

LIVING WELL #5: EXPLAINING THE GOSPEL WELL

ESV TCL 2025/11/09

Q. Why might we want to explain the *gospel* well?

A. Everyone needs to be ready for Jesus' return:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Bad examples: Charles Finney, crisis evangelists, Arminians, Pelagians, Sandemanians, RCs, JW's and other cults have not explained the gospel well.



1. A DEFINITION OF 'GOSPEL'

Q. Coming from old English, the word 'gospel' simply means good news¹. But is it the same in the Bible?

In Hebrew, the words בְּשׂוּרָה (be.so.rah) and others mean 'news', often *good news*, as in:

2 Kings 7:9 Then [the lepers] said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household."

In Greek, the word εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion) means specifically, *good news*, as in the synoptic gospels²:

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2. THE GOSPEL BEFORE JESUS

Q. How could there be any good news before Jesus came?

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel.' NIV³

Hebrews 4:2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. NIV – Q. Who are 'they'? A. Ancient Israel:

Exodus 3:7-8a The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ...

Q. How similar was the gospel then, at the burning bush, to how it is now?

¹ Originally something like "God's spell", meaning God's story literally. [Wiktionary](#).

² As Rico Tice says, "*The gospels are the gospel.*"

³ See p49 in *Biblical Types and Images*, [Covenant Books UK](#), 2025, and also Revelation 12:9 for confirmation of the serpent's true identity as the devil.

3. THE GOSPEL SINCE JESUS

2 Timothy 2:8-10 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Q. What do we learn about the gospel from the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:8-10?

4. WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is how we must respond to the gospel and take hold of Christ himself:

Galatians 3:8 ... Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel. – Westminster Shorter Catechism 1646/7

Q. 15. What is Faith in Christ?

A. Faith in Christ is trusting him alone to save us – J.D. Legg, Low Row, Swaledale, c.1960 ⁴

If the catechisms are right, how could Abram have had true saving faith before Christ?

a) God is one, so faith in one person of the Trinity is trusting all, together ('Simplicity of God'):

Galatians 3:20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

b) *"Though faith is specifically directed to Christ, it is in him that we believe in God, and by him that we are brought into fellowship with the Father, through the Spirit."* – Louis Berkhof⁵

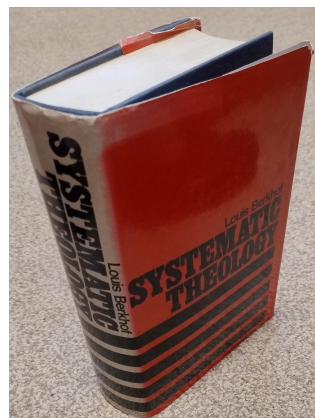
5. THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL

The good news is to be proclaimed (evangelised) to all:

Matthew 28:18ff And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," ESV

Matthew 22:8-14 'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, ... ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." ... ¹⁴ 'For many are invited, but few are chosen.' NIV

2 Corinthians 5:11,20 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.. ... 20b We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ESV



⁴ Relevant proof texts: John 3:36; Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-18, 35-36; Acts 3:1-10, 16; 4:7-12; 13:38-43; Romans 1:14-17; Galatians. 2:15-20.

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p503, 1979 Banner of Truth reprint of 1939-1958 edition. See also Deuteronomy 6:4: ... our God, the LORD is one.

6. THE GOSPEL ENVELOPE

The blessings that come from the gospel are a lot more than 'pie in the sky when you die'!

Forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, adoption, regeneration, union with Christ.

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, progressive sanctification, prayer, peace with God and others, freedom, victory over all enemies, God's many means of grace.

Membership of Christ's church, mutual fellowship, opportunities to serve, teaching, help, support, example, comfort, encouragement.

Renewal of heart and mind, the fruit of the Spirit, wisdom.

Bodily resurrection, glorification, eternal life on the new earth with God and his people.

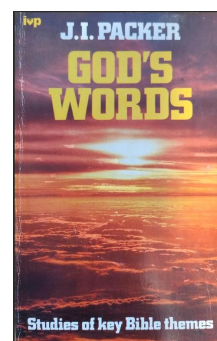
7. MISREPRESENTING THE GOSPEL

Warning: This section contains a lot of dangerous heresy and falsehood!

Sacramentalists⁶

In his book, "God's Words", Jim Packer explains that Roman Catholics use words like 'faith' with a completely different meaning from the way in which Protestants use them:

*'... the historic Roman Catholic idea of faith has been of mere credence and docility. Faith, to Rome, is just belief of what the Roman church teaches, ... uncomprehending assent ... '*⁷



Theologically Vague Evangelicals

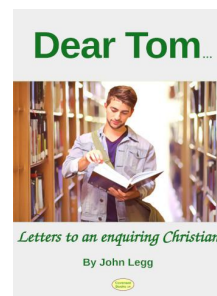
Quite often a Christian will say to an enquiring Non-Christian something like:

"You just have to believe that Jesus died for you on the cross."

Q. What is wrong with that?

A. Jesus and his apostles never preached the gospel in that way.

*"The apostles told their hearers to 'Repent ... and turn to God' (Acts 3:19), and to 'Believe in the Lord Jesus' (Acts 16:31), with no suggestion that they ought to concentrate on believing, as a fact, that Jesus had died for them. The Lord himself did not tell his hearers to believe that he would die for them. He said, 'Come to me.'" (Matthew 11:28)*⁸



Indeed, perhaps a better translation of Paul's command to the Philippian jailer would be:

*Acts 16:31 Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*⁹

Charles Finney & Arminian Crisis Evangelists

Arminian¹⁰ Charles Grandison Finney (1792 – 1875) and many others since him have taught that a mere exercise of the will is sufficient for a person to become a Christian, therefore any imaginative methods and emotional techniques that pressurise someone into "going to the

⁶ e.g. 'Roman' Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, some Strict Baptists, the Campbellite cult, JW's, Mormons and others.

⁷ p129 of God's Words by Jim Packer, IVP, 1981.

⁸ p41 of Dear Tom and Dear Beth, John Legg, [Covenant Books UK](http://CovenantBooksUK.com), 2021.

⁹ Πίστευσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν, καὶ σωθήσῃ σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκός σου. SBL

¹⁰ Although named after Jakob Arminius (1560 – 1609) the term 'Arminian' describes a wide range of theologies which deny the sovereignty of God.

front” or “making a decision” were popularised. But, people easily confuse “going forward” etc. with genuinely entrusting themselves to Christ.

B.B. Warfield wrote of Finney: *‘God might be eliminated from it [Finney's theology] entirely without essentially changing its character’!*¹¹

Pelagians

Welsh Pelagius (c.355 – c.420 AD) denied original sin and taught that becoming a Christian is purely a matter of intellectual assent.

Sandemanians

Even a recent minister of Westminster Chapel has been guilty of adhering to the teachings of Scottish Robert Sandeman (1718 – 1771). He taught that faith was a mere intellectual acceptance of the truth.

Jehovah's Witnesses

*‘The ransom is the means by which Jehovah God provides deliverance and release from sin and death. Jesus gave his perfect human life as the corresponding price for what Adam lost.’*¹²



Gayle Sandemanian Chapel
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Hypercalvinists

The gospel should only be offered to *‘sensible sinners’* to avoid casting *‘pearls before swine’*.

Antinomians

Accepting Jesus as Lord is separate from accepting him as Saviour (See Romans 10:9.)

Even Luther?

*‘Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times.’*¹³ - Luther's confusion of faith with assurance.

8. WHY IT MATTERS THAT WE GET IT RIGHT

If we explain the gospel inaccurately,

1. False professions of faith, as per the parable of the sower, will be our fault and frequent.
2. People may presume that they have become Christians, but have not really.
3. We may get glory for mere humans instead of for God.
4. We will be unable to distinguish between true and false Christians.
5. We may not depend on the Holy Spirit to convert people. Our prayer will be stunted.
6. Others?: Homework.

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¹¹ B.B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, 2 vols.; New York: Oxford, 1931.

¹² p728 of *Insight on the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, Watchtower, 1988.

¹³ Preface to *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, Martin Luther, 1522.