

What Is the Gospel?

The Gospel Coalition Booklets

Edited by D. A. Carson & Timothy Keller

Gospel-Centered Ministry *by D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller*

The Restoration of All Things *by Sam Storms*

The Church: God's New People *by Tim Savage*

Creation *by Andrew M. Davis*

The Holy Spirit *by Kevin L. DeYoung*

Can We Know the Truth? *by Richard D. Phillips*

The Plan *by Colin S. Smith*

What Is the Gospel?

Bryan Chapell

 **CROSSWAY**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

What Is the Gospel?

Copyright © 2011 by The Gospel Coalition

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Matthew Wahl

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture references are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica. Use of either trademark requires the permission of Biblica.

All emphases in Scripture have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-2675-6

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2676-3

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2677-0

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2678-7

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

What God Requires, He Provides	8
What God Provides, He Perfects	15
Whom God Perfects, He Uses	24
Notes	27
The Gospel Coalition	29

*“Christ Jesus came into the world
to save sinners.”*

1 TIMOTHY 1:15

The events that led to his arrest had been years in the making. When he was growing up, the polite phrase our family used to describe my brother's mental capability was, "He has a harder time learning than most." Though his mind stayed undeveloped, David became increasingly strong in body and will as my parents aged. Stresses of dealing with him, as well as with their own issues, led to their separation and to greater difficulties with my brother. As an adult, David's desire for independence and his developmental disabilities were constant concerns. For friendship and thrills, he developed relationships that spelled trouble. The obvious resulted.

His arrest and confinement were more than his mind could process. He knew only the overwhelming fear that someone with a young child's mental ability would experience in a jail cell. He huddled in a corner and trembled.

My brother's obvious fear rekindled something in the heart of another man in that cell. And despite his own difficulties, he shared with David the message of God's mercy: "Jesus can help you. Trust him."

The truths of Sunday school lessons in special-needs classes that David had attended as a child rushed back to him. He prayed for God to forgive him and trusted in Jesus as his Savior.

David will be in jail for a long time. He will also be with Jesus forever—forgiven, restored, treasured, and transformed. This is the gospel for my brother and for all who trust in Jesus.

Gospel simply means "good news." The Bible uses the term to refer to the message that God has fulfilled his promise to send a Savior to rescue broken people, restore creation's glory, and rule over all with compassion and justice. That's why a good summary of the gospel is "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

God's rescue, restoration, and rule apply to our spiritual condition but are not limited to spiritual realities. Through Jesus Christ, our God delivers his people from the eternal consequences of human sin that

Bryan Chapell

have touched everything. Our salvation includes us, but it's also bigger than we are.

Before we further explore these amazing truths, we need to recognize that the Bible does not trumpet them just to dazzle us. God reveals these truths so that sinners such as David and you and me can forever be free of the guilt and power of sin by trusting the good news that Jesus is the Lord who comes to save us. Following are key aspects of that good news.

What God Requires, He Provides¹

We may not like the idea of someone identifying us as “sinners,” especially if we use that term to refer only to ax murderers and child molesters. But the Bible says that God is absolutely holy and that all who do not match his perfection are “sinners,” a term that simply means missing God's standard. If we sin to any degree, we become something other than what God intended (Rom. 3:23; James 2:10). He made us to reflect his holy nature (1 Pet. 1:16). So our faults not only hurt us but also mar our relationship with God (Eph. 4:30).

God's Image

Our relational problems with God began when our human nature was corrupted by our first parents' sin (Rom. 5:12). Since Adam and Eve, every human knows what it means to fail loved ones, hurt others, and abandon one's own ideals. All of us know shame and remorse. These actually reflect a spiritual reality we may not have recognized: we feel guilt because we were made to be like God, but we fail to live so (Rom. 3:10).

We were made in God's image (Gen. 1:26–27). He designed us to be like him so that we could love him and others made in his image. When we sin, we are going against our original nature, and something deep inside of us winces. The guilt we feel is an echo of the pain our heart registers any time sin distances us from the relationship we were designed to have with our God.

God requires holiness for us to have a close relationship with God, but both our nature and our actions distance us from him. How can we fix this? We can't. We are imperfect creatures and can't make ourselves holy any more than a muddy hand can wipe a white shirt clean.

God is the only one who can fix our relationship with him, and