

Gospel Content

Throughout the Bible, salvation has been by grace, worked through the mechanism of faith in God's promise of deliverance. Since Christ's first coming, that promise has been made clear in the New Testament writings, centering on Jesus Christ as the identity of the deliverer and the reconciling work [atonement] he accomplished on the cross.

Thus, the content of a "saving faith" would include all of the following beliefs:

† Our need for salvation

- all people are corrupted in nature [sin];
- the penalty for this corruption is death and eternal separation from God;
- nobody has the ability to mitigate this corruption or penalty;

† Christ's identity

- Christ's divinity;
- Christ's humanity;
- Christ as God's only promised deliverer [or Messiah] from the Old Testament;
- Christ as God's prophet, priest, judge, and king, and his future return;

† Christ's work

- Christ's death on the cross, burial, and resurrection as prophesied in the Old Testament, and subsequent appearances;
- Christ's payment of the penalty for our sins, making it possible for our deliverance through reconciliation with God and thus having Christ's righteousness accounted to us, being redeemed from sin, and receiving eternal life;
- the Holy spirit's work in administering this grace and our need to appropriate this blessing by faith in Christ's identity and deliverance.

A full gospel presentation would include all of these issues. However, we need not share a full gospel presentation every time we share our faith with someone else. Sometimes it is enough to encourage a person to take one more step toward faith in Christ. Still, every believer should be prepared to share a full gospel presentation if God provides the opportunity.

One issue we should be careful about explaining correctly is the need for repentance. The Bible's teaching on repentance as part of salvation is that a person must repent of his/her lack of faith in Christ [i.e. lack of faith in God's promise of deliverance]. Repentance of individual sins and repentance of the sinful way of life comes after salvation, as part of the sanctification process, and so should not be presented as a requirement of salvation. In sharing the gospel, we simply are asking someone to believe in God's offer of deliverance, not requiring anything of them.

On the following page, there is an example of a full gospel presentation, using scripture and illustration. Feel free to adapt this example to suit your style or to come up with a presentation of your own that incorporates the necessary beliefs.

God wants to be intimate with us. In the beginning of the Bible, it talks about God acting like a father to the people he created. God desires for us to be intimate with him.

We are sinners. Sadly, we are separated from God because he is perfectly pure and holy while we are tainted with sin. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” Would you agree that in some way you have fallen short of perfection, that you have done something wrong at some point in your life? It is important to acknowledge that you are tainted.

We cannot fix this problem. Most people are aware of this separation from God, sensing God is distant, feeling empty, or feeling guilt about their sin. So we try to reconcile with God by going to church, giving to charity, and doing nice things for others. Unfortunately, none of the things we try can accomplish a reconciliation with God. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.” The problem is that while the things we do might be good, they can never make us pure again, and so they can never reconcile us with God. The Bible states this conclusively in Romans 3:20, which says, “For no one can ever be made right in God’s sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God’s law, the clearer it becomes that we aren’t obeying it.” Do you understand that you cannot make yourself pure enough to be intimate with God? You are tainted and you cannot fix it.

The penalty for sin is death. Romans 6:23 begins, “For the wages of sin is death...” Because of our sin, we have spiritual death – a separation from God – and physical death, and if we end this life still separated from God then we are destined to spend eternity separated from God, what the Bible calls Hell. That’s the bad news: You are tainted, you cannot fix it, and so you deserve to go to Hell.

Jesus died for us. The “Good News” is that God is willing to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The whole of Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” Jesus was both man and God, he was God here on earth. He was the promised deliverer of the Old Testament of the Bible, the one called the Messiah or Christ, who would deliver individuals from sin and Satan, and deliver Israel from oppression. He came to sacrificially die for us, to pay the penalty for our sin. Jesus, as a person, lived a pure life – which only he could do because only he was also God – making him a worthy sacrifice for mankind, and he was capable of making this sacrifice, of taking on the penalty of our sin, because he was God. Romans 5:8 says, “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

Jesus was resurrected. A couple of days after Jesus’ death on the cross and burial, he was resurrected from the dead, to prove his identity as the Son of God, to prove the acceptance of his sacrifice, and to prove his conquering of death and sin. 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 says, “I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me – that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now.” At the end of time, it will be Jesus who will judge everyone as the righteous king.

We can be saved through faith. Based on Jesus’ sacrifice, God offers us forgiveness of our sins, he offers to attribute to us the righteousness of Christ, and thus he offers to reconcile us to himself, and save us from eternal death. The Holy Spirit administers this grace and we accept this gift simply by believing it to be true. Romans 10:9-10 says, “For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.” Do you believe Jesus was who he said he was: the Son of God? Do you believe that he accomplished what he said he would: paid the price for your sins in his death and rose from the grave, all so that you could have forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and eternal life? Can you believe this? You are tainted, there is nothing you can do about it, and so you deserve Hell; but God is willing to save you as a gift, through your faith in Jesus being the Son of God who came to earth as the promised human deliverer known as the Messiah or Christ, and died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and then rose from the dead to prove his identity and accomplishment.

This is a gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” Do you trust in God to save you through his gift of grace alone, not putting any trust in anything you can do, such as pray, attend church, get baptized, take communion, or do good deeds?

Prayer. We must celebrate! Your acceptance of God’s grace in faith brings you into God’s kingdom! You are now a citizen of Heaven, a child of God, declared righteous before him! Your name is written in the book of life, the Holy Spirit has sealed your salvation and come to live inside you! You have eternal life right now! Let’s pray and then celebrate.