

Essential Gospel Doctrine

The Gospel is God's promise to save His people conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone. In this article, we will look at the essential doctrine that is contained in the gospel. The doctrine is essential for two reasons: First, without this doctrine, there is no gospel. Second, the person who does not believe the doctrine of the gospel is yet dead in his sins. We will go over each part of the definition of the gospel and expound on the doctrine therein.

GOD'S PROMISE

We first see GOD. The existence of God is an essential gospel doctrine. If one does not have GOD, one does not have the gospel. But the gospel does not just stop at God's existence. What does God do? God PROMISES. And the only way the gospel can be good news is if *God has the power to keep all His promises without even a single failure.*

What does the Bible say about the ability of God to keep His promises? Because of space limitations, the Scripture verses will not be written out, but please turn to these passages and read them: Deut. 7:8-10; Josh. 21:44-45; 23:14; 2 Sam. 23:3-5; Ps. 89:24-37; 132:11; Is. 45: 23; 46:9-11; 54:9-10; Jer. 33:20-21,25-26; Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 15:8-9; 2 Cor. 1:19-20; 1 Thes. 5:24; Titus 1:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:9-13; Heb. 6:13-20. This is only a small percentage of the passages that talk of God's faithfulness to keep His promises. If God's promises were not sure to be fulfilled, then all is in vain.

How can we be sure that God is able to keep all His promises? Some of the verses above mention this, and there are many other verses that mention it as well. The reason we can be sure that God is able to keep all His promises is because God is *sovereign*. That means He is in total control of all things. He *created* all things, and He *orders* all things. There is not a single thing in the universe that is not *controlled* by God. If there is anything that is not under God's control, then whatever it is that is not under God's control can get in the way of God's fulfilling His promises. If God promises to do something, yet there are some people around who are not controlled by God, then those people could thwart God's promise. God *must* be in control of *every single thing*. Here are a few Scriptures that show that God is in control: Job 23:13-14; Ps. 115:3; 135:5-7; Pr. 16:33; Pr. 21:1; Is. 45:6-7.

Those who believe the gospel believe that God is *sovereign* over all things and is thus able and faithful to keep all His promises. If you do not believe that God is sovereign, then you do not believe that His promises are sure and certain. If you do not believe that His promises are sure and certain, you do not believe the gospel.

Inseparably connected with the doctrine of God's sovereignty and faithfulness to keep His promises is the doctrine of *predestination*. To "predestinate" means to "determine beforehand." We have already seen that God is in control of everything, meaning that he determines everything. Now the question is, *when* did He determine everything? Does He determine things

based on what His creation does? If He did that, His promises would not be sure and certain, because they could be changed by the will of man. So – if God does not determine things in reaction to His creation, He must have determined things *before* creation. God is an infinite God – that means He has no beginning and no end. So when we talk about God determining things *before* creation, we are not saying that it is possible to pinpoint a particular *time* before creation, because time did not exist before creation and because God's determination of all things was in His mind from eternity past. It is enough to say that He determined all things *before* He created all things. (Note that the doctrine of God as creator of all things is essential gospel doctrine, because God cannot be in control of that which He did not create, unless some higher being is the one that created and then designated God to be in control. But a god who is in subjection to another being cannot be God. Many Scriptures, when they talk of God's sovereignty, link God's sovereignty with God as Creator.)

Here are some Scriptures that speak of God's predetermination of all things: Is. 42:9; 46:9-10; Mat. 25:34; Acts 13:48; 17:26; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4-5,11; 3:11; 2 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8. And the Bible says that the most important event in history, even though it was carried out by evil men, was predetermined: Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28.\

TO SAVE

TO SAVE means to deliver or rescue. So the gospel speaks of God's promise to deliver or rescue.

First of all, what is the necessary implication of deliverance or rescue? If I'm going to RESCUE someone, does that mean that everything is okay with the person I'm going to rescue? No! It means that there is something terribly wrong. That person is in a situation in which he is in need of RESCUE. And if I'm going to DELIVER someone, it's because that person is *being held* or *is bound* by someone or something. Since the gospel speaks of God's saving certain people, what is the terrible situation from which these people need to be RESCUED? What are they bound by from which they need to be DELIVERED?

The Bible clearly tells us the state of these people before they are rescued and delivered. In fact, it tells us that the state of *these* people – that is, the ones that are mentioned in the gospel – before salvation is no different than the state of *everyone without exception* by nature. Ephesians 2:1-3 says that we were *dead* in trespasses and in sins. When it says we were *dead*, does that mean that we did not breathe or that our heart was not beating or that our brain was not working? We can see from verses 2 and 3 that it does not mean that, because it says that we were *doing things*. So when we talk about unbelievers being *dead*, we do not mean that they do not do anything. This death is a certain kind of death. As verse 1 says, it is a kind of death that is *in trespasses and sins*. We were dead *in our sins*. Colossians 2:13 says that we were dead in the offenses and the uncircumcision of our flesh. John 3:19 says that unsaved people love darkness rather than light, because their works are evil. Romans 6:17 and 20 says that we were *slaves* of sin. So we were

dead in sin and *slaves* to sin. This means that everything we did was evil, and we *could not do anything* good. We could not even understand the difference between good and evil. In the second part of Romans 6:20, it says that we were “*free as to righteousness.*” This means that when we were slaves to sin, we were *without* righteousness. We did not have a righteousness that answered the demands of God’s law and justice. Read Rom. 3:9-12; 8:5-8; 1 Cor. 2:14.

Another essential doctrine comes from the answer to the following questions: “*Why* were we dead in our sins before we were saved, and *why* is *everyone* dead in their sins who is not saved?” For the answer to this question, look at Romans 5:12-19. Sin entered the world through *one man*. Through *one man’s disobedience*, the many were constituted sinners. Who is this one man? He was the first man ever to be created – Adam. What does that have to do with us? Adam’s sin is imputed to all whom he represented. How many people did Adam represent? All of Adam’s posterity. The doctrine of original sin is essential gospel doctrine.

What is God’s attitude toward those who are dead in their sins and who are void of righteousness? Ephesians 2:3 says that we were by nature *children of wrath*. Because God is perfectly holy and righteous, He will not fellowship with those who are not as righteous as He is. He can *only show wrath* to them. This is why, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, we were children of wrath. We were under God’s wrath. At the very end of the verse, it says, “*even as the rest.*” This shows that everyone without exception by nature is a child of wrath. They are under God’s curse. Everything they do is under a curse.

Now someone might ask, “Everything they do is cursed? Don’t they do at least a little bit of good? Isn’t God pleased with some of what unsaved people do? Are you saying that God doesn’t bless them or have some kind of mercy upon them?” My answer is, This is not just my opinion; it is revealed by *God*. And if you have a problem with it, you have a problem with God. What does God say? Psalm 14:2-3 says that there is *none* doing good. Matthew 7:18 says that a corrupt tree *cannot* bring forth good fruit. It is an *impossibility*. But someone might ask, “Isn’t an unbeliever doing good when he is kind to others? What about if he’s kind to the environment or to his animals?” Proverbs 12:10 says that even the *mercies* of the wicked are *cruel*! His so-called goodness to others is actually *cruelty* in God’s sight! Hebrews 11:6 says that it is *impossible* for unbelievers to please God. Do you see any exceptions in here? Does an unbeliever’s so-called good deeds or acts of kindness please God? God says that this is an *impossibility*. And if it is impossible for an unbeliever to ever please God, what is God’s attitude toward those who do not please Him? *Only a curse. Never* a blessing. Proverbs 3:33 says that the house of the wicked is *cursed*. Deuteronomy 8:15-19 shows that everything he does is cursed.

When the Bible speaks of those who are dead in their sins, who are slaves to sin, who are bringing forth fruit unto death, who cannot bring forth good fruit, who cannot please God, and who are under God’s curse, it is not just speaking of the immoral pervert. It is *also* talking about the one who is doing his best to obey God and to be moral and dedicated and sincere but who does not believe the gospel. Paul’s testimony about himself is the most vivid example. In Philippians 3, he shows that he was not an immoral pervert when he was lost; in fact, he was just

the opposite. He was a moral, sincere, zealous, religious person. Yet because he did not believe the gospel then, Paul counted all that but loss. Proverbs 15:8 says that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to God. It is all an abomination, even if it comes in the name of Christ. The so-called “Christians” of our day who claim to love and worship God but who do not believe the gospel (including all who believe that Christ died for all without exception) are bringing forth fruit unto death. They have a zeal, but it is not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). They are ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). The state of the religious unbeliever who comes in the name of conservative Christianity, even in the name of the doctrines of grace, is the same as the state of the irreligious, unconcerned, immoral, liberal homosexual.

Part and parcel with the doctrine of original sin and total depravity is the doctrine of what sin earns. For if certain people are saved from their sins, they are also saved from the consequence of their sins. What is the consequence of sin? Romans 6:23 says that sin earns death. Sin *demand*s death. Verse 16 talks about “*sin to death.*” Verse 21 says that “*the end of those things is death.*” When Romans 5 speaks of Adam, it speaks of *condemnation* and *death* as sin’s result.

What is this condemnation and death, which is also spoken of as damnation? The Bible clearly states that it is the state of the wicked after they die in which they are eternally punished for their sins. The place in which they are eternally punished for their sins is called hell. The following are some Scriptures that speak of the horrible state and place of those who die in their sins: Is. 33:14; Mat. 3:12; 13:40-42; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thes. 1:8-9; Rev. 14:9-11; 21:8. We see from these passages two main truths about hell. First, it is a burning with fire that causes unimaginable pain and agony and torment to all who are there. Second, this burning fire and torment will last for eternity. The fire will never go out, and the pain and agony will never end. What a sobering thought. Even the worst suffering on earth cannot even begin to compare with the torment of hell.

Why does hell exist? And why are its occupants tormented forever? Some say that God would not do such a thing as tormenting the wicked forever. The reason people say these things is because they do not know who God is. Hell is what it is because God is who He is. God, first and foremost, is *holy*. He is *totally, everlastingly, perfectly pure*. God’s holiness means that God is *just*. Because of His *holy* and *unchangeable justice*, all transgressions against His Holy Commandments, which are *total* affronts to His infinite Holiness, *must* be punished in proportion to His Holiness. Those who die not having a righteousness that equals the holiness of God *cannot even begin to pay* for their sins. Sin against an eternally Holy God must be punished with eternal punishment. Those who do not believe in the eternal punishment of the wicked do not believe in the utter sinfulness of sin. They do not believe that sin is that much of an offense to God. And the reason they do not believe that sin is such an offense to the eternal God that the wicked must be punished eternally is because they do not believe in the Holy and Just God of the Bible.

We have thus far seen what God’s people are saved from. Now we go into what this salvation

entails, according to God's testimony. What happens to a dead sinner when he is saved?

First, when the sovereign God appoints a time to save one of His people, there is *absolutely no stopping it*. God's saving power is *irresistible*. Read John 6:37. Are there any exceptions there? Are there any whom God has given to Jesus who *will not* come to Him? Now look at verse 44: "No one is able to come to Me (that is talking about the total inability of man to come to Christ by nature) *unless the Father who sent Me DRAWS him, and I will raise him up in the last day.*" What does it mean when it says that God *draws* a person? Does it mean that God says, "Please, please, will you please come to me"? No. The word *draw* here means to *drag by force*. To find out what this word really means, see how it is used in other parts of the New Testament: John 21:11; Acts 16:19; 21:30; James 2:6. It is plain to see that this word does not have anything to do with pleading or with proffering or even with asking. It is a *unilateral, forceful dragging*. Does this mean that God drags a person kicking and screaming? No – God changes his heart so he is willingly dragged to Him. Psalm 110:3 says, "*Your people shall be WILLING in the day of Your power.*" John 10:27 says, "*My sheep HEAR My voice, and I know them, and they FOLLOW me.*"

Let us now look at the *change* that takes place at this time.

There is first a change of *state* before God. We have already seen that God's people by nature are in a state of wrath and condemnation. They are under God's curse. They do not have a righteousness that equals God's righteousness. What happens at salvation to a person's *state* before God? At salvation, the righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to His people. This means that they are *legally constituted righteous* – as righteous as God Himself. This is an amazing truth. God, because He is holy, only fellowships with those who are as righteous as He is. And He will admit no one to heaven who does not have a righteousness that equals His. Imputation is the only way that God can be just to justify sinners.

Because of imputation, there is a change from *death to life*. We, by nature, in our own righteousness, were dead in sins and could only bring forth fruit unto death. But what does the Scripture say about our state when we are saved? Read Ephesians 2:4-5 and Colossians 2:13. We were dead once, but we were made alive. This making of a new life is sometimes called being born of God. Read John 3:3-8 and 1 Peter 1:23. *Regenerate* is another word for born again. Generate = born, and re = again. So when we talk about regeneration, we are talking about being born again.

As part of being born again, there is a change of *heart*. Read Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:25-26. Before salvation, God's people have a heart of stone. After salvation, God's people have a heart of flesh. What does this change of heart mean? In order to find this out, we need to see what is the function of the heart according to Scripture. The following are examples (notice what the heart is *doing* in each of these passages): Gen. 6:5; 24:45; 27:41; Ex. 35:35; 36:2; Deut. 15:9. 1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 14:1; 15:2; 49:3; Prov. 14:10; Ecc. 7:22; Is. 33:18; Mat. 13:15; Luke 2:19; Acts 8:22; Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 4:12. The *heart* is what *thinks, understands, knows, and*

believes. So a change of *heart* is a change of *thinking, understanding, knowledge, and belief*. Those who are *not* saved are lacking knowledge and understanding. Read Isaiah 45:20. What were these idolaters lacking? They were lacking *knowledge*. What knowledge were these idolaters lacking? Look at verses 21-25. These idolaters were lacking the knowledge of the true God, the one who is both a just God and a Savior. They were lacking the knowledge that only in God is there righteousness and strength. They were lacking the knowledge that God is a justifier of His people. In Romans 10:2, we again see a lack of knowledge. What is this knowledge that they were lacking? Look at verses 3 and 4. They were ignorant of the righteousness of God and thus were automatically going about to establish their own righteousness. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 says that these unregenerate people are blind to the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ. So we see that those who do not have a knowledge and understanding of the *gospel* have not been *saved*.

Let us now look at descriptions of those who are saved. Read John 17:3. What is everlasting life? It is *knowledge* of God and of Jesus Christ. Read John 8:32. What is the *truth* that God's people *know* that sets them free? It is that same *truth* that those who do not believe are *ignorant of*! It is the truth of the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel; the truth of the person and work of Jesus Christ! Read Romans 6:17-18: What is that *doctrine* that believers believed when they were made free from sin? Again, it is the same *doctrine* of which unbelievers are ignorant! 2 John 9 says that those who do not stay in the *doctrine* of Christ do not have God.

Another effect of the change of heart is *repentance*. It is important to note the passages in which repentance and belief of the gospel are mentioned together. Some examples are Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21. Since repentance is connected with belief, of what does this repentance consist? When God's people are given knowledge of the true gospel, they *repent* of believing a false gospel. This means that they turn *totally* away from the false gospel of salvation conditioned on the sinner and submit to the righteousness of God revealed in the true gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone. They count all their works while believing a false gospel as dung, as dead works, as evil deeds, as fruit unto death. They realize that their belief of a false gospel showed that they were lost. They will *never* speak peace to their former selves. Repentance and judging go hand-in-hand. If one believes that he was lost while believing a false gospel, then he obviously will not think that someone else is saved who believes that same false gospel.

We are given an example of true repentance in Philippians 3:4-9. When Paul believed in the true gospel of the righteousness of God, he counted his former religion as loss and as trash. He realized that when he believed in salvation conditioned on the sinner, he was bringing forth evil deeds, dead works, and fruit unto death. He realized that now that God had changed his heart to believe the gospel, he would never go back to bringing forth evil deeds, dead works, and fruit unto death. They were on the dung heap. *This* is true gospel repentance. If someone says that he repented of a false gospel at conversion and then needs to continue to repent of a false gospel as a Christian, then that person is still dead in his sins, because he has no idea what true gospel repentance is. True gospel repentance is a one-time occurrence, just as regeneration is a one-time

occurrence.

There is another important meaning of “TO SAVE.” The aforementioned Hebrew and Greek words also mean “to preserve,” “to be safe,” and “to do well.” Here we see that salvation does not only have to do with the initial deliverance and rescue from the bondage of sin, but it also has to do with being *preserved* from evil. Once we are delivered and rescued, we *remain* in this state *forever*. So the gospel also includes God’s promise to *preserve*. What kind of good news would it be if God promised initial regeneration but then said that these regenerate people can become unregenerated and finally perish in hell? This is not good news at all. In fact, it is a blatant form of salvation conditioned on the sinner, because it says that a person’s *bad works* can *undo* his salvation. And if his *bad works* can *undo* their salvation, what does he think will *redo* his salvation?

Let us review some Scriptures that show that God preserves everyone He regenerates and that not a single person whom God saves will return to a state of lostness.

Read Psalm 37:23-28. Notice that in verse 23, preservation is tied to God’s sovereignty. God orders our steps, and He preserves us. This is an important passage, because it shows two things: first, God causes us to remain in a state of justification; and second, God causes us to remain submitted to His righteousness. We see both *objective* and *subjective* preservation here. God does *not* keep His people in a state of justification while at the same time having them engage in unbelief and denying the gospel. God preserves in *both* ways. There is *never* one without the other.

Read Psalm 73:23-24. See here that preservation is *all the way* to final glory. And notice again the objective and subjective preservation. God’s people are guided by His counsel, and God takes hold of their hands and takes them to glory.

Read Jeremiah 32:39-40. Do you see how God’s preservation of His people is tied right in to His promise to deliver them and to give them a new heart? God promises that He will put His fear into their new heart and that they will *never* depart from Him.

Read John 6:37-40. How many whom God has given to Jesus will Jesus lose? “*I shall not lose ANY of it*”! How many who believe in Jesus will have everlasting life? “*Everyone*”! Again, see that this preservation goes all the way from regeneration to final glory.

Read John 10:28-29. Who is able to pluck the sheep out of God’s hand? *No one!* They shall *never perish*.

Can anyone or anything stop or hinder God’s people from being saved eternally? Read Romans 8:28-39. When God justifies someone, is there any question as to whether or not He will glorify that person? *Absolutely nothing* can separate us from God’s love!

Read Psalm 121:3-8. Look closely at what God is saying here. He is saying that He keeps His people from slipping, keeps them from all evil, and keeps their soul. God keeps our souls *safe*, and not only does He keep our souls safe, He keeps us from slipping! God has made it so that it is *impossible* for His people to slip! We *cannot* slip! God promises it, and He keeps His promises!

What does it mean to slip? This leads into a vital area of subjective preservation. God's people are preserved from believing, confessing, and following a false christ and a false gospel. Read John 10:5. Does it say that we will *sometimes* follow a stranger? Does it say that we will follow a stranger and follow the true Shepherd at the same time? No! It says that we will *never* follow a stranger! (For more on this topic, please see the article "God's Preserving Grace" in the May 2000 issue of *Outside the Camp*.) Christians still do struggle with sin and constantly fall short of the perfect standard in their character and conduct, but they *never* follow a stranger or confess a false gospel. Anyone who says that a Christian *can* follow a stranger and confess a false gospel does not know the preserving grace of God.

HIS PEOPLE

Whom does God promise to save?

Matthew 1:21 shows that God promises to save HIS PEOPLE. In the context of the verse, these are specifically CHRIST'S PEOPLE. Who are Christ's people? Read John 10:1-30 and notice how Jesus talks about the sheep and how possessive He is. Jesus says here that these sheep are His sheep, that He calls His own sheep by name, that He lays down His life for the sheep, He knows them that are His, He gives eternal life to His sheep, His father has given the sheep to Him, and His sheep shall never perish. Is Jesus saying that everyone without exception are His sheep? If that were the case, then everyone without exception will be given eternal life and will never perish. We know that is not the case. But just to make it as plain and as clear as it can possibly be, Jesus says something in verse 26 that most religionists who come in the name of Christianity absolutely hate. Read verses 24 through 26. Jesus first tells the Jews that He already told them He was the Christ, and they did not believe. But *Jesus did not stop there*. He told them *why* they did not believe! He said that *the reason* they did not believe was because they were *not of His sheep*. It cannot get any plainer than this. He did not say, "You are not of My sheep because you don't believe." He said, "You do not believe because you are not of My sheep." Look at verse 15 again in light of this. Jesus said that He lays down His life for the *sheep*. Then in verse 26, Jesus said that these Jews were *not* of His sheep. So – did Jesus lay down His life for these Jews? Can there be any doubt in the mind of *anyone* who really believes in the Jesus of the Bible? There cannot be.

Ephesians 5:25 and Acts 20:28 show that Christ gave Himself up for the church and purchased the church with his own blood.

Christ's people are the ones for whom Christ died.

Another part of John 10 points us to another essential gospel doctrine. In verse 29, Jesus said that His Father gave the sheep to Him. When did that *giving* take place? This article mentioned predestination earlier – God determined all things before He created the world. If He determines anything in reaction to what His creation does, then His promises would not be sure an certain, because they could be changed by the will of man. This is most strongly shown in God’s predestinating a certain number of people to be given to Christ and saved based on Christ’s work alone. This kind of predestinating is sometimes called *election*, and the people whom God *elected* are sometimes called the *elect*.

In Ephesians 1:3-14, we see that God chose His people before the foundation of the world. But we also see that bare election is not enough. God chose His people before the foundation of the world *to be redeemed and adopted in Christ, to make us understand the truth of the gospel, to be to the praise of His glory, and to be sealed with the Holy Spirit*. God did not just choose to save a people without His law and justice being satisfied! Read 1 Peter 2:1-10. We see in verse 4 that Jesus Christ was chosen by God. We see in verse 5 that Jesus Christ is called “*an elect, precious Stone*.” And we see in verse 9 that God’s people are called “*an elect race*.” Notice two other things in verse 9. First, God’s people are also called “*a people for possession*.” This has to do with what was mentioned previously, which is that Jesus Christ is *possessive* of His people. He calls them “*MY sheep*” and says that they are “*MINE*.” These are people who are Christ’s own possession. Second, notice that at the end of this verse, it talks about the *calling* out of darkness into light. As we saw before, this darkness is the darkness of *ignorance*, and this light is the light of the *knowledge* of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God does not *elect* someone and then *save* that person and leave that person ignorant of the person and work of Christ.

We see in Romans 9:9-24 that God chooses to have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He chose the objects of mercy before they were even born, even before they had done anything good or bad. Verse 23 says that God *prepared* the vessels of mercy beforehand. Notice also that verse 11 says, “*that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works*.” The Holy Spirit through Paul presents two opposing views. The doctrine of election is totally contrary to salvation by works. If one does not believe in the biblical doctrine of unconditional election, he automatically believes in salvation conditioned on the sinner. If one believes in salvation conditioned on the sinner, he automatically opposes unconditional election.

Read Romans 8:29-30. In verse 29, when it says “foreknew,” it means “loved beforehand.” God loved His people before the foundation of the world, and He predestinated out of love. Notice that he again does not talk about bare election but says that God predestinated His people to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. God chose His people from the beginning, and not only that, He chose them to *salvation* in sanctification of the spirit and *belief of the truth of the gospel*. There are some so-called “Calvinists” who would say that they believe in absolute predestination but who also claim that not all who are saved believe the truth of the gospel. These people know

nothing of true, Biblical predestination and election. God predestinates His people to be called by the gospel, to be saved based on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone, and to *know* that they have been saved based on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone. Without this, predestination and election are empty doctrines of self-righteous religionists.

In 2 Timothy 1:8-11, we again see that God's people were chosen in eternity past. And again we see that this choosing is in direct opposition to salvation by works. We see that this choosing was to salvation by means of the calling of the gospel, which brings life and incorruptibility to light.

CONDITIONED ON

God saves His people **CONDITIONED** on the work of Christ alone. What does it mean to **CONDITION** something on something else? "Condition" as a noun means "an essential requirement of." So if A is **CONDITIONED** on B, then A cannot happen until the requirement of B is met. In the gospel, *salvation* cannot happen unless the requirement of Christ's obedience and death is met. When we talk of those who believe in salvation **CONDITIONED** on the sinner, we are saying that these people believe that *salvation* cannot happen unless the requirement of the *work of the sinner* is met.

THE ATONING

Before the atonement, there must be an imputation. The sins of all God's people were *imputed* or *counted* or *legally charged* to Jesus Christ on the cross. This was typified in the Old Testament in the sacrifice of atonement. (See Leviticus 16 for an example.) In Isaiah 53, we see Christ *bearing* the transgression of His people. The sins of His people were *imputed* to Him. Jesus Christ actually became *guilty* by imputation. He remained perfect in His character and conduct, but He was counted guilty because sin was imputed to Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that Jesus Christ was actually *made sin* for us.

If Christ atoned without imputation, then He must have either atoned for no one or atoned for Himself. We know that both of these are impossible. In order to make atonement, Christ must be the *substitute* and *representative* of a certain number of people.

What is **ATONEMENT**? It is reconciliation. What does it mean to reconcile? It means "to restore to friendship or harmony." Jesus Christ, when He suffered, bled, and died, restored friendship between God and those for whom Christ died. How was this friendship restored? Jesus suffered the just punishment for the sins of all His people; God's wrath was poured out on Jesus; and God's wrath was appeased. See Rom. 5:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Eph. 2:14-16.

The Bible uses other words to describe what Christ accomplished on the cross:

Propitiation. To *propitiate* means to appease or to pacify. Christ appeased or pacified God's wrath when the sins of His people were imputed to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ became sin for His people and incurred the judgment for that sin. There is no fellowship with God when there is sin. Why is that? It is because God is *righteous*. *Righteousness* is the opposite of *sinfulness*. In order for God to fellowship with sinners, the sin of those sinners must be punished in a substitute who is a man who is totally without sin. The only one who qualifies for that is Jesus Christ. Christ took on the sins of His people, God punished Christ for those sins, and God was pacified. God was at peace, not at war.

Redemption. To *redeem* means to pay the price for a possession so as to rescue or deliver that possession. Ransom is another word that is used. Christ's blood paid the price for His people's sins and bought them as his very own. What did His people do to make themselves into God's own possession? Absolutely nothing. It is *Christ alone* who paid the price. We had nothing to pay. Nothing that we ever did or were enabled to do would pay the price. It is only through the blood of Christ. See Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9.

BLOOD

Why is BLOOD a necessary part of the gospel?

Leviticus 17:11 says that the life is in the BLOOD, and it is the BLOOD that makes atonement. Hebrews 9:22 says that there is *no remission* without the shedding of BLOOD. *Remission* means "a releasing of the guilt or penalty of." Notice here that it does not just say "blood"; it says "*SHEDDING of blood.*" This blood actually has to be *shed* for remission. Why? First, think about what Leviticus 17:11 says. The *life* is in the blood. Thus, the *shedding* of blood is the pouring out of one's life. We know that if someone loses too much blood, he will die. Christ's shed blood means that Christ died. But is that all it means? We know that people die of things other than shedding too much blood. So why did Christ have to die a bloody death? Why did blood have to come out of His body? Read Hebrews 9:12-21. First, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled and poured – mostly sprinkled. So Christ's shed blood is one of the evidences that He was sacrificed. But there is more. What did this sprinkling signify? Verses 19 and 20 refer to Exodus 24:8. This blood was sprinkled as an outward, visible seal to the people. It was an outward, visible seal of God's promise. The shed blood of Christ is an outward, visible seal of God's promise to save His people. Hebrews 13:20 says that Christ's blood is the "*blood of the everlasting covenant.*" And 1 Corinthians 11:25 says that the cup in the Lord's Supper is the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

Another reason that the blood of Christ must be shed is because it is a *giving* from one to another. Christ *gave* His blood, which was His life, *to* His people. Blood that stays inside a human cannot be *given* to another. It cannot be *sprinkled* onto another. Christ did not keep His blood to Himself. He sprinkled our hearts from an evil conscience, as Hebrews 10:22 says. He *washed* our sins by His blood, as Revelation 1:5 says. His blood *cleanses* us from all sin, as 1 John 1:7 says. This *sprinkling* is a *purging*; it is a *cleansing*. Christ gave up His own blood –

His own life – so that we might be cleansed by that blood.

In the New Testament, we see in Ephesians 2:13 that Christ's blood made us come to be near because of that reconciliation. We see in Colossians 1:20 that Christ's blood makes peace and reconciles.

AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

The first imputation is the imputation of the sins of Christ's people to Christ, making Christ legally guilty. The second imputation is the IMPUTATION of Christ's RIGHTEOUSNESS to His people, making us legally righteous.

Again, if imputation is to occur, there must be *representation*. Jesus Christ must be a *representative* of a people.

What is the RIGHTEOUSNESS that is imputed to Christ's people? It is perfect obedience, or one could say, the *merit* of perfect obedience. Why is perfect obedience necessary? Why can't God accept just the best someone has to offer? It is because God is *holy*. And if you understand God's *holiness*, you will understand that God *cannot* fellowship with anyone who is not as righteous as He is. So in order for any human being to fellowship with God, that human being must either be perfectly righteous in his *own* character and conduct, or he must be *charged* with the perfect righteousness of *another* human being who is perfectly righteous in his character and conduct. In either case, there has to be at least one perfect human being! That eliminates everyone but Jesus Christ. The following are some Scripture verses that show that Christ was sinless: 1 John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15;. 7:26-28.

Not only was Jesus Christ totally sinless; He was a totally sinless *man*. Jesus Christ was fully human. Matthew 1:25, Luke 2:7, and Galatians 4:4 clearly show that he was born of a woman. Matthew and Luke say that he was a child and grew up, just like any of us. Jesus got hungry and thirsty and tired and sleepy, just like any of us. In fact, 1 John 4:3 says that anyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. Jesus came in the flesh, a flesh just like ours, and had all the same bodily needs that we do. Yet, *unlike* any of us, He did all this without sin. And it *had* to be this way, or else there would be no imputed righteousness. Christ also had to be a human because a *human* must be punished for the sins of *humans*. Just as Christ was our representative and substitute in His life, He was our representative and substitute in His death. And since sin demands death, and God cannot die, Jesus Christ *had* to be a human who could and did die. He *had* to be a human who could and did pour out His blood. He *had* to be a human who could and did rise again from the dead, giving resurrection life to us. The humanity of Christ is an essential gospel doctrine.

But not only was Jesus Christ human, He was also God. And He *had* to be God. He *had* to be God because only God can forgive sin. Only God can deliver us from the power of sin and death. Only God is without sin. Only God can satisfy His own justice. And only God can sanctify the

offering. We see in Matthew 1:18-20 and Luke 1:35 that Jesus Christ was conceived by God the Holy Spirit. We see in Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:34 that Jesus Christ's mother had not had sexual relations with any man before He was born. Isaiah 9:6 says that Jesus Christ is "*the mighty God.*" John 1:1 and 14 says that the Word was God and became flesh and dwelled among us. Titus 2:13 says that Jesus Christ is our great God and Savior. Jesus said in John 10:30 that He and God the Father are one. John 1:14 and 18, John 3:16 and 18, Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 and 11:17, and 1 John 4:9 say that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. And 1 John 4:15 says that whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God is regenerate. The deity of Christ is an essential gospel doctrine.

Jesus Christ *had* to be a *God-man*. He *had* to be one person with two distinct natures: a divine nature and a human nature. He *had* to be both of these at once because He *had* to be the *Mediator* between God and men – the only One who could go between them. 1 Timothy 2:5 says that Christ Jesus is the only Mediator. Who can make peace between Holy God and sinful man? Only a *God-man Mediator*.

ALONE

God saves His people conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ ALONE. There are so many false gospels out there that say "the work of Christ – PLUS" or "the blood of Christ – PLUS." But if a PLUS is added to the equation, then it is no longer the true gospel of grace. The atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ *must* demand the salvation of *all* whom He represented *without any contribution from the sinner*. Romans 4:4 and 11:6 show that if salvation is conditioned in *any way* to *any degree* on the works of the sinner, then God is *not* showing grace; instead, the sinner has obligated God to save him. God would owe a debt to that sinner. And that god is an idol. Grace is *not really* grace if the works of the sinner are introduced as forming *any part* of the ground of his salvation. If someone conditions *any part* of salvation, from regeneration to final glory, on *anything* that proceeds from the sinner, then what they call "grace" is actually no grace at all. It is a system of works, and it is an abomination to God. In Galatians 5:2, Paul says that if one is circumcised thinking that this forms at least some part of the ground of his salvation or acceptance before God, Christ will profit him nothing. It is Christ's work *alone* that is the ground of all salvation and all blessing.

Those who believe in universal atonement do *not* believe that it is the work of Christ *alone* that makes the difference between salvation and damnation. Instead, they believe that it is the work of the *sinner* that makes the difference. These people do not believe the gospel.

Why is it that God's people cannot lose their salvation? Because no one can undo what Christ has done. If one believes that he can lose his salvation, he does not believe in the finished work of Christ. If one believes that he cannot lose his salvation yet also believes that his everlasting habitations are based on his present stewardship, he does not believe in the finished work of Christ. Our works form *no part* of our initial salvation, our being kept saved, our being blessed, our being recommended unto God, or our right to inherit the kingdom.

Read John 19:28-30. It is finished! There is no work for the sinner to do for salvation! To say that there *is* still work for the sinner to do for salvation would be to say, “It is *not* finished” and to call the blessed Lord Jesus a liar. But we who are Christ’s people, Christ’s sheep, Christ’s church – those who have been given by God the Father to God the Son, for whom Jesus led a perfect life and died on the cross – *we* know that it is finished. We have a Sabbath rest, as Hebrews 4 says, because God has caused us to rest from our works and to trust in Jesus Christ ALONE for ALL of our salvation.

The gospel is GOOD NEWS. It is a PROMISE that can never fail. It is a promise from God to save His people conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone. This atoning blood and imputed righteousness DEMANDS the justification, sanctification, and glorification of ALL whom Christ represented. Jesus Christ finished the work. That is the gospel. Do you believe it?

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