  
Followers  
p. 8

**Individual Study and Group Discussion**

**Opening Questions**

Based upon the reading, what did you find most helpful? Was anything confusing? What was most challenging?

**Study and Discussion Questions**

1. Describe an experience you have had of God as Creator, Merciful Father or Just Judge.
2. “Sin is building your life on something other than God.”
  - a. What examples can you give of other things upon which we build our lives?
  - b. Do you have a story to share of someone you know who has chosen to make God the ultimate thing in his/her life?
3. In Romans 5:19, explain “the disobedience of the one man” and “the obedience of the one man.”
4. How does Romans 3:25-26 explain God’s justice?
5. What do 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Colossians 1:22 say about God’s promise of our new standing in Him?