

What are the essentials of the gospel message?

Question: "What are the essentials of the gospel message?"

Answer from GotQuestions.org: The word “gospel” means good news, and it is best defined as the message of forgiveness for sin through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It is essentially God’s rescue plan of redemption for those who will trust in His divine Son in order to be reconciled to a just and holy God. The essential content of this saving message is clearly laid out for us in the Bible.

In the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he lays out the content of the gospel message, “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

In this passage, we see three essential elements of the gospel message. First, the phrase “died for our sins” is very important. As Romans 3:23 tells us, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The reality of sin needs to be acknowledged by all who approach the throne of God for salvation. A sinner must acknowledge the hopelessness of his guilt before God in order for forgiveness to take place, and he must understand that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Without this foundational truth, no gospel presentation is complete.

Second, the person and work of Christ are indispensable components of the gospel. Jesus is both God (Colossians 2:9) and man (John 1:14). Jesus lived the sinless life that we could never live (1 Peter 2:22) and, as such, He is the only one who could die a substitutionary death for the sinner. Sin against an infinite God requires an infinite sacrifice. Therefore, either man, who is finite, must pay the penalty for an infinite length of time in hell, or the infinite Christ must pay for it once. Jesus went to the cross to pay the debt we owe to God for our sin and those who are covered by His sacrifice will inherit the kingdom of God as sons of the king (John 1:12).

Third, the resurrection of Christ is an essential element of the gospel. The resurrection is the proof of the power of God. Only He who created life can resurrect it after death, only He can reverse the hideousness that is death itself, and only He can remove the sting that is death and the victory that is the grave’s (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). Further, unlike all other religions, Christianity alone possesses a Founder who transcends death and who promises that His followers will do the same. All other religions were founded by men and prophets whose end was the grave.

Finally, Christ offers His salvation as a free gift (Romans 5:15; 6:23), that can only be received by faith, apart from any works or merit on our part (Ephesians 2:8-9). As the

Apostle Paul tells us, the gospel is "...the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). The same inspired author tells us, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

These, then, are the essential elements of the gospel: the sin of all men, the death of Christ on the cross to pay for those sins, the resurrection of Christ to provide life everlasting for those who follow Him, and the offer of the free gift of salvation to all.

Recommended Resource: Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification by R.C. Sproul.