

"The simplest and shortest ethical precept is to be served as little as possible ... and to serve others as much as possible."

—Leo Tolstoy

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The True Gospel (Part 2)

In the last issue, we saw how important it is that we understand just what the true gospel is. If we are not following the true gospel that Christ proclaimed, we will wind up somewhere other than the [Kingdom of God!](#)

Whether in English or Greek, *gospel* means "good news" or "good tidings," yet the news [Jesus Christ](#) brought is not just a proclamation of good cheer. Normally, when we hear the phrase, "good news," we think of a positive announcement. Jesus' message is certainly encouraging, but the adjective "good" has its roots in the word "[god](#)," suggesting that, in this case, Jesus' message also possesses a moral quality.

Certainly, Jesus' gospel is the good news of salvation. What could be more encouraging? Jesus Himself confirms this in [John 3:17](#), "For God did not send His Son into [the world](#) to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." However, in accordance with human nature's desire for self-preservation, the Protestant world has overemphasized this aspect of [the gospel](#) and minimized others, particularly the process of sanctification.

Notice Paul's list in [I Corinthians 1:30](#): "But of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. . . ." Protestants hang on this verse because on its face it seems to say that Christ did all the work for us—that we are righteous, sanctified and redeemed by accepting His sacrifice for us, and we need do no more.

Upon closer study, though, what this verse says is that Jesus is our example in these matters; He embodies these virtues. Just as He is "the way, the truth, and the life" ([John 14:6](#)), He is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. If we walk as He walked, we will be wise, righteous, holy and saved! As the whole context shows, God will amaze and shame the world by taking the foolish, weak and base, and creating them into children like His Son (cf. [Luke 10:21](#)). Even as nothing just appears as a finished product, so His children will go through a process of development, and this process follows the same one that Jesus Christ experienced in His life ([John 8:12](#); [I Corinthians 11:1](#); [I John 2:6](#); etc.).

This is where the Protestant gospel fails. It proclaims "by grace you have been saved through [faith](#)" *alone* (a word not found in [Ephesians 2:8](#), yet added by Martin Luther), and discounts works entirely as a vehicle for building character because, in their view, we are already righteous and holy through Christ. True, we are not saved by works (verse 9), but Paul emphatically asserts that God is creating us in Christ for good works (verse 10). James adds that works exhibit and stimulate faith ([James 2:18](#), 22, 24, 26). Works, then, are a tool to build as well as a product of godly character.

The gospel, then, is more than an announcement of salvation to mankind. It is a roadmap that teaches us what we must do to be saved—not just justified by Christ's sacrifice, but also born into the Kingdom of God! Between justification and glorification is sanctification, the process of becoming holy and righteous as He is, and the gospel explains how that is accomplished. Though that process does not save us, we will not be saved without it!

In part three, we will see how the New Testament authors use "gospel" in their writings to learn how they define it.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Faith \(Part Two\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Faithfulness on the part of a human being ultimately rests on his trust in God, and if a person is going to be faithful, its because he believes what God says and he is motivated then to have a genuine commitment to righteousness. Such an iron-clad trust motivated the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11. Faith is to spiritual what eyesight is to physical.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Is the Christian Required to Do Works? \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Why do so many nominal Christians reject works and obedience to God's law? John Ritenbaugh posits that they do this because they fail to gather God's whole counsel on this subject. In doing so, they miss vital principles that help to bring us into the image of God.

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