

For Sunday 8/14/2022 Helpful clarity on the Gospel in an email from Tony Payne at Matthias Media (see email folder Books\email dated 7/26/2022; quotation marks refer to that email).

The point of the email is to point out a very serious problem: churches do not win people to Christ or grow as God has designed. One reason may be that we are not clear on the real gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore are not presenting the genuine article which is the power of God to salvation. If we have a form or fashion of the gospel, but not the full or complete thing, then we do not have the power of God and therefore we should not expect much.

Payne says this is the gospel: “Jesus who died on the cross for sins, rose again as the Lord and Christ of the world, and now offers forgiveness and salvation and eternal life to all those who repent and submit to his rule in faith.”

I would edit the underlined portion to this: “to all those who repent and trust in Him.” The *submit* language used by them is not incorrect in terms of the disposition of faith toward the Lord and toward God, but it is not clear enough itself because it omits a very important idea. The Bible does not use the submit terminology, favoring rather *believe* or exercise *faith*, like in Ephesians 2:8-10 and Romans 3:25-26. Scripture does use *submit*, but only in two particular verses could be related to initial salvation. One is Romans 10:3 which speaks of Jews who have a certain zeal but not one based on sound Scriptural knowledge. “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” The other is James 4:7 which exhorts Christians to “submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” I do not believe this to be a clear “salvation verse” but it does express what the Christian’s mindset should be throughout his or her life.

Those who repent and trust in Christ—by grace through faith alone—will be submissive to Jesus by means of their new nature. Carrying out submission *beforehand* in any comprehensive manner is impossible because the old nature does not want to do that. Furthermore, mere slavish submission is not the obtaining cause of salvation as it is (at least hypothetically) in Islamic theology. Trust encompasses the notions of love and personal relationship that mere submission does not.

Instead of submission as an obtaining cause, we teach that those who genuinely trust in Christ *will* submit to Him as a natural outflow of true faith. The ongoing life of faith is indeed a life of repentance and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The ongoing life of faith is one of actually *following Jesus*. It entails being His *disciple*. Following and being a disciple are not option packages of Christianity. They are part of the base package. That package starts with genuine faith, a faith which turns from self and sin to God and righteousness and is centered in Jesus.

That said, there is definitely a kind of submission involved in the initial reception of the gospel: the sinner has to put himself under God's word and authority in the sense that he abandons his own self-made theology. The person is told that he is a sinner and unless he repents he will perish. He can decide to believe (and thus submit to that word and God's authority over him) demonstrating a proper humility toward God and recognition that God is in charge, and that judgment awaits. Or he can rebel and continue down his own path, only later to run squarely into that authority when he faces Jesus as judge. In this sense, faith is correctly described as *submissive*, in a similar fashion as it is described by the word *repentant*.

To highlight submission without mentioning faith is not as accurate to Biblical teaching as it should be.

Returning to the email I received, it says the gospel is "that the crucified Jesus has been raised by God and thus proven and declared to be the 'Christ'—God's promised worldwide ruler and judge in the line of David, whom death could not defeat and who will reign over God's kingdom." This is a very good statement. See Acts 17:30-31 and Romans 1:3-4.

The word *gospel* is used in 94 verses in the NKJV New Testament. The first use is in Matthew 4:23 where Jesus was "preaching the gospel of the kingdom." In short, this is that Jesus has come to be king, and that we must repent and believe in Him to see the kingdom. See John 3:3-5, 16. The last use of *gospel* is in Rev. 14:6 which speaks of the everlasting gospel proclaimed by an angel—and his message in verse 7 was that inhabitants of earth must fear God, give glory to him because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship Him who made all things. *That* is the gospel as well as 1 Corinthians 15:3-4!

This ties the individual gospel with the kingdom gospel, which are not separate gospels at all. Rather, the individual gospel is part of the kingdom and cosmic plan of our Lord. See the book of Acts on this as well as Romans 8:19-22. The kingdom involves more than individual salvation and "spiritual things." It involves the earth, society, nature, politics, government, the justice system, etc.

"The gospel, then, is not [merely] Jesus crucified', but 'Jesus **Christ** and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2). The One who was crucified has **now risen** as God's worldwide-king-and-judge ('Christ'). He now calls on everyone in the world to turn back to him in repentance and to receive forgiveness of sins on the basis of his atoning death."

The point of ensuring “Christ” is in the gospel message is that Jesus is God’s appointed judge and ruler over the world. Indeed, *Christ* means anointed, but anointed for *what end*? He was anointed—chosen—by the Father to rule the world. In other words, Christ is not just a title, nor is it a name. It refers to the person of Jesus and his *function* in the world, especially in the future. *Christ* implies that Jesus had to be resurrected because He was anointed to rule as King, as the second Adam. He was not chosen merely to die for sinners, but to die and afterward to rise, and after that to rule and judge.

Our evangelical tendency is to think that the reason we want to believe is so that we can go to heaven instead of Hell. That’s not the whole truth, however. The reason you want to be right with Christ and God is that Jesus will be King over the world, and He will be your judge, and you love Him with all your heart and want to serve Him faithfully and stop sinning. The only way to achieve acceptance into His kingdom is to entrust yourself to Him. The only way to receive His forgiveness for the sins you have done against Him is to repent and turn to Him in faith. He graciously will forgive, but you cannot receive that while being in a mode of rebellion, pride, and self-autonomy. If you trust Christ, you are deciding to abandon sin and self and riches and switch loyalties from the world and flesh and devil to Him.

We have both savior and lordship aspects here. Jesus saves you, but not to live as you please. He saves you so you can experience the greatest good, which is to live for Him. He saves you to deliver you from the present evil world (Gal. 1:4).

It is not enough to say that the gospel encompasses individual salvation—that is, the rescue of a certain number of individuals from the devastating consequences of sin. This is because the gospel of Jesus includes payment for sin, transformation of individuals from sinners to saints, a world-wide kingdom in which God’s people will reign with Christ, the judgment by Christ of all mankind (Romans 2:16), and the eternal state which is the ultimate restoration of the world to pre-fall conditions.

Payne’s email is dealing with a serious shortcoming of many gospel presentations, and that is that those presentations are *truncated*. They preach that Jesus died for your sins and rose again from the dead. The fact that He was buried and that He was seen by many eyewitnesses prove those facts. That is definitely *part* of the gospel. But there is more than those historical events. Paul explains those in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. He does so NOT to say that is ALL that you have to believe. He does it to say to the Corinthian people that *the Person who did these things* is the one you are to believe in. And that person has done and will do *other things as well* which are part of the good news. Not only did Christ die and rise, but He also has been declared the Son of God with power and will reign over the earth as King of kings. He offers you to be a citizen of His kingdom—which requires forgiveness of sins and rebirth—if you abandon your own

devices and trust in Him. In Christianity, you recognize our Lord’s creator relationship to His creation; His kingship over that creation; His loving sacrifice for the creation; His ultimate rule over all creation; and His role as judge of living and dead when He returns.

You might object: “Why isn’t there a passage of Scripture that explains the gospel concisely?” For one, Paul *does* explain it in a systematic way in the book of Romans. We could call it “The Gospel to the Romans” because that is what it is. It deals with almost all of the Christian message, and implications having to do with the Jew-Gentile issue, and how God’s sovereignty fits in, sanctification, etc. Second, there is not one small section that explains everything because Christianity is an entire world-view—a way of looking at the world that is entirely different than what we naturally see in our flesh. Therefore, it takes the Bible to explain the gospel, not just a little pamphlet or two-page tract.

Payne’s email does *not* deal with the following issue, but it is extremely important to address. Christian belief is trust in a person—the *person* of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. See Acts 9:42, 11:17, 11:21, 14:23, 16:31, 18:8, 22:19, as well as Genesis 15:6. It is not mere belief in certain facts about the person, although that is how many evangelicals in recent history have portrayed Christian faith. In *that* case, Christianity becomes nothing more than assent to information or knowledge about a few key historical events. On the contrary, Biblical faith is *trust* in Jesus, similar but more than you would trust another person like your spouse, or how you trust your surgeon to not kill you while you are asleep on the operating table, or how you would trust your mom and dad to do the right thing for you when the going was tough.

Christ is not only Savior—he is also Creator, Son of God, Judge, King, and Lord. *This* is the One God calls (via the gospel) for you to trust. *Informational belief* is what the demons possess—James 2:19. *Personal trust* is what true Christians possess and is what we mean when we say that a person is saved *by faith*. Justification is indeed by faith alone, but it is that kind of repentant- and in-the-person-of-Christ faith that we have discussed above. It is not justification by faith-as-belief-in-certain-facts. It is justification by faith-in-Jesus kind of faith.

Let me illustrate it this way:

Informational Belief		Personal Trust
I believe Joe Biden is president.	➔	I believe in Joe Biden.
I believe Jesus Christ is the Savior.	➔	I believe in Jesus Christ.

Note that when I say “personal” trust, I do not mean you personally as an individual. That kind of *personal* is indeed needful,¹ but what I mean is trust in a person—personal in the sense of trusting in another person, not just that you yourself as a person trust something. This trust is relational, in the divine Person.

If you trust in HIM, you will be saved. The power of the gospel to salvation is Christ Himself. He and His work is what makes the message powerful.

To summarize what I am saying. The gospel is:

1. Jesus is the Son of God, the agent of creation.
2. Jesus died for sinners.
3. Jesus rose again from the dead.
4. Jesus is the Lord and Christ of the world
5. Jesus offers forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life to all those who repent trust in Him.
6. Jesus is going to be judge of all mankind and you have to be ready.
7. Jesus is going to be king of the world.
8. We must fear God and worship Him.
9. If you do not believe in Him, you will be lost and outside of His kingdom forever.
10. We are emphasizing the gospel has to do with informational belief of certain facts, but person-to-person trust in Jesus Christ.

¹ As opposed to a kind of family or corporate faith: “we are Christians” or “everyone in this gathering we call a church is a Christian.” If you believe you are Christian simply because of group identity or historic practice, that is not true faith. True faith is an individual decision to become a follower of Christ and to mean it in more than a mere “religious” way.