

The briefest gospel outline is, "***We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for God's glory alone.***" It's a nice orthodox formula, but it's not going to inform anyone, or compel them to come to Christ. We need to explain these things in the context of an interesting story that folks can follow -- not a series of facts. And yet, every story needs a plot. And a plot is nothing more than a sequence of facts and events. The plot in itself may be dry and boring, but we can flesh it out with characters and action.

Here's a little plot to work with:

1. There is an infinite God who is Creator and Sustainer of everything
 - a. He is just, and has declared his Law
 - b. He is loving, and desires to preserve his children
2. Man has rebelled against God.
 - a. It's in our nature to be rebellious [Adam's sin corrupts, and it is imputed to us]
 - b. But it's also our personal choice to be rebellious [we also sin directly]
3. Any violation of God's Law carries a penalty of eternal death
4. We are incapable of saving ourselves from eternal death. Why?
 - a. A sin against an infinite God creates an infinite debt
 - b. Only an infinite being can pay that debt
 - c. We are finite beings
5. God graciously gave his son Jesus Christ to stand in our place
 - a. Jesus is an infinite being: he is God-in-the-flesh who came to save his people
 - b. He lived a perfectly righteous life to satisfy God's Law on our behalf
 - c. He paid our debt to God by dying on the cross in our place [atonement]
 - d. He rose from the dead to prove his identity, and to procure our salvation
 - e. He did everything necessary to finally and completely save his people
6. We receive this gift of salvation by faith: by believing these things are true, by trusting only in what Christ did to save us, and by turning from our sin to godly living.
7. If we believe, and abandon our rebellion in response to this truth, then
 - a. We are freed from the penalty of death
 - b. We are considered righteous in God's sight
 - c. We become the adopted children of God,
 - d. We have a right to an inheritance in the kingdom of God
 - e. We become ambassadors for Christ in this world

What do you think? Is there more that needs to be put in or explained? Is there something unnecessary? What would you add, change, or remove?

You may have noticed that this is still a little vague for the man on the street. It uses a number of words like "salvation" and "righteous" that may not be clearly understood. We can expand on any of the points. But I think it pretty much covers all the basics of the Gospel. Now we want to carefully choose the verses from which these facts are drawn. We resort to Scripture, not logic, to support our claims. Those who belong to Christ will respond to their master's voice if we speak it clearly. This is not our personal argument. It is God's argument. It is the bible that speaks, not us. It is the Spirit who persuades, not us.

What we need to grasp as fundamental to the Christian Gospel are these things:

- Our *salvation* is a fixed event that took place in the past, on the cross.
- Our *conversion* is the point at which we acknowledge what Christ has already done for us.
- Our *sanctification* means being renewed in the image of Christ; it is a life-long process of becoming more and more obedient to the will of God.
- Our faith is the *instrument* by which we receive the gift of grace, not the *condition* which makes it effective
- Nothing we can do will add to, take away from, validate, or trigger what Christ accomplished on the cross.
- We cannot be more saved or less saved than we are today.
- It has not been given to us to maintain our salvation by works.
- When it comes to salvation, God never takes into account what we have done, but only what Christ has done.

That is what makes it good news.

The Nature of Faith –

Belief, Trust, and Faith are not the same thing. Even though the language of the bible often treats them as one, the message of the bible does not.

Belief is a *cognitive* function. It involves acquiring knowledge and assessing its veracity. *Trust* involves the extent of our *dependence* on someone or something; it increases with our knowledge of who or what we depend on. So independence defeats our need to trust. *Faith* is an action word. It is a dependent and visible *response* to what we believe to be true about the object in which we place our trust. Christ is the sole object of our faith.

The more I know about an engineer, the more I'm willing to believe that the bridges he builds are trust-worthy. I demonstrate my trust in his bridge by stepping onto it. That is, if I trust *him*, then I am willing to trust his bridge enough to step onto it. By stepping onto it, my belief level grows; I now know by experience what I only hoped was true before. The greater my experiential knowledge, the greater my belief; and the greater my belief, the greater my trust; the greater my trust, the more I act on it.

So too, as we grow in our *knowledge* of Jesus Christ, of what he has done on the cross and in our life, our *trust* in him grows. As our trust in Christ grows, we are more willing to act in a way that demonstrates our trust. By acting, our belief level grows because it is no longer theoretical. To the extent that our knowledge of Christ grows, so grows our belief, so grows our trust, and so grows our faith. So if I want someone to grow in Christ, I don't encourage them to act more, or to trust more. I encourage them to *know* more, because I understand that more knowledge will produce greater belief, which stimulates greater trust, producing more action, which reinforces their knowledge, affirming their belief, and motivating them to learn even more. This is the dynamic of Christian growth. *A disciple is a learner, by definition. But every true learner practices what he knows.*