

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration

Lesson 1: Introduction

I. Historical Background: Previous Statements on the Gospel

A. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony For the Truth (1910-1915)*

1. In 1909 God moved two Christian laymen to set aside a large sum of money for issuing twelve volumes that would set forth the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and which were to be sent free to ministers of the gospel, missionaries, Sunday School superintendents, and others engaged in aggressive Christian work throughout the English speaking world. A committee of men who were known to be sound in the faith was chosen to have oversight of the publication of these volumes. Some of the volumes were sent to 300,000 ministers and missionaries and other workers in different parts of the world. At last the stock became exhausted, but appeals for them kept coming in from different parts of the world. As the fund was no longer available for this purpose, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, to whom the plates were turned over when the Committee closed its work, have decided to bring out the various articles that appeared in *The Fundamentals* in four volumes at the cheapest price possible. All the articles that appeared in *The Fundamentals*, with the exception of a very few that did not seem to be in exact keeping with the original purpose of *The Fundamentals*, was published in this series.

B. *Vatican II (1963-1965)*

1. Rome upheld the teachings of Trent (1545-1563) in that both faith and water baptism are necessary for salvation (but added an “all things being equal” caveat).
2. However, for those who cannot explicitly believe and/or be baptized, Rome added the notion of a “baptism of desire.”

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.”¹

C. *The Lausanne Covenant (1974)*

1. Lausanne formed the First International Congress on World Evangelization headed by Billy Graham in the city of Lausanne, Switzerland. A statement was drafted by John Stott to outline the essential nature of the Gospel and the importance of evangelizing.
2. The Lausanne Covenant was agreed upon by 2,300 people from 150 nations from all branches of the Christian church in the space of ten days.
3. On the nature of evangelism the Covenant reads:

“To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.”

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, II.16.

D. The Manila Manifesto (1989): An Elaboration of Lausanne

1. Held in Manila, Philippines. Twenty-one affirmations resulted.
2. On the Good News for today:

“We rejoice that the living God did not abandon us to our lostness and despair. In his love he came after us in Jesus Christ to rescue and remake us. So the good news focuses on the historic person of Jesus, who came proclaiming the kingdom of God and living a life of humble service, who died for us, becoming sin and a curse in our place, and whom God vindicated by raising him from the dead. To those who repent and believe in Christ, God grants a share in the new creation. He gives us new life, which includes the forgiveness of our sins and the indwelling, transforming power of his Spirit. He welcomes us into his new community, which consists of people of all races, nations and cultures. And he promises that one day we will enter his new world, in which evil will be abolished, nature will be redeemed, and God will reign forever.”

E. Evangelicals and Catholics Together (1994)

1. Consultation began in 1992 between Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic Leaders.
2. The result was a 25-page document titled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT). It was originated by Charles (Chuck) Colson and Catholic social critic Richard John Neuhaus, and was signed in 1994 by 40 noted evangelical and Catholic leaders. It called for Catholic and evangelical cooperation on social and cultural issues where both traditions share common goals, one example being the fight against abortion. The accord also stressed mutual allegiance to the Apostles' Creed, world evangelism, and justification “by grace through faith because of Christ,” and encouraged “civil” discourse over doctrinal differences.
 - a) The notion of being “justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone” was not explicitly mentioned. While the Catholic Church has always maintained that justification was by grace through faith in Christ, the “*solus*” of the Reformation were explicitly denied in the Council of Trent and the word “alone” was conspicuously absent from ECT.
3. On January 19, 1995 a gathering occurred with Chuck Colson, Campus Crusade for Christ's founder Bill Bright, and theologian J. I. Packer (all ECT signers), along with ECT critics John MacArthur, Ligonier Ministries' R. C. Sproul, apologist John Ankerberg, author Michael Horton, and pastor D. James Kennedy. Moody Bible Institute president Joseph Stowell moderated, with assistance from church historian John Woodbridge. The leaders eventually agreed on a five-point statement, designed to "elucidate" the stance of evangelical ECT signers.

F. ECT II, 1997: The Gift of Salvation

1. At a meeting in the fall of 1996, it was determined that further progress depended upon firm agreement on the meaning of salvation, and especially the doctrine of justification. After much discussion, study, and prayer over the course of a year, a statement titled “The Gift of Salvation” (GOS) was agreed to at a meeting in New York City, October 6-7, 1997. The clarifying statement by all ECT Signatories reads:

“Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so. The New Testament makes it clear that the gift of justification is received through faith. “By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). By faith, which is also the gift of God, we repent of our sins and freely adhere to the Gospel, the good news of God’s saving work for us in Christ. By our response of faith to Christ, we enter into the blessings promised by the Gospel. Faith is not merely intellectual assent but an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life. We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).”

However, the concept of imputation as it relates to justification was sidestepped in the GOS document, so many notable evangelical leaders were expressing distress over the “agreement.”

G. The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration (1999)

1. Discussions were held early in 1998 between those who supported GOS and those who did not (dissenters included ACE members). It was agreed that a statement was urgently needed which reaffirmed the gospel and justification through faith alone. A drafting committee (The Committee on Evangelical Unity in the Gospel) was composed of evangelicals who agreed with GOS and those who did not (ACE. Members included Packer, Sproul, Carson, Timothy George, Erwin Lutzer, John Ankerberg, among others. The statement took more than a year to formulate and is intended to clarify the biblical position of all evangelicals re: justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone.
2. In November, 1998, at the ETS Annual Conference a panel discussion was held between Father Martin and J. I. Packer on the Catholic side and Bob Godfrey on the Protestant side. The topic was “Have Protestants and Catholics Finally Agreed on Salvation? A Panel Discussion on the Roman Catholic-Evangelical document, ‘The Gift of Salvation.’” The primary issue in the document “The Gift of Salvation” is that the doctrine of “imputed righteousness” was not present. Hence, Catholics and Protestants remain divided over an essential teaching in the Gospel.
3. A crux in the controversy:

“Is our justification based on the righteousness of Christ *in* us or the righteousness of Christ *for* us? . . . The Roman Catholic Church has always affirmed that justification is by faith in the sense that faith is a *necessary* condition (though not a *sufficient* condition) for justification . . . Rome believes justification is through faith but not through faith *alone*.” (Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right*, p. 68)
4. The document was presented In July 2000, at the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA) in New Orleans, in a cooperative effort between CBA, Zondervan Publishers and Moody Press. In addition to the statement itself, Zondervan distributed free of charge thousands of copies of *This We Believe*, edited by John Akers, John Armstrong and John Woodbridge, which elucidated key elements of the Statement.
5. In August, at “Amsterdam 2000,” all 10,000 delegates were given a copy of the gospel document. As a result, several groups, including Promise Keepers, have added the gospel statement to their ministry doctrinal statements to clarify their commitment to the fundamental truths of the gospel.
6. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president R. Albert Mohler states:

“The statement’s carefully crafted affirmation of the doctrine of justification may be its most significant achievement in light of current controversies. The drafters insist that the righteousness of Christ alone is imputed to believers by God’s legal declaration ‘as the sole ground for our justification.’ Further, our justification and adoption are by grace alone, through faith alone, achieved by Christ alone, ‘while we were yet sinners.’ This last phrase is especially important, and the statement continues to deny any notion of inherent human righteousness. This is a significant correction of previous statements popular among some evangelicals, which have confused the biblical teachings on justification, and have surrendered the Reformation achievement.”
7. The overarching theme and purpose of this Statement is to expound the notion of “justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone.”

II. Significance of the Statement

A. The Priority of the Gospel (Romans 9:1-5)

“I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”

B. *The Only Gospel (Galatians 1:6-9)*

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

C. *What are the necessary and sufficient truths that one must understand and commit to in order to be Christian?*

D. *Are we really quibbling over words?*

E. *“How will they know if they do not hear?” Our privilege and responsibility.*

F. *What do you hope to get out of this study?*

III. Format and Logistics

A. *Format of the Study*

1. Lesson Plan
 - a) The Nature of the Gospel (Statement 1)
 - b) The Scope of the Gospel (Statements 2-4, 17)
 - c) The Person of the Gospel (Statements 6, 7)
 - d) The Provision of the Gospel (Statements 8, 9, 10)
 - e) The Triumph of the Gospel (Statements 11-12)
 - f) The Application of the Gospel (Statements 5, 14-16, 18)

B. *Assumptions*

1. God’s Word is the final authority on the matters about which it speaks
2. There will be some teaching with open discussion
3. Respect for everyone’s beliefs regardless of knowledge or denominational background