

What is the Gospel?

By Mark Westman, Pastor of Highview Christian Church,
Washington, Illinois

What is the Gospel? Most Christians know the Gospel means good news, but what is that good news. That should be an easy question for Christians to answer, but is it? Dr. Michael Horton is a Christian scholar I often read and listen to. He recently attended the National Christian Book Sellers Convention where he asked one hundred and twenty people, who were mostly evangelical and charismatic Christians, to explain the Gospel and its meaning. Dr. Horton taped their responses and as I listened to their answers I became more and more depressed. Incredibly only one person gave the correct answer and he was a Baptist minister. The rest basically said that the Gospel was about helping them to live good, meaningful and successful lives. Then Dr. Horton asked another large group if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "The Gospel is to help you live a godly life." Only one person disagreed and the rest agreed the Gospel is all about them! It seems to me that far too many Christians have confused justification with sanctification.

So why are so many Christians confused about the meaning of the Gospel? Could it be they are no longer hearing any teaching and preaching on the Gospel in their churches? Perhaps we are living in a day where the good news has been replaced with good advice from our pulpits. Maybe the folks in the pews believe if they try hard enough to be good enough they can save themselves rather than hearing the truth that you need God to save you from your sins.

Like man of you, I was raised in a legalistic time in the church where I was taught if you fail to follow the church's social gospel you will go to hell. I was taught that playing cards, dancing, drinking, listening to certain types of music and movies, and smoking would earn you a free ticket straight to hell. That teaching was ungodly and wrong, but at least somewhere in that legalistic teaching I heard something about the cross of Jesus. Today we have a kinder and gentler version of those legalistic days. If you are sincere and try really hard to do what the church teaches then you will be happier. But if you fail to follow the pastor's good advice then you will lose out on God's best for your life. Sadly, the cross of Jesus does not work well with the self-help and feel good messages that fill our pulpits today. The truth that we are sinners by nature and choice condemned to eternal life in hell before a holy God, is non longer the driving question for many

attending the church. Sadly, for many, the question is what will this church teach and do for me to help make my life happier and receive God's best for my life?

What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the good news of God's plan in redemptive history to save us from the consequences of our sins culminating in the life, death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the son of God becoming a man and being tempted in every way like us, yet He never gave in to that temptation and sinned. Therefore, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world when He freely laid down His life so we can spend forever in heaven. The Gospel is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus where His blood and death satisfied the wrath of a holy God. The Gospel is being fully clothed in the righteousness that is Christ Jesus and through faith in what He alone has done through the cross we receive His imputed righteousness. The Gospel is the knowledge that it is by His stripes that we are all healed and the New Covenant was cut in Jesus' precious blood. The Gospel is believing with all your heart that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ according to scripture alone. Saint Paul wrote, "***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 14:3-4)

If there is one thing that all Christians should find unity in it is the meaning and power of Christ's Gospel. But honestly, how can we find Christian unity when most Christians believe the Gospel is all about them? I will consider my ministry at this church to be successful, no matter what Satan may bring our way, if a person were to thrust a microphone our way and ask us, "What is the Gospel?" and we can then tell them that it's all about what Jesus Christ did to save us from our sins.