

## The Gospel Message

### Introduction

There were two twin brothers who caddied on the PGA and NIKE Tour for a while. They were from Joplin, Missouri, and were members of the Church of Christ. They went to various churches and spoke and ministered. Their tent-making was caddying. One of them caddied for me for over a year. We had a heart-to-heart talk one day about the gospel. My caddy was giving away my golf balls as souvenirs with a Church of Christ gospel presentation. If he had been giving out my testimonies with my golf balls that would have been different. But, he would not give out my testimonies because he believed that I taught a false gospel. The church of Christ believes that you must be baptized to be saved. In Mark 16:16, we read, “he who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.” They also reference John 3, where Jesus was having a conversation with Nicodemus about being born again. Jesus said that unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. They believe that being born of water is being baptized. I, and nearly everyone outside the Church of Christ, believe that the next verse clearly tells us that being born of water means being born of the flesh. When a pregnant woman is about to deliver, her water bursts, and she knows that this is real labor; the baby will be out soon. That is being born of the flesh. Jesus said you must be born again. There is a physical birth and there is a spiritual birth. My testimony encourages people to get baptized after they have believed and received Christ. I believe it is an act of obedience rather than a mandatory step in getting saved. Baptism is about repentance. We turn away from our works and turn to Christ. Jews understood that when a Gentile wanted to place his faith in the God of Abraham and worship the true God, he would get baptized. It was a public testimony that he had converted to Judaism. We also believe that baptism is a picture of the death and burial of Christ and the resurrection of Christ from the dead. When we are baptized, we identify with the death and burial of Christ, and of our sin nature, and we also identify with His resurrection and our new life in Christ. Our understanding of Mark 16:16 is that someone must turn from their ways and place their trust in Christ. When someone believes, that is what they must do. We do not believe that getting immersed in water along with believing saves you. So, my caddy would not give out my testimonies because he said it was a false gospel since it did not include the requirement of baptism. We had conversations about John 3, but he would not accept our interpretation of this key passage. As the employer in that relationship, I told him he could no longer give out his tracks with my golf balls; he could only give out my testimonies with my golf balls.

(Mark 16:15-16) “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. {16} He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”

(John 3:5-6) “Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. {6} That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

When I was a professional I put on evangelistic golf outings. I would share my testimony and the gospel at these events. These were four-person scrambles where everyone hits from the same place and they take the best shot each time. To play, you had to be unequally yoked. By that, each team had to be made up of two believers and two unbelievers. These events were well

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received and very successful. The church that Karen and I were going to at that time went through a doctrinal change and became very reformed. One of the places that I put on a golf outing every year was for a church in Virginia Beach. The last time that I went there, the pastor took me aside and told me that I was not allowed to share the gospel at this evangelistic outing. I was not allowed to give an invitation to receive Christ. They said that it is God who converts a soul and there is no decision by men to receive Christ. He softens and converts the heart, and we are not to try and convince or persuade people to make a decision. They believe that John 1 clearly teaches that we are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God. We cannot decide on our own will to believe and receive Christ; it is only by God's choice. He has already chosen who will be saved and who is not allowed to be saved. Anybody that preaches anything different is preaching a false gospel, and they would not allow that.

(John 1:12-13) “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, {13} who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

A number of years ago at another church I invited a young man to come preach. In his message he shared about how he was reaching out to people evangelistically. I loved his heart for the lost and his evangelistic efforts. However, he came to a place in one story where a man asked him if he was saved. The young man asked, “Do you love God?” The man said, “Yes, I love God.” And the young man told him that he was saved. He also mentioned that repentance is not part of the gospel message. I took a week off from our preaching schedule to correct some of the things that had been shared that Sunday morning. The gospel message is extremely important, and I did not want anyone in our congregation to have a wrong understanding of this essential doctrine.

What is the gospel message? I have given you three personal case histories about the message of the gospel. Is this an important topic? Absolutely, Paul said if anyone preaches a different gospel, let him be accursed. That is a pretty strong statement to make. Then, Paul said it a second time, if anyone preaches a different gospel, let him be accursed. Let's look at Galatians 1:6-9 to see what Paul said.

(Gal 1:6-9) “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; {7} which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. {8} But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! {9} As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”

There had been a number of people preaching different gospels, particularly some Jewish believers, who said that they must receive Christ, but also be circumcised and follow the Law. Paul wrote this letter to set the records straight. In verse 8, he said if an angel preached a different gospel, let him be accursed. And, in verse nine, he said, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed.” The content of the gospel message and the accuracy of the gospel message was extremely important to Paul, and Paul's writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, so this is not really from Paul, but from God Himself. The gospel message is vitally important.

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The gospel message was under attack in the early church. In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch and some Jews from Judea came down and began teaching people that they had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them. Paul knew that this was a false gospel that they were preaching and he took issue with them. They not only took issue, the church leaders determined to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss and resolve the issue with the twelve apostles.

(Acts 15:1-2) “Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” {2} And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.”

In verse twenty-four, after they had come to one mind, the elders and apostles in Jerusalem wrote a letter for Paul and Barnabas to take back to the church in Antioch and to other churches. The letter begins by saying, “since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls...” The false gospel had upset, disturbed, and unsettled many people. The message of the gospel needed to be clarified. As we are studying relational evangelism, the gospel message is critical. We must be clear about the gospel message so that we can clearly and accurately share it with others.

(Acts 15:24) “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls,”

In Romans 1:16, Paul said, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” The gospel message is important; it is the power of God for salvation. Without the gospel message, people cannot be saved. It is important to preach the gospel, and to preach the right gospel message.

(Rom 1:16) “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

### 1. What Is The Gospel Message?

Since I began with Paul’s word to the Galatians about the gospel message, I want us to look through Galatians at what Paul said about the gospel message. I mentioned that there were some Jews who come in and upset people in the church at Antioch. They had also preached this false gospel to those in the churches in Galatia, so Paul wrote this letter to bring correction to what had been shared.

Paul gives his first clue about the gospel message in verses fifteen and sixteen. He said that God, who had set him apart from his mother’s womb called him through His grace, and revealed His Son in him. It was not by works that God called him; it was through God’s grace.

(Gal 1:15-16) “But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased {16} to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

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In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul mentions how he confronted Peter for his hypocrisy in dealing with the Jews and Gentiles. Then, in Galatians 2:16, Paul said, “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus, and that by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

(Gal 2:16) “nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

In Galatians 3:2-3, Paul asks the Galatians if they had received the Spirit by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith. It is a rhetorical question; they had received the Holy Spirit at salvation when they had received Christ by faith. Then, he added, “having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” It is very clear that they began their Christian journey by faith, not by works.

(Gal 3:2-3) “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? {3} Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he said, “after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.” When we hear the message of the gospel, we must believe and receive Christ, and this is by faith. When we believe, God seals us with the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul was referring to when he asked the Galatians if they had received the Spirit by work or by hearing with faith.

(Eph 1:13-14) “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, {14} who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.”

A few verses later Paul drives the point in a little deeper and talks about the father of the faith, Abraham. Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Paul said, “therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.” Then, he said how the Gentiles were also going to be justified by faith. God had said to Abraham that “all the nations will be blessed in you.” This was a prophetic word that just as Abraham had received righteousness by faith, so would all the nations receive their righteousness.

(Gal 3:6-8) “Even so Abraham believed god, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. {7} Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. {8} The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “all the nations will be blessed in you.”

Paul concludes chapter three by saying, “for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Paul’s main emphasis in the gospel is that we must believe the gospel message and receive Christ into our lives by faith.

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(Gal 3:26-27) “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. {27} For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Today, the biggest thing that separates Christianity from other religions is works. We believe we are saved by grace and not by works. The gospel message was being challenged in Paul’s day by people that wanted to require works in order to be saved. There are a number of things that are part of the gospel message, but one thing that Paul and the other apostles made abundantly clear was that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our works.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Paul shared again with the Corinthians the gospel that he had originally preached to them. Since we do not have a record of the original gospel message that he preached, we are very blessed to have this second edition of that gospel message. Let’s take a look at what Paul shared with them.

(1 Cor 15:1-11) “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, {2} by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. {3} For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, {4} and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, {5} and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. {6} After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; {7} then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; {8} and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. {9} For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. {10} But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. {11} Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

We see in verse three of first importance is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. There is a lot contained in that verse. We recognize that all of us have sinned. Paul also shared that in Romans 3:23, where he wrote, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There are a number of Scriptures that Paul could be referring to but most believe he is referring to Isaiah 53 where the prophet wrote that all of us like sheep have gone astray, but that the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He said the Messiah would bear our griefs, carry our sorrows, and would be pierced for our transgressions, and be crushed for iniquities. We have all sinned and Christ died for our sins.

(Rom 3:23) “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

(Isaiah 53:4-6) “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. {5} But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. {6} All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.”

What was the consequence of our sins? Why did the Lord need to die for our sins? It goes back to Genesis 2. When the Lord put Adam in the garden, He told him that he could eat from any tree

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in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He said if he ate from that tree he would surely die. And, Adam ate from that tree and there was a spiritual death. His sins separated Him from God. There was a physical death that came later, but there was an instantaneous spiritual separation from God. He was no longer covered with God's glory, and he and Eve recognized that they were naked, and they were also ashamed. In Romans 6:23 Paul wrote that the wages of sin is death. That is the message that God promised Adam, "in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." Our sins have earned us death, a spiritual death.

(Gen 2:16-17) "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; {17} but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

(Rom 6:23) "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Isaiah wrote about this separation. In Isaiah 59:2, he said, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God." God is a holy God and when Adam sinned, he was no longer holy and could not be in the presence of a holy God. His sin separated him from a holy God. All of us like sheep have gone astray. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Since God created us to have fellowship with Him, He created a plan to redeem us and to forgive us.

(Isaiah 59:2) "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear."

The next part of the gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians was that Christ was buried and raised from the dead on the third day. The death, burial, and resurrection is a critical part of the gospel message. Paul said that this happened on the third day according to the Scriptures. David prophesied in Psalm 16:10 that God would not abandon the Messiah's soul in Sheol, the place of the dead, or allow the Messiah's body to undergo decay.

(1 Cor 15:4) "and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

(Ps 16:10) "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay."

In Romans 10:9-10, Paul talks about what we must do to be saved. He said we must confess Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. We must believe and confess that Jesus is the Messiah, and we must also believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is very much a part of the gospel message. (Note: it is not enough to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, we must confess Him to be our Lord or Master. In James 2:19, he wrote that the demons also believe and shudder. The demons know that Jesus is the Messiah and part of the Godhead, but they have not submitted their life to Him as Lord.)

(Rom 10:9-10) "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; {10} for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

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(James 2:19) “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

Paul also gives some evidence of Christ’s resurrection. He said that He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve, and then to more than five hundred brethren at one time. At the time of the writing of this letter to the Corinthians, which was around 56 A.D., most of those people that saw Jesus were still alive. In Acts 26, when Paul shared the gospel with King Agrippa, he shared about the death and resurrection of the Messiah according to the prophets. He said, “for the king knows about these matters...since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.” Paul also shared that Christ had appeared to him.

(Acts 26:22-26) “So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; {23} that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles...{26} For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.”

In verse ten, Paul said, “by the grace of God I am what I am.” Paul knew that he had been saved by grace and not by his own righteousness or works.

What is the message of the gospel? The message of the gospel is that God is a holy God and He created us to have fellowship with Him. Unfortunately, all of us have sinned and that fellowship with God was broken. God knew that we would sin and He created a plan to redeem us from our sins and to restore fellowship. He sent His Son to die and bear our sins on the cross, taking our punishment. When Jesus was on the cross, He said, “It is finished.” He had paid for our sins in full and the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, signifying that fellowship with God had been restored. God raised up Jesus from the grave on the third day. To receive forgiveness for our sins, we simply have to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that He was raised from the dead, and we must confess Jesus as Lord. It is a gift from God, not something that we can earn. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul said, “for by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

(Eph 2:8-9) “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; {9} not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

### 2. The Mystery Of The Gospel

Paul uses the term, “mystery” in his letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 6:19, he asks the church to pray for him that he would boldly make known the mystery of the gospel. What is the mystery of the gospel?

(Eph 6:19-20) “and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, {20} for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

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To find out the mystery, we have to go back to Ephesians 3:3-6, where Paul defined the mystery of the gospel. Paul said that he got revelation about the mystery and now he had understanding of the mystery of Christ that other generations had not known. In verse six, he said, “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” The Jews knew that they were God’s chosen people. They knew that God had a covenant with them and that they were special. They knew the Messiah would come to them. Their view of others, the non-Jews, were that they were unclean and not the recipients of God’s promises. Their mystery that the Messiah was coming for all people had been hidden from them. Even though God told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him, they did not fully grasp this concept. Paul gave Paul a revelation that the gospel was to be preached to all men, not just to the Jews. Furthermore, Paul was to be the apostle to the Gentiles. This was new and not understood by the Jews.

(Eph 3:3-6) “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. {4} By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, {5} which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; {6} *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,”

(Gen 12:3) “And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

We saw earlier in Galatians 3:6-8 that Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. He said it was those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. Then, without using the term, “mystery of the gospel,” Paul explained that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and he quotes Genesis 12:3, that all the nations will be blessed in Abraham. (See also Genesis 22:18, 26:4, and 28:14.)

(Gal 3:6-8) “Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. {7} Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. {8} The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “all the nations will be blessed in you.”

The Apostle Peter also received a revelation about the mystery of the gospel. Acts 10 is devoted to the unveiling of this mystery. He gave a vision to Cornelius, a Gentile soldier, and then he gave a vision to Peter about eating unclean meat. Peter went to Cornelius’ house and preached the gospel to these Gentiles and the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, just as it had been to the Jews at Pentecost. This led Peter to exclaim, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”

(Acts 10:34-35) “Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, {35} but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”

The Jews in Jerusalem did not know this mystery and when they heard what Peter had done, they took issue with him. We find that in conversation in Acts 11. Peter told them about the visions



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and how the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Cornelius and his household. Then, in Acts 11:18, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life." The mystery of the gospel had now been revealed to the apostles and Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

(Acts 11:1-3) "Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. {2} And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, {3} saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

(Acts 11:18) "When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life."

The significance of this is that the gospel message is not for a select group of people; it is for everyone. When Jesus gave us the Great Commission, He commanded us to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." The gospel message is for everyone, and those that believe the gospel message will be saved and those who reject the gospel will be condemned.

(Mark 16:15-16) "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. {16} He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

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### **Small Group Break-Out**

**Sharing:** Share one thing that you learned tonight that stood out, or one thing that you can apply in your own life.

Share a thirty-second testimony of how you came to Christ.

**Prayer:** Pray for one to three people in your family or in your “oikos” that is not a Christian. Pray for the CCA Relational Evangelism training to bear much fruit.

**Scripture Memory Assignment For Session 1:** Titus 3:5, Romans 1:16