

Current Issues Concerning the Gospel Within Evangelical Christianity

Stephen R. Lewis, Ph.D., Rocky Mountain Bible College and Rocky Mountain Seminary



I am amazed at all the confusion surrounding the debates among those within Evangelical Christianity. I believe that part of the problem is that most are arguing at cross-purposes (pun intended). It is commonly assumed that ‘gospel’ means the message to the *unbeliever*, and debates over the question ‘What is the gospel?’ are often conducted on that basis. In fact, Scripture uses

the word ‘gospel’ in a number of different ways. This makes it very easy for people to get confused and begin talking past each other. I believe something similar is happening in this discussion. Many of those involved in this discussion seem to treat the questions below as synonymous, and proceed on that basis, perhaps we need to back up and be sure we understand the questions correctly before we begin anathematizing each other over how we answer them.

Here are some of the various questions proposed:

What must I do to be saved? Is this the same as “what must I do to have everlasting life?” What do we mean when we use the words believe/faith/trust? (Is it believe “in?” “about?,” “unto?”) Does believe/faith/trust involve our volition/will? Or is it a passive believe/faith/trust (being persuaded)? What actually happens when we believe? Define belief as appropriated in Scripture.

Do we need to Confess? (Confess what?) Must we Repent? (Repent from what? To what?—what are the contexts?) What do we mean by “saved?” Saved from what? Saved to what?

For what do I believe Jesus Christ? Do I need to believe in Jesus Christ for . . . Everlasting life? (If I have believed in Jesus Christ for it am I not therefore assured of it?); Forgiveness of sin(s)?; Entrance into heaven?; To be declared righteous?

Where did we get the phrase—“How do I get to heaven?” What do we mean by that?

What is the Gospel that I must believe? How many different ways is “Gospel” used in the NT? Are they all the same thing, only worded differently? If different, must they all be believed in order to . . . ?

Do I need to believe in Jesus Christ and His Works? Which works must be included or must we include all of them (do we know all of them)?: His Deity? His Humanity? Christophanies? Death? Resurrection? Death and Resurrection? His Miracles?

How will the Holy Spirit be involved before, during, and after justification if a time line can even be conceptualized/realized...Biblical? Or does it all run together and work

differently for different people?

To what are we Elect/Chosen/Predestined? What does the Bible say? Why evangelize? Do the elect have the knowledge of Christ already and just need to be told of the saving/abundant knowledge that accompanies?

To ask it other ways . . . What must I do to be Justified? What must I do to have my sins forgiven? What is the requirement for entrance into heaven? What must I believe in order to have everlasting life?

Are all of these asking the same thing? If so, how does the Scripture use them? In other words, show us the TEXT(S).

Do we all agree that the “means” is always “faith/believe/trust” alone? Or is it faith/believe/trust plus . . . ? Do we all agree that the basis of offer of salvation/justification/everlasting life/heaven bound/sins forgiven/etc is the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures?

Is anyone saying that the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is *not* the basis for . . . ?

Because of the variety of terms and the confusion over which questions mean what, the debate has gotten very broad, abstract and diffused intellectually, while at the same time growing very intense emotionally. I suggest we return the discussion to the concrete, practical matter where it all began: When I’m talking to an unbeliever, what do I need to tell him? And what is the goal of that conversation? On what biblical grounds do I justify my answer to these two questions?

Some have suggested that the issues within Evangelical Christianity are merely semantics. We are all just saying the same thing, but using different words. If this is the case then we are all correct. Correct? One group is saying one thing that appears to upset another group—there is not enough emphasis on the Works of Jesus Christ (His Death and Resurrection in particular). On the other hand, some are upset with another group because they believe that they are too narrow in what we believe in Jesus Christ for (is it maybe more of a multiple choice issue?).

Finally, I would also like to stress that I do not know of anyone in Evangelical Christianity who would deny or dismiss the clear teaching of the New Testament that the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the sure foundation upon which our hope of eternal salvation/life is based. Without the person and work of Jesus Christ, the gift of eternal life could never be offered to anyone who has faith alone in Jesus Christ alone for it.

I am of the persuasion that if we can all get on the same page concerning terminology then we can begin to make progress. But this is a huge task. What we are running into is the inevitable process of communication. If we could all understand this concept then we might make progress.