



Does the Gospel Contain Doctrine? by Sellers S. Crain, Jr

All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.

Our word gospel comes from the Greek word *evangelion*; eu mean something good or pleasant, and *angelion* means message. Therefore, gospel means good news. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines gospel as "something accepted or promoted as infallible truth, or as a guiding principle or doctrine. The message concerning Christ and the kingdom of God and salvation." It gives as synonyms for gospel both "doctrine" and "testament." It defines testament as "an expression of conviction; a tangible proof or tribute." The Oxford Dictionary defines gospel as "Something that serves as a sign or evidence of a specified fact, event or quality." The writer of **Hebrews** describes the gospel as Christ Last Will and Testament and says it is the second and the new covenant for people with God (**9:18-22**).

The word "doctrine" is defined as "a set of beliefs or ideas that are believed to be true" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). "in Scripture, then, doctrine refers to the entire body of essential theological truths that define the message (**1 Timothy 1:10**; **4:16**; **1 Timothy 6:3**; **Titus 1:9**). The message includes historical facts such as those regarding the events in the life of Christ (**1 Corinthians 11:2**). But it is deeper than biographical facts alone. As J. Gresham Machen pointed out years ago, Jesus' death is an integral historical fact. But it is not doctrine. Jesus' death for sins (**1 Corinthians 15:3**) is doctrine." (Baker's *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*) The early Christians received the "apostles' doctrine" which included facts about Christ with interpretation of their importance to them. Some are saying that the gospel is preached to the lost and doctrine is taught to the church, but is that true?

It has been said for years that the gospel contains facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises to be received. Some have said it contains things to believe, teaching to help us grow in Christ, and things to hope for. Paul wrote,

Moreover, brethren I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures... (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**)

The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is doctrine. Paul preached the doctrine that Christ "died for our sins" as an essential part of the gospel.

Paul preached the resurrection to the Athenians, and they called it doctrine (**Acts 17:18-19**). There does not seem to be any sharp distinction made between

gospel and doctrine in the New Testament. In the New Testament, we will find some teaching referred to as gospel in one place and as doctrine in another place (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:16; 6:17-18**). The message preached to help mature Christians is referred to as both gospel (**Galatians 2:14; Ephesians 6:15; 1 Timothy 1:10-11**) and doctrine (**Mathew 28:20; Acts 2:42**). Scripture teaches "obedience to the faith" or to the "truth" (**Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 6:17; 16:26; Philippians 2:1; 1 Peter 1:22**). Paul said he had preached "the word of faith" which included "confession of faith, and righteousness" (**Romans 10:8-10**), He taught spiritual growth is dependent upon faithfulness to sound doctrine, for the truth provides the means of spiritual growth. (**Colossians 2:6**) He told the Ephesian elders that in "testifying" to them "the gospel of the grace of God," he had not failed to "declare the whole counsel of God" (**Acts 20:24, 27**). The gospel then involves not only the facts about Christ death, burial and resurrection, but also "the whole counsel of God."

The word "*Decalogue*" is often used for the Ten Commandments. They were commandments to be obeyed and not ten opinions or suggestions. The Ten Commandments are often referred to as the Law of Moses. However, they are actually the foundation of the law, or ten principles on which the law recorded in **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy** ("second law") is based. The law actually contains 613 laws. Jesus was confronted by a lawyer (one who was learned in the law of Moses), who asked Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (**Luke 10:25**). Jesus asked him,

"What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"
[The man answered,] "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (**Luke 10:26-27**)

It has been said that loving God fulfills the first four commandments, whereas, loving one's neighbor satisfies the remaining six (**Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-12**). While that is true, Christ said much more than that. Here the whole law and the prophets stands for the entire Hebrew Bible. (Dr. Sellers S. Crain, Jr., *Truth for Today Matthew Commentary 13-28*, p.263-264)

In the same manner, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are the facts that support the message. The gospel contains commandments which are to be obeyed. "Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (**Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 4:23**). In preaching "the gospel of the kingdom," He taught repentance (**Mark 1:15b**; see also **Luke 13:1-5**). He taught people to confess faith in Him to be saved (**Matthew 10:32-33**). He taught people to be baptized, and He "baptized more than John" (**John 4:1**; see also **John 3:1-6**). By the authority given Him from heaven, He commanded His disciples to

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," [and He added that those who believed and were baptized were to be taught to] "**observe all things that I have commanded you...**" (**Matthew 28:19-20**; *emphasis mine, S. C.*)

In Mark's account of the Great Commission, Jesus said the disciples were to:

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (**Mark 16:15-16**)

The way men were taught to be saved was by the preaching of the gospel which contained the commands to believe and to be baptized in order to be saved. Then they were to be taught to obey Christ's commandments contained in the gospel (**John 14:15**). Jesus told His disciples that before Jerusalem would be destroyed,

"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations,..." (**Matthew 24:14**)

The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A. D. Paul wrote that at the time he wrote the book of Colossians "the word of truth of the gospel" had been preached "in all the world" (**Colossians 1:5-6**). This was one of his prison epistles written between A. D. 62-63. Although the message of this book was the Preeminence of Christ, it contains many specific commandments from the apostle.

Paul taught "obedience" to the gospel and to the "faith" (**Romans 1:5; 16:26; Romans 10:16; 2 Corinthians 9:13**). In reference to Israel, he lamented that "not all had obeyed the gospel" (**Romans 10:16**). He wrote to the Thessalonians in his second letter that when Jesus comes in "flaming fire" He will take "vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**). Peter said the Jewish Christians to whom he wrote had "purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren..." and then said, "now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (**1 Peter 1:22, 25b**). Obviously, in obeying the truth, they had obeyed the gospel that was preached to them. Paul rebuked the Apostle Peter, who in separating from Gentile Christians in Antioch out of fear of the Judaisers, had not been "straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (**Galatians 2:6-12**). Peter's sin was not being obedient to one of the main doctrines of the gospel which was that in Christ's death God had made it possible for all men, Jew and Gentile, to be reconciled to God "in one body," the church, the body of Christ, "through the cross" (**Ephesians 1:23; 2:16**). These Christians had "trusted" Jesus Christ (**1:18**), after hearing "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation..." (**1:12-13**). Those who believed the message of the gospel obeyed "being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" for "the forgiveness of sins" (**Acts 19:5; Ephesians 1:7**)

The gospel contains promises to be received. Jesus statement to the apostles about going to "My Father's house" to "prepare a place" for them, and His return in the clouds of heaven to receive them to Himself to take them home to heaven to be with Him forever was a promise (**John 14:1-3**; see **2 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). What is often called the Great Invitation: "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" is a promise (**Matthew 11:28-30**). He promised to be with His disciples (Christians) "always, even to the end of the age" (**Matthew 28:20b**). That is the Christian age in which we are now living. The last dispensation of time in which God will deal with mankind. The Great Commission is our mission. Paul wrote that Christians are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (**Romans 8:17**). He also wrote that "Gentiles would be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (**Ephesians 3:6**). He wrote that in Christ "we have obtained an inheritance" and the Holy Spirit is the "guarantee of our inheritance" (**Ephesians 1:11, 14**). Peter described that inheritance this way,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible

and undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven for you...
(**1 Peter 1:3- 4**; see also **Colossians 1:5**)

God has "given to us exceedingly great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (**2 Peter 1:4**).

Men often make promises they do not keep, but "God is not a man that He should lie" (**Numbers 23:19**; see also **Titus 1:2**). The promises of God in Christ are "sure and steadfast" (**Hebrews 6:19**).

The promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. (**2 Corinthians 1:20**)

God determined to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath. (**Hebrews 6:17**)

While this was written of the Patriarchs, Paul has already shown that we are heirs of the promises made to Abraham.

To be a recipient of the promises of God, we must believe the facts of the gospel that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and that He rose again the third day to return to Heaven to reign over God's kingdom, the church (**Acts 2:23-39**; see also **Matthew 16:18-19**). We must be willing to obey the commands of believing, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, and being baptized into Him for "the remission of our sins" (**Acts 2:38**). This is the begin of our spiritual journey, but it requires faithfulness to God to receive our inheritance of eternal life in heaven.

—-- Sellers S. Crain, Jr, September 2020