

Essential Christianity
studies in what we believe and who we are as Christians

Study 1: What the gospel is (and isn't)

Discuss: What is the difference in meaning between these pairs of words?

- Accept/except
- Imply/infer
- Comprise/compose
- Disinterested/uninterested
- Exhaustive/exhausting

We often see (or hear) English words used in the wrong way, or misunderstood. “Gospel” can be one of those words. It literally means “good news,” being the translation of the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον. This word, as used in the New Testament, has a particular meaning. However, we often hear it used to refer to actions or beliefs that are not covered by the New Testament usage of that word. The aim of this study is to “get back to basics,” and understand just what the gospel is (and isn't).

READ 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

1. How important is it to believe the right gospel? What does Paul have to say about those who wander from this truth? [see also Galatians 1:6-8]
 - a. Who was it that first preached the gospel to you? When was that? Can you remember what they said?
 - b. Have you ever discovered that you have forgotten, or misremembered, something important from your past? How do you think this happened?
 - c. How do you think it was possible that people could have forgotten the gospel that Paul had preached to them (in the case of the Corinthians around 4 years earlier, in the case of the Galatians around 14 years earlier)?
2. Discuss and write down in simple sentences – or bullet-points – what the gospel is, according to Paul in this passage.
 - a. Is there any detail he includes that surprises you? What, and why do you think he put this in?
 - b. Is there any detail he leaves out that you would expect to be in there? What?
 - c. This is, of course, not the only place in which the gospel is explained in the New Testament. Here are some other gospel references¹ – what do they add to what Paul says here?
 - i. Matthew 4:23
 - ii. Mark 1:1, 14-15
 - iii. Romans 1:9, 15-16; 10:16; 11:28

¹ This is not an exhaustive list, but is fairly extensive and representative

- iv.** 2 Corinthians 11:4
- v.** Colossians 1:15, 23
- vi.** 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 2:14
- vii.** 2 Timothy 1:10; 2:8
- viii.** Philippians 1:27

- 3.** Who is the gospel about? What would you think of someone who claimed to be preaching the gospel but didn't mention Jesus?
- 4.** What does the gospel say about what we are like as human beings? What would you say to someone who expressed the belief that we're all essentially good, and being a Christian is simply about trying to be a nice person?
- 5.** What does the gospel call us to do? What would you say to someone who suggested that we're all Christians, by virtue of our upbringing and culture?
- 6.** In the common "This bloke died and found himself standing at the pearly gates ..." joke, what is the explanation usually given for why a person should be let in to heaven? What does the gospel have to say about that?