

# *A Gospel Summary*

*Jeffrey C. Nesbitt*

This is a reply to the question often asked, “What should we include in our Gospel presentation?” What follows is only a summary and the bare minimum that should be included in the whole Gospel. I also believe that it is not necessary, nor many times possible, to bring the whole gospel to everyone at one sitting. We must trust that what time God gives us to witness of Christ will be used to that individual person’s edification and desired conviction.

## **1. GOD the Eternal, Sovereign Ruler and Creator**

Today we live in an unprecedented time in all history. There is much interest in the metaphysical, but very little knowledge about spiritual truths. The Great and Holy One of the Bible is virtually unknown among the various and myriad people of the earth. And most tragic is the ignorance of the God of the Bible among those who make claim to being His children; Christians. Thus we must begin our presentation of the Gospel with the presupposition that our listener has little or no knowledge of the True God of the Bible. I love to speak of God to others by describing Him in all His attributes; His holiness, majesty, omnipotence, love, eternality, aseity (independence of His creation), sovereignty, immutability, faithfulness, goodness, patience, grace, mercy, wrath, omniscience, omnipresence, loving-kindness (covenant faithfulness), etc.

This is a most important foundation to build upon, for we are making known the Living God in Whom we live, move and have our being. It is to Him that we must look for our every desire here on earth and our hope for the ages to come. A wrong understanding of God will inevitably lead to a wrong understanding of all that follows. Just remember, that God inspired men to write the 39 books of the Old Testament to make Himself known in all His glory. He then took on human flesh and fully “declared Him.” (*Jh.* 1:18) And finally God added 27 more “books” to complete His self-revelation. Therefore, we should not be overly anxious to rush through this first aspect of the Gospel.

It has been well said that “non-Christians have been mistaught by Christians for such a long time that He is only love.” But the non-Christian’s concept of love today is so distorted as to be almost wholly useless in making the message clear. Furthermore, the teaching of

Scripture that God is love is for Christians, who have received Christ and can appreciate what He did for them while they were yet sinners (*Rom.* 5:8). In addition, the love of God is not among His most central attributes. To counterbalance the notions that non-Christians have of God, the Christian ought to concentrate on His primary attributes and perhaps not mention His love at all. Furthermore, the wrath of God now abides on those who do not believe in Christ (*Jh.* 3:36). Scripture nowhere says that God loves the sinner but hates his sin; God is angry with the sinner continually (*Ps.* 5:5; 7:11; 10:3).

Many times the non-Christian will ask the question, “How can a good God allow evil?” or “If God is so good, why does He allow so much suffering?” These and like questions afford the opportunity to speak of God in His majestic and ineffable holiness and the fact that all evil on the earth is due to sinful man and not God. In fact, things would be much worse if God wasn’t restraining the outworking of men’s evil devices. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose (*Rom.* 8:28). All things are according to His eternal plan to bring glory to Himself and the salvation of all them that believe on Christ the LORD. No one receives that which he doesn’t deserve. Clearly, God is long-suffering toward all men, for He has reserved the meting out of His perfect judgment until the last day (*2Pet.* 3:9). Each and every day is an expression of His benevolence towards us that we might repent and turn to Him in faith in His Son. (*1Tim.* 2:4)

## **2. God’s Holiness and Man’s Sin and Depravity**

Although we have said that the Gospel is “good news”, that God is reconciled to men in Christ, it must be pointed out that outside of Christ all men are by nature, lost, with no natural affection for God nor do they have the ability to even seek Him. From birth, we are all under the just condemnation of God. Otherwise, even after presenting Christ’s work, many will think that there may be another way of being found acceptable before God if they do certain things and work hard enough at it. The nature of sin and depravity must be presented in such a way that it is clear that this is an impossibility and their situation is utterly hopeless if they are outside of Christ. (*Rom.* 3:10-18; *Eph.* 2:2, 3; 4:17-19)

How are we to do this? By first showing that God in the beginning, made man in His own image with true knowledge (*Col.* 3:10) righteousness and true holiness (*Eph.* 4:24). And because man is made in God’s image, he is capable of receiving revelation from Him; and this is shown in the book of Romans: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.” (*Rom.* 1:19). In other words, inherent within each person is the knowledge of what God is like. And it says, “For the invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (*Rom.* 1:20). So even the creation shows that God is

sovereign. But men, being sinners, reject God's testimony about Himself and they substitute the truth for a lie, "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain the their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (*Rom. 1:21*). They worshipped the creature rather than the Creator (*Rom. 1:25*). Thus all men by nature know that God is and He is the Sovereign Ruler and Creator of all things, but these same men reject the testimony which is within them and which is clearly shown around them and substitute a "god" after their own liking. The result is that all men are idolaters; they refuse to worship the one true God Who alone is worthy of our worship; worshipping those things which are no "gods", *e.g.* . . . money, sex, jobs, material possessions, religion, etc. It has well been said, "In the beginning, God made man in His own image, and ever since that day, man has been trying to return the favor."

The Fall of man was great indeed, for our rejection of the One True God has resulted in God's rejection of us and He has thus allowed us to live out our lives in an ever accelerating downward spiral; living out our lives according to the dictates and imagination of our reprobate minds, doing those things which are abominable to Him. We are indeed responsible for our actions and will suffer the just punishment for them. Our nature is corrupted; we are bondservants to it and love to do its bidding. We love the darkness and hate the light (*Jh. 3:19*). There is no good thing within us (*Rom. 3:10-18*), and if not for the gracious hand of God restraining each and every one of us, we would commit those things which even the most heinous of individuals would consider horrible. The world would be in a state of complete chaos and we would more than likely annihilate ourselves in a very short time.

The "bad news" is that even though men know that their words, thoughts and deeds are not acceptable even by their own standards, they are incapable of changing themselves to do that which is right and good. Our condition is pitiable and hopeless and God is wroth with us because we refuse to do that which He has commanded and shown to be right and good.

### **3. God's Provision of Redemption in Christ**

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me!" (*Jh. 14:6*) Now, how is it possible that Jesus can be the ONLY way to God? Well, if Jesus lived a life that was in perfect conformity to the law of God, even in its spirit, and was thus sinless, He would therefore have the right to say this. And this is exactly what the Bible says about Him! For He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (*Heb. 4:15*). And the Scriptures, long before His birth, prophesied that He would be the one to come and be the human substitute to pay the penalty for sin. In that way He could be the ONE WAY men can come to God. Isaiah wrote that God "shall see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied; by the knowledge of Him shall [His] righteous

servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities” (*Is. 53:11*).

This is what the death of Christ means. He paid the penalty for sins by bearing those sins in Himself, so that sinners could be made righteous (*2Cor. 5:21*). But if He was but a finite man, how could He then be a substitute for more than just one man? We then bring forth the glorious truth that it was God Himself Who came to earth and became man in the one person Jesus of Nazareth (*Jh. 1:14; Phil. 2:6-8, Col. 2:9*). Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour, God with us Who saved His people from their sins. (*Matt. 1:21*) Jesus, being the Eternal God was able to be a substitute for all those Whom He came to save. (*Jh. 6:37-39*) His death is infinite in its sufficiency to save all those who come to Him in faith.

That great chasm which existed between the Holy God and sinful man was removed through His shed blood. (*Rom. 5:8-10*) In Christ men are brought back to God, because His righteousness is imputed to their account. And not only are we brought near unto God but we are made sons and daughters by adoption through Christ’s work for us. (*Gal. 4:4, 5; Heb. 2:10*) We can now reign with Christ right here on earth and experience God’s love and fellowship in Him. Further, we are given the power to overcome our sinful natures which can enable us to live lives that are pleasing to God; though it be only in principle yet there is still a dramatic change which takes place in us (*2Cor. 5:17; 2Pet. 1:4*).

#### **4. God’s Requirements**

This is where we bring together all that we have said before.. How is this reconciliation which Christ has accomplished through His death applied to us? How does a person become cleansed of his sin and receive God’s forgiveness and the power to lead a new life? The Scriptures are clear that a person must be born again/born from above. God must initiate a mighty work in a person. That person’s wicked and evil nature must be changed or he “cannot enter or even see the kingdom of God” (*Jh. 3:3,5*). And without this new birth, that person will never come to Christ (*Jh. 6:44, 65*). We need to make this fact known. The ability to become born again is not within man’s ability to accomplish. There is absolutely nothing which we can do to even initiate this supernatural work within us. Yet, it is absolutely necessary that it happen.

What then are we to tell them beyond this truth? Well, the Scripture is clear, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” (*Isa. 45:22*). And again the Scriptures say, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Acts 20:21*). All men everywhere are to repent and believe on Christ. They are to trust God Who promises to save all those who come to Him in faith. Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” (*Jh. 6:47*). Thus we have the two requirements; repentance, which is the turning from sin and the world with all its sinful ways; hating the very

sin within us and desiring those things which God has commanded; to do them out of a heart of gladness and thankfulness — and faith, which is a trusting in God's Christ and depending upon His work as being done in our place.

The new birth (regeneration) is a sovereign and secret work of God the Holy Spirit (*Jh.* 3:3-8). Because all men are born spiritually dead, they need to be "made alive". Resurrecting a corpse requires the power of God. And this is exactly what He does according to His own will and when He wills. (*Eph.* 1:4-11; 2:1-10). Salvation is of grace; a gift of God. This being true, men are therefore totally dependent upon the mercy and grace of God. However, God has also instructed us in His Word, that in spite of our total inability to do anything, even to initiate our salvation, we are responsible to repent and believe upon the Lord Christ. (*Acts* 2:36, 37; 3:19; 8:22; 17:29-31) The fact is that if anyone has even the slightest desire to seek after God, it is because the Holy Spirit has done a work in them. We are not to try and second guess what God is doing, or what He may or may not do. What we are responsible to do is to repent of our sins and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, believing that all who come to Him will be received warmly. (*Matt.* 11:27, 28; *Jh.* 6:37-40)

## **5. The Consummation and Judgment.**

We know that not all those who we talk to about these deep and wonderful things will be positive in their response to us. Many will openly reject our words as being foolish and offensive. And this should not surprise us, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (*1Cor.* 1:18). Let us never forget that "Many are called, but few are chosen". Only those whom God has worked His marvelous work of the new birth will believe on Christ (*Jh.* 1:13). And yet this is our hope and joy, knowing that there is a definite number; a multitude of people in this world which God has determined to bring into His kingdom and in His perfect time brings them to faith, using broken vessels, mere men who faithfully bring the "Good news" to the nations (*1Cor.* 1:21).

Therefore it is incumbent upon us to tell the "rest of the story"! We must be open and honest with our hearers to tell them of the coming judgment. There is a price to pay for rejecting God's Christ, the only way back to Him. The fact is we are under condemnation even now, if we are outside of Christ. (*Jh.* 1:19; 5:24; *Rom.* 5:18) God's patience and long-suffering towards all of us is meant to lead us to repentance. (*2Pet.* 3:9) But if we refuse to heed the call, the end will be a dark and fiery day. For there is coming a day when every one of us must stand before this Holy God and give an account for every thought, word and deed. All things will be made known and displayed for all to see, even the deepest recesses of our hearts will be uncovered before all. And we will receive the just punishment for these things which are not in perfect accord with God's commandments. They will not be passed over but they will be dealt with in strict

accordance with His law.

Because all of our acts are in rebellion against God, who is infinitely Holy, the punishment must and will be eternal; everlasting torment. There is a place called Hell in which will be cast the Devil and all the fallen angels with him. And all those who refused to trust in Christ will be cast there with them, for all eternity. (*2Pet. 2:4-6; Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15*) The One Who is able and willing to save those who come to Him by faith is the same One Who will judge all those who refuse to come. For every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is LORD! (*Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10*). Jesus IS the Lord of Glory! He is and will be everyone's Lord; either the Lord of their salvation or the Lord of their damnation; but either way, Jesus IS LORD! God has bestowed this honor upon Him (*Acts 2:36*), and has no need of us to crown Him Lord, nor can we make Him Lord. We are required to bow before Him as LORD.

These headings therefore can be used as a guide in presenting the Gospel to others. Hopefully they will help give some structure to our speaking the "truth in love" to those who are lost. Again I would consider them to be minimal, and only a guide. Each person we meet is different and is living in different circumstances, thus our approach will vary. BUT our message must be the same. If anything, we will append to this guide, but never diminish it.

It must also be remembered that the attitude of our hearts is very important as we seek to bring the gospel into the world to needy sinners. Let us ever be in prayer as we seek to speak to others. We should speak with a boldness through brokenness, knowing from whence we came; that we all were at one time "children of wrath" even as others.