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When a Man Accepts the Gospel

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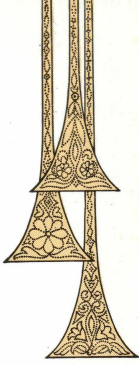
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When a Man Accepts the Gospel



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When a Man Accepts the Gospel

There is an almost mystic quality about the effect of a decision. Nothing compares with the feeling of satisfaction and relief that follows a major decision or an important accomplishment in our lives. I remember one deadline that I faced for more than three years. According to common practice, I kept telling myself that I had plenty of time. I waited almost too long and lost the joy of a task properly accomplished. Even then, however, the relief of meeting a deadline that I had faced for three years was inexpressible. Someone once posted this sign at the edge of a muddy road: "Choose your rut carefully; you will be in it for the next twenty miles."

Last week we discussed "The Provocative Gospel" because the message of Jesus Christ and what He accomplishes in the lives of all who obey Him demands and generates response. We attempted in that lesson to show why the "Gospel" is a response-producing message.

Today, I want us to look more closely at the nature of this response. No decision is more important than the one each of us makes about Christ's "Good News." What actually happens when a man accepts the "Gospel"? In this study I want us to see the anatomy of acceptable response to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. I'm convinced that this study could make *the* difference in your life!

One New Testament passage about the "Gospel" towers above all the others. Someone has called these verses, from the Apostle Paul's pen, the classic Biblical definition of the "Gospel" of Christ. I want us to read *I Corinthians* 15:1-4 today. Here we see four vital actions that involve man's acceptance of Jesus Christ. Listen as we read *I Corinthians* 15:1-4. (Better still, let me suggest that you get your Bible and a note pad to jot down these four points.) Here is the reading: "Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (*I Corinthians* 15:1-4).

First, Paul says that the "Gospel" of Christ is nothing less than God's *revelation*, God's message for today's man. Listen to Paul's words again: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received." Most of us enjoy claiming originality for the things we say and write. Very few of us, however, ever have anything truly original to contribute. Paul unashamedly makes this matter clear: "I did not preach or teach my own opinions or philosophy!" This he stated readily because he well knew that, "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him (Christ) should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself (God) . . ." (*Colossians* 1:19, 20). The New Testament writers, and all New Testament Christians for that matter, realized, in the words of the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, "God . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son . . ." (*Hebrews* 1:2). In another letter, Paul explained, "For I make known to you brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Galatians* 1:11, 12). My friends, today as we discuss the "Gospel" of Christ I freely confess that the things said are not original with me. To present the "Gospel" is to declare God's final and full revelation of Himself.

Then there is a second factor in man's acceptance of the "Gospel," Paul says in *I Corinthians* 15:1-4. This message was and is designed for *proclamation* by those who allow its claims to govern their lives. Three times in these four verses Paul says he "preached" and "delivered" the "Gospel" to the Corinthians (*I Corinthians* 15:1-3). In the face of Jewish rejection and Gentile ridicule, Paul earlier wrote in this same letter, "we preach Christ crucified"

as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:22-24). "I have not spoken with 'brilliance of speech and intellect,'" Paul also wrote the Corinthians. "I chose so to do that you might know my determination to concentrate entirely on Jesus Christ and the fact of his death upon the cross" (See I Corinthians 2:1, 2). Those willing to receive this responsibility because of the "Gospel's" benefit to their lives are "entrusted" by God with presenting the message to all lost men (I Thessalonians 2:4; I Timothy 1:11). The Great Commission of Christ, "Go and preach the gospel to the whole world," remains effective even today for all obedient disciples of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:44-48).

Then there is a third emphasis in Paul's discussion of the "Gospel" in I Corinthians 15. God revealed the "Gospel" and followers of Christ *proclaim* this message to the world. But there is a third element just as vital as these two: the *reception* of the "Gospel" by lost men. "You received the message I preached," Paul reminded the Corinthians. "You received the revelation of God's salvation in Christ, which I proclaimed without change, just as I received it." Paul refers, in this reading, to what Luke described as the historian of *Acts*. In *Acts*, chapter eighteen, Paul's "Gospel" preaching in Corinth is discussed. We learn the following: "And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18: 8). By this acceptance of the "Gospel," the Corinthians came into a living relationship with God, which Paul reminds them of in his *First Corinthian* letter. "But of him (God) are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30). A dramatic and profound change occurred in the lives of the Corinthians. Just how great the change accomplished in their lives by their acceptance of the "Gospel" of Christ becomes apparent in I Corinthians, at chapter six. In verses nine and ten of this chapter, Paul talks about immoral people who are adulterers and homosexual perverts, idol worshipers, thieves of all kinds, drunkards, and lawbreakers (I Corinthians 6:9, 10, TEV). The next verse startles the average church member! "And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). These are the very people to whom Paul says, "You received the 'Gospel' I preached and were saved by it." The "Gospel" of Christ revolutionizes the life of every obedient believer, of every person who accepts it! Otherwise, it is less than useless! When we talk about the "Gos-

pel" of Christ we consider the greatest moral and spiritual power known to man!

But there is still a fourth action stressed in Paul's classic discussion of Christ's "Gospel." "God revealed it, I preached it, you received it," he has thus far said to the Corinthians. His fourth emphasis is this: faithful participation in the new life produced by acceptance of the "Gospel" assures one of the final glory with God. Two statements by Paul establish this truth. He says that the "Gospel" the Corinthians received was also that "wherein ye stand." Furthermore, Paul stressed, "You are saved by the 'Gospel' if you hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain" (I Corinthians 15:1, 2). At least two-thirds of all the New Testament books were written to encourage Christians. In his *Letter to the Philippians*, Paul urges that Christians "stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). In another letter to Christians the apostle admonishes that we "continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard" (Colossians 1:23). Christians are also urged "as therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and builded up in him, established in your faith, even as ye were taught" (Colossians 2:6, 7). God revealed it! Paul proclaimed it! The Corinthians received it! Now they are to participate continually in the life produced by their acceptance of the "Gospel" of Jesus Christ. This is the four-fold discussion of the "Gospel" in I Corinthians 15:1-4.

When a man accepts the "Gospel" he calls on the name of the Lord for salvation. The Bible promises, "Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). But this leaves one searching for some practical way to "call" on the Lord. How does such an action occur in our lives? Paul asks and answers the same question: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Romans 10:14, 15). Faith in Jesus Christ and willing surrender to Him as Lord of one's life is the result of hearing the "Gospel." In fact, Paul, later in the same chapter, concludes: "So faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). To believe in Christ and to obey His will for your life is "to call upon the Lord."

When a man accepts the "Gospel" he does so because that message of God's love, grace, and forgiveness, glaringly illuminates one's spiritual depravity. The "godly sorrow" that produces "repentance unto salvation" arises in the sensitive heart that listens to the "Gospel" story (II Corin-

thians 7:10). Jesus pleads, "except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3).

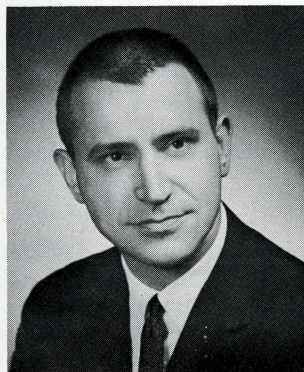
When a man accepts the "Gospel" he accepts Christ's sovereign control over all the affairs of his life. Paul explains that when we hear "the word of faith" preached, we are led to "confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord" and to "believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead," which confession and faith bring us salvation (Romans 10:8-10).

No part of one's obedient response to the "Gospel" portrays or "retells" the three vital elements of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection like New Testament baptism. The sixth chapter of *Romans* reveals a direct connection between each of these essential areas of "Gospel" truth and one's baptism. Listen carefully, noting the words "death," "burial," and "resurrection." "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his *death* (emphasis mine, jac)? We were *buried* (emphasis mine, jac) therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his *death* (emphasis mine, jac), we shall be also in the likeness of his *resurrection* (emphasis mine, jac); knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (Romans 6:3-6).

An old Saxon king went to a distant province in his kingdom to put down a rebellion. Following a successful war, the king returned to the central castle in his fief. High in the main tower he placed a lighted candle that was visible for miles. He then sent his herald into all areas of his realm with the "good news" that all rebels who took an oath of allegiance while the candle still burned would be fully pardoned and readmitted to kingdom citizenship. But the herald had to make it clear that the king's clemency was limited to the life of the candle.

God, our heavenly Father, expresses unlimited mercy and pardon in Christ Jesus. His offer of forgiveness in Christ creates the "good news" or "Gospel" we have discussed today. There is no "candle time" with respect to God's love and grace. But "candle time" is all that we in sin and rebellion have. Do not confuse God's limitless offer of pardon with your limited life and opportunity to "accept the Gospel." Make your decision, now, to obediently surrender to Jesus Christ in baptism; thus, to receive the "new life" of Christian service and devotion.





John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.