

# What is the Gospel?

By Rev. Ronald Cammenga

The world today is filled with bad news. One reads of the bad news in the newspapers, hears of the bad news on the radio, and sees the bad news all around him. There is bad news in the world at large, bad news in our own country, and even much bad news in our own homes and families. There is the bad news of war, of sickness and disease of every kind; there is the bad news of mental and emotional turmoil. Every man has bad news, of one kind or another, in his life. For all of us there is the bad news of death. Not only is there death in the world. Each of us must die. God himself tells us why there is this bad news in the world. In His Word, the bible, He makes plain that the cause of all this trouble is man's own sin. In romans 1:18 we read: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." All the trouble and suffering in the world is nothing but God's judgment on the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

In spite of all this bad news in the world today, there is some good news. That good news is the gospel. That is, in fact, the meaning of the word "gospel". The word "gospel" means "good news". But, what is the gospel? And what is the good news that the gospel proclaims? The good news of the gospel concerns Jesus Christ, the Son of God come into our flesh. It is the good news about His virgin birth, His life of perfect obedience to the law of God, His suffering and death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, and His promise that He will come again to judge the wicked world and take His church up into glory forever. Christ is the good news of the gospel. And Christ is the good news of the gospel because by His perfect life and by His death on the cross Christ endured the wrath of God against the sins of His people and merited for them a perfect righteousness. On account of this perfect righteousness of Christ believers may have the assurance that their sins are forgiven. And having the assurance that their sins are forgiven they may also be assured of the favor and blessing of God upon them, both in this life and in the life to come.

This gospel, this good news, the church is called to proclaim. The churches are not to keep silent about this gospel. Nor are the churches to set about to change this gospel. This is, in fact, what many preachers of the gospel are doing today. But this is wrong. The church is called by Christ Himself to proclaim this gospel. The Apostle Paul, sent out by Christ Himself to be a preacher of the gospel, makes this very plain in I Corinthians 1:17: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Now the apostle doesn't mean in this passage that he had no calling of God to administer the sacrament of holy baptism. In the preceding verse, in fact, he speaks of having baptized certain believers in Corinth. But what the Apostle means to emphasize is that his chief calling, his primary task was to preach the gospel. Christ had exactly called him and sent him out for that purpose. It is that calling, to preach the gospel, that is still the calling of the church today.

But why must this gospel be preached, you ask? The gospel must be preached because by the preaching of the gospel God saves His people. There is no other way to salvation. A man is saved only through the preaching of the gospel. The Apostle Paul also emphasizes this truth. Immediately after he writes that Christ sent him for the purpose of preaching of the gospel, he gives the reason for that: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." The preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto a man's salvation. This same truth the Apostle also emphasizes in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The plain teaching of the Bible is that a man is saved only by means of the gospel.

There is good reason for this. The reason is that God Himself is pleased to work the work of salvation in the heart of a man only through the preaching of the gospel. It is not the case that the preacher himself, by means of his persuasive speech, is able to save a man. The preacher is only a weak, sinful human being like any other human being. The work of salvation is the work of God alone. Yet, God is pleased to save us by means of the preaching of the gospel. When the gospel is preached, God irresistibly and sovereignly applies the Word that is preached unto the hearts of His people by His Holy Spirit.

The gospel calls men to believe in Jesus Christ. The gospel condemns any other way unto salvation. A man is saved only by believing on Christ, who is proclaimed in the gospel. Man cannot save himself. Man cannot by his

own good works earn salvation. Man cannot even cooperate in his own salvation. Salvation is apart from any works that a man can do. A man is saved only by believing in Jesus. This is the teaching of Romans 4:5, "But to him that worketh not, BUT BELIEVETH on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Because salvation is only by believing the gospel, the faithful preacher of the gospel commands men to repent and to believe. This command to believe is an essential part of the gospel. When the Philippian jailer cried out to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?", Paul's answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Jesus Himself said in John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." A man is saved, therefore, by believing in Jesus Christ who is proclaimed in the gospel. In no other way can a man be saved.

But the simple fact is that when the gospel is preached there are many who do not believe that gospel. In fact, not only do they not believe the gospel, but they reject Jesus Christ who is proclaimed in the gospel. All men who hear the gospel do not believe. That was the reaction to the preaching of Jesus Himself when He was on earth. In John 6 Jesus is busy preaching the gospel to the people. And that gospel is that He is the Christ sent down from heaven by God. John tells us that in response to this preaching of Christ, many of the people said, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it." They rejected Christ, and from that time walked no more with Him. That there are many who do not believe the gospel is also the teaching of Paul in I Cor. 1:23: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness." To many the preaching of Christ crucified is a stumblingblock and foolishness. Many there are who reject the gospel.

Why is this, you ask? Why do not all who hear the goodness of the gospel believe in Jesus? The answer is that no man of himself can believe the gospel. All men are sinners who by nature will not and cannot believe. Jesus says in John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The clear teaching of the bible is that the very ability a man has to believe the gospel, to have faith in Jesus Christ is given him by God alone. Only those who are drawn by the Father come to Jesus for salvation and everlasting life. We read in Eph. 2:8: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." There is a good reason why salvation is all of God, why man cannot take the credit in any respect for his salvation. That reason is that God must have all the glory for salvation. Man must not be able to take some of that glory for himself. As the apostle writes in I Cor. 1:31: "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

This is the goodness of the gospel. Indeed, it is the only good news that there is. This is the gospel which the churches which publish this article proclaim. We are unashamed of this gospel. And we are unashamed of it because it IS the power of God unto salvation. Because we are unashamed of this gospel, we are willing to proclaim this gospel to any and to all who will hear it. We also stand ready to help any who desire further instruction in this gospel. We invite you to contact us with your questions.