

The Gospel in an Hour

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Introduction.

Many of the lessons we've gone through recently have been designed to teach us how to be more effective seekers of the lost. We've seen that evangelism must always begin with expressions of our love, that different people must be approached in different ways, and that we must defend the timeless truths of the Bible from the assaults of humanism and modernism. In the final analysis, though, saving the lost is not about us and how cleverly we conduct ourselves. It's about the eternal word of God and its effect on the human heart, and without that word, we will never save a soul. Everything we've looked at to this point, then, is about nothing more than paving the way for the gospel.

Of course, if we do all that paving, but the gospel never shows up, our actions make as much sense as building a four-lane highway that no one ever drives on. And yet, that's the point where many Christians find themselves. They know that their friend or neighbor is ripe to be taught the truth, but they get stage fright and don't know what to say.

Thankfully, there are a couple of different remedies for that situation. First, if we don't know what to say, we can ask someone who does to help us. I'm always delighted to help with a study. I know that Joe and John are also happy to teach, although their schedules are not quite as flexible as mine. Regardless, help is always available.

However, it may be that we aren't comfortable with bringing somebody else into our study, and yet, we're not confident in our own abilities to teach either. That's why we're going to look this morning at a simple study outline that any Christian can use to teach. If you'll look at your bulletins, you'll notice a little card stapled to the corner, and that card contains this outline. We can carry it in our wallets and purses and always be prepared to teach. If we follow it, we can tell people everything they need to know to be saved in a session or two. Let's look, then, at the gospel in an hour.

The Bible and Sin.

This presentation of the good news begins by looking at **THE BIBLE**. Within this subject, the first point that we need to make is that the Bible is God's law. For support, we can turn to 2 Timothy 3:16-17. It's important that we bring this out because it sets the standard for everything else we say. We can't determine what God wants by consulting our own feelings or listening to the commandments of men. Instead, we learn what God's expectations for our lives are by turning to the holy book that He inspired. If it's in the word of God, it's part of the law of God.

Some denominations acknowledge that the Bible is God's book, but they say that only a special priesthood or group of clergymen is capable of understanding and interpreting it. That works out very conveniently for those self-appointed interpreters, but that's not what the Bible says at all. Instead, God's word teaches that we ourselves can understand the Bible. Consider Paul's words in Ephesians 3:4. Paul here isn't writing to some special group of holy men apart from normal Christians. Instead, it's those normal Christians he's writing to, and he tells them that the purpose of his writing is so that they can understand his special spiritual insight. The Bible is written to be understood by us.

Even though the Bible is so readily understandable, not everything it says is pleasant. This is particularly true of the Bible's discussions of **SIN**. According to the word of God, sin is a violation of His law. We see this idea presented in 1 John 3:4. When God tells us not to do something and we do it anyway, we violate His law and sin. On the other hand, when He tells us to do something and we choose not to do it, that too is a violation of His law and therefore sin. There is no commandment of God that we can violate without sinning. He expects every commandment to be obeyed.

This, of course, is not an easy standard to meet. In fact, the Scripture reveals to us that none of us have met it. Every man or woman has sinned. As many have you have probably already guessed, we can establish this by turning to Romans 3:23. Every one of us has sinned, and as a consequence of that, we fall short of the perfection that God's holiness demands. Almost everyone will acknowledge that they have sin in their lives. Whenever we lie, or lust, or covet, or hate, or disobey any other commandment, we sin and fail to live up to God's expectations.

Even though this failure is universal, it has terrible consequences. The Bible teaches, in fact, that anyone who sins has earned death for themselves. We can find this in the first part of Romans 6:23. Just as we might go out and earn a wage by working for an employer, when we sin, we earn a wage too. There is now something that we deserve, and what we deserve is eternal death. If we continue in sin until the day of judgment, that death sentence will be pronounced on us.

Jesus and Salvation.

Obviously, mankind, if left to rely on itself, is in a terrible state. We are headed for eternal torment, and we cannot save ourselves. Thankfully, God has provided a Savior for us in our Lord **JESUS** Christ. We learn that life is available through Him from the second part of Romans 6:23. There are two important points to be made about this life here. First, it is a free gift. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation from God, but it is something that He gives to us

freely through Jesus. Second, this life is not for our time on earth only, but for eternity. Without Jesus, we are headed for eternal death and separation from God. With Him, we can look forward to a joyful eternity spent in heaven.

Such a great gift is possible through Jesus because He is the Son of God. Among many, many other passages of Scripture, we learn this from Mark 1:1. During His time on earth, Jesus looked every bit as human as we do, but in reality, He was also much more. In a different form, Jesus existed from before the foundation of the world and was and is every bit as divine as God the Father is. That makes Him a unique being who is uniquely able to save us from our sins.

This salvation is something that Jesus accomplished for us by dying for our sins. We see this idea highlighted in 1 Corinthians 15:3. Here's what this means: As we've already seen, God's word is law, and just as is true of any human law, when we violate that law by sinning, there's a punishment attached to that. God's justice demands that our sin must be repaid with death. Jesus was sinless and did not have to die, but He chose to die in our place, because of our sins. He paid the death penalty for us. As a result, if we are found in Christ, we no longer have to fear the punishment of God.

Jesus, though, is even more important than that makes Him sound. Jesus is not just a possible escape from sin. He is the only possible escape. We can only be saved through Him. Consider what Peter teaches in Acts 4:11-12. This is important because of all of the other religions out there. Many of them have nothing to do with Jesus at all. When we see that, we know right off the bat that they cannot save us from our sins, and if we choose to follow them, we will pay the death penalty ourselves. Closer to home, there are many churches that claim to follow Jesus, but in reality have substituted their own teachings for the teachings of God's word. Whether those people recognize it or not, they also have abandoned Jesus to seek salvation in other ways, and they too will suffer for it. Only Jesus can save us.

This **SALVATION** of Jesus, although it is available to everyone, is not unconditional. God does not automatically save everyone, nor does He randomly select only a few who will be saved. Instead, the Bible tells us that there are several conditions we must meet in order to be saved from our sins. The first of these conditions is that we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus Himself tells us this in John 3:16. Without that faith in Christ, we are doomed. However, the Bible plan of salvation doesn't stop there. There are other things that it tells us that are necessary to redeem us from our sins, and if we don't go through those other steps, we are not yet saved.

The next step in the process is repentance. We learn about repentance from 2 Corinthians 7:10. As the saying goes, repentance is a change of heart followed by a change of action. The change of heart occurs when we feel godly sorrow, when we look at the sins we have committed and are sorry for them, not because we got caught, but because we disobeyed and disappointed God. From that point on, because of our godly sorrow, we are determined not to sin any more. We go through life fighting to obey God's will in everything instead of doing what we want. That's repentance.

After we repent, the Bible teaches us that we must confess Jesus as Lord. This is apparent from Romans 10:9. This passage teaches that if we wish to be saved, we must acknowledge before men that Jesus is the Christ, the One who has all authority, over everyone and over us. This will prove critically important on the day of judgment. In Matthew 10, Jesus Himself promises that if we confess Him before men, He will confess us before the heavenly Father. On the other hand, if we are too proud or too cowardly to make that good confession, neither will Jesus confess us. We will be left to our own devices, and we will surely die for our own sins. Confession, then, is an essential part of our salvation.

After confession, the final thing that we must do to be saved is to be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. We learn this from the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38. For some reason, this clear, plain statement of Scripture is rejected by most of the so-called Christian world. Many people argue that if baptism saves us, that would make it a work. We would be saving ourselves instead of relying on God to save us. Of course, that's not what the Bible teaches. Baptism is not a work of merit. We aren't baptized in order to wow God into accepting us into heaven. Instead, baptism is what Paul calls the obedience of faith. We don't earn anything by our baptism. It is merely one of the conditions that we must fulfill before we receive the grace of God. Unless we fulfill it, though, we cannot be saved.

Similarly, many people are confused about what Bible baptism is. Some say that it is an intangible indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Still others say that sprinkling a few drops of water on someone's head is enough to baptize them. In reality, the baptism that saves us from our sins is a complete immersion in water. We see this from the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:38-39. First of all, the text tells us that the medium of baptism was water, not the Holy Spirit. Second, we see that Philip and the eunuch are much more involved with the water than either sprinkling or pouring would require. In order for the eunuch to be baptized, he had to go down into the water and come up out of the water. First-century Christians clearly practiced immersion for the forgiveness of sins, and we must do the same.

Of course, all of this is a very simple, stripped-down outline to use. Almost any of these points could be expanded to take an hour of study by itself, and sometimes, when our prospects have a lot of questions about a particular area, it's necessary to do that. Nor should we be disappointed if we reach the end of the outline and the student isn't demanding water. Some people need a week or two to digest all this; others simply need more study on other points. However, simply by presenting this outline, we can teach anyone what they need to do to be saved.