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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 4—Chapter 7

OF THE GOSPEL

There was Gospel in the former dispensation, though called the legal dispensation; it was preached to Adam, to Abraham, and by Isaiah, and other prophets, as has been observed. Yet there is a clearer revelation and ministration of it under the present dispensation; as the law was by the ministration of Moses; "Grace and truth," the word of grace and truth, the gospel, "came by Jesus Christ," in a clearer and fuller manner than it had been made known before (John 1:17). Concerning which the following things may be noted.

1. First, The name and signification of it. The Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, used for it throughout the New Testament, signifies, a good message, good news, glad tidings; such the gospel is; a message of good news from God, from heaven, the far country, to sinners here on earth: such was the gospel Christ was anointed to preach, and did preach, even good tidings (Luke 4:18 compared with Isa. 61:1), and which his ministers bring, whose feet are beautiful upon the mountains (Isa. 52:7; Acts 13:32,33). The Hebrew word used for the gospel, and the preaching of it, signifies good tidings also; and it is observed by some, to have the signification of "flesh" in it, which has led them to think of the incarnation of Christ; which is, undoubtedly, good news to the children of men; and a considerable branch of the gospel of Christ; what has given Isaiah the character of an evangelic prophet is, because he so clearly spoke of the incarnation of Christ, as well as of his sufferings and death, as if then present in his time: "To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given" (Isa. 9:6; 7:14). And when the angel proclaimed the birth of Christ to the shepherds, he is said, "to bring good tidings of great joy to all people" (Luke 2:10,11). And this is one principal part of the gospel, the great mystery of godliness; "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). Our English word "gospel," is of Saxon derivation; in which language "spel" signifies speech; and so gospel is either "good speech," which carries in it the same

idea with the Greek and Hebrew words; or God's speech, which he has spoken by his Son, by his prophets, and by his ministers; and is the voice of God the Son, the voice of Christ speaking in his ministers, and the voice of the Holy Ghost also.

Now this word is variously used; sometimes it is put for the history of Christ's birth, life, and actions; such are the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Mark begins his history thus; "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). And Luke calls his Gospel; "The former treatise" he had made, "of all that Jesus began, both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). And hence these four writers are commonly called evangelists; though this title is sometimes given to others, as distinct from apostles (Eph. 4:11), and even to ordinary ministers of the word, when they do the work of an evangelist, or preach the gospel faithfully, and make full proof of their ministry (2 Tim. 4:5). Sometimes the gospel is to be taken in a large sense, as including the word and ordinances (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16). And sometimes strictly, for the doctrine of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; hence gospel ministers, who bring good tidings of good, are said to publish peace, and to publish salvation (Isa. 52:7), the sum of which is expressed by the apostle, when he says, "This is a faithful saying," &c. (1 Tim. 1:15). Hence,

1a. The gospel is called, the gospel of salvation, the word of salvation, and salvation itself (Eph. 1:13; Acts 13:26 28:28), because it gives an account of Christ, the author of salvation; of his appointment to it; of his mission, and coming into the world, to effect it; and of his actual performance of it; of his being the able, willing, and only Saviour; and of the salvation itself, as great and glorious, perfect and complete, spiritual and everlasting; and because it describes also the persons that share in it, sinners, sensible sinners, and who believe in Christ; and who, according to the declaration of it, shall certainly be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:30,31), and because it is, not only the means of revealing, but of applying salvation; for it is to them that believe "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

1b. It is called, "The gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), because the various doctrines of it are doctrines of grace, or which exhibit blessings as flowing from the grace of God; as election, redemption, pardon, justification, adoption, and eternal life; and particularly, that salvation, from first to last, is all of grace, and not of works (Eph. 2:8).

1c. It is called, "The gospel of peace," the word of reconciliation, the word preaching peace by Christ (Eph. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:19; Acts 10:36), because it relates the steps taken in, council and covenant; to form the scheme of man's peace with God; to lay the foundation of it; and to bring it about; hence called the council of peace, and the covenant of peace (Zech. 6:13; Isa. 54:10). And also relates the actual making of it; by whom, and by what means; by Christ, who is our peace; by the chastisement of our peace being laid on him; by the shedding of his blood on the cross; and by his suffering of death (Eph. 2:14; Isa. 53:5; Col. 1:20; Rom. 5:10).

1d. It is called, "The gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23), because it treats both of the kingdom of grace here, showing wherein it lies; and of the kingdom of glory hereafter, pointing out the proper meetness for it, regeneration by the Spirit of God; and the right and title to it, the righteousness of the Son of God; and that itself, as the Father's free gift to his people, flowing from his good will and pleasure (John 3:5; Matthew 5:20; Luke 12:32).

2. Secondly, The author and origin of the gospel.—

2a. It is not of man, a device and invention of men; a system of things schemed and formed by the art and wit of men; says the apostle, "I neither received it of men, nor was I taught it;" that is, by men, as human arts and sciences are (Gal. 1:11,12). It is not discoverable by the light of nature and reason; the law, and the things of it, may be known thereby, as what is morally good and evil, as were by the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14,15), but not the things of the gospel; they are what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive of; as for instance, that fundamental doctrine of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, believed and confessed by Peter, was declared by our Lord to be what "flesh and blood had not revealed" to him, but his "Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:16,17). Hence the gospel is frequently called, a mystery; the wisdom of God in a mystery; the hidden wisdom; and the doctrines of it, the mysteries of the kingdom; which are only known by those to whom it is given by the Spirit and grace of God to know them (Matthew 13:11), and when they are externally revealed, and men have got some little notion and idea of them, they are disapproved of by them; for natural men receive not with approbation, and a good liking, the things of the Spirit of God, the doctrines of the gospel, which he searches and reveals; for they are foolishness, insipid things to them; for which they have no taste; as the doctrine of a crucified Christ, and salvation alone by him (1 Cor. 2:14; 1:18,23).

2b. The gospel is from heaven; it is good news from a far country, which far country is heaven: the gospel is, with the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven; and Christ that spoke it, is He that speaketh from heaven: the question put concerning the baptism of John; "Whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" may be put concerning the gospel, and answered as that; that it is from heaven, and not of men (1 Pet. 1:12; Heb 12:25; Matthew 21:25). It comes from God, Father, Son, and Spirit; from God the Father, and is therefore called the gospel of God; that is, the Father, concerning his Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1,3), which he ordained before the world was; and in time committed into the hands of men to preach, whom he made, and makes, able ministers of it, and which he blesses and succeeds. It comes also from Christ, the Son of God; and is called, the gospel of his Son, the gospel of Christ, the word of Christ, and the testimony of our Lord (Rom. 1:9,16; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:8), of which Christ is the subject, sum, and substance, as well as the author; even his person, offices, and grace; and of which he was the preacher when here on earth; for which he was qualified by the Spirit without measure, and spake and preached it as never man did; and by whom it was revealed and brought to light in the clearest manner; hence the apostle says, he received it "by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). It may

be said likewise, to come from the Holy Spirit of God, the inciter of the scriptures, wherein it lies; who searches the deep things of it, and reveals them to men; who leads the ministers of it into all the truths thereof; and makes their ministrations of it powerful and successful; and whereby he and his grace, comparable to the golden oil, are conveyed and received into the hearts of men. The instruments of declaring, publishing, and proclaiming the gospel, and its truths, to the children of men, are the prophets of the Old Testament, who made a report of it, though believed but by few; the angels, who descended at the birth of Christ, and brought the good news of it; John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, who pointed him out as the Son of God, and as the Lamb of God that took away the sin of the world; the apostles of Christ, who had a commission from him to preach the gospel to every creature; and all ordinary ministers of the word, whose business it is to publish good tidings of good things.

3. Thirdly, The effects of the gospel when attended with the power and Spirit of God.

3a. The regeneration of men, who are said to be born again by the word of God, and to be begotten again with the word of truth (1 Pet. 1:23; Jam. 1:18), hence ministers of the gospel are represented as spiritual fathers (1 Cor. 4:15).

3b. As in regeneration souls are quickened by the Spirit and grace of God, this is ascribed to the gospel as an instrument, hence it is called the Spirit which giveth life, and said to be the savior of life unto life (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:6).

3c. The gospel is frequently spoken of as a light, a great light, a glorious light; and so is in the hands of the Spirit a means of enlightening the dark minds of men into the mysteries of grace, and the method of salvation; "the entrance of thy word giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps 119:130). The Spirit of God gives the gospel an entrance into the heart, being opened by him to attend unto it; and when it has an entrance, it gives light into a man's self, his state and condition, and into the way of life by Christ; it is a glass in which the glory of Christ, and of the riches of his grace, may be seen.

3d. By it faith in Christ comes, and is ingenerated in the heart by the Spirit of God attending it; hence among other reasons, it is called "the word of faith;" and ministers, by preaching it, are instruments of confirming and increasing faith, and of perfecting what is lacking in it (Rom. 10:8,17; 1 Thess. 3:10).

3e. When faith is wrought in the soul, the righteousness of Christ is revealed unto it in the gospel; and not at first believing only but at after times; for it is revealed therein "from faith to faith," from one degree of it to another, giving thereby clearer views of it, and of interest in it (Rom. 1:17), hence it is called the word of righteousness, and the ministration of righteousness (Heb 5:13; 2 Cor. 3:9).

3f. It affords spiritual food, and is the means of feeding and nourishing souls unto everlasting life; it contains words of faith and good doctrine, even the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus; it has in it milk for babes, and meat for strong men; and when it is found by faith, it is eaten by it with pleasure, and fills with spiritual joy (1 Tim. 4:6; 6:3; Heb. 5:13,14; Jer. 15:16), which—

3g. Is another effect of it in gracious souls, it yields much spiritual peace, joy, and comfort; the doctrines of it are calculated for such a purpose; it is good news and glad tidings of good things; as of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ, which, when applied, cannot fail of producing spiritual joy in sensible sinners; when Philip preached Christ and his gospel in Samaria, there was great joy in that city (Acts 8:5,8), all this must be understood of the gospel, not as producing these effects of itself, but as it comes, not in word only, but with the power and in the demonstration of the Spirit; when it is sent forth out of Zion as the rod of God's strength, and it becomes the power of God unto salvation (1 Thess. 1:5,8; Ps. 110:2; Rom. 1:16).

4. Fourthly, The properties of the gospel.

4a. It is but one, there is not another, as the apostle says (Gal. 1:6,7), the same gospel which was in the beginning, and will be to the end of the world, the same under the Old Testament as under the New; the subject of it, Christ and salvation by him; the doctrines of it, of justification, remission of sins, &c. the same, only now more clearly revealed; then it was in types and figures, now more plainly set forth, and more clearly and fully expressed; the same was preached by Christ and his apostles, and by all faithful ministers since, and will be to the end of time; for it is true of the gospel what is said of Christ, it is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

4b. It is called, from the objects of it, the gospel of the circumcision, and the gospel of the uncircumcision (Gal. 2:7), not that the gospel of the one is different from that of the other; it is the same gospel, only dispensed to different persons, the circumcised Jews and the uncircumcised Gentiles; it was first ordered to be preached to the Jews, and to them only, in Christ's lifetime; after his death and resurrection he enlarged the commission of his disciples, and sent them forth to preach the gospel to every creature, both Jews and Gentiles; yet the special revelation and application of it are made only to some; to some it is the savor of life unto life, to others the savour of death unto death; there are some to whom God would make it known; it was his determinate pleasure to make known the riches of the glory of the mystery of it; to others it is hid, even to the wise and prudent, while it is revealed unto babes; of which no other reason can be given, but the sovereign will and pleasure of God (2 Cor. 2:16; 4:3; Col. 1:27; Matthew 11:25,26).

4c. It is a glorious gospel: so it is called (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11 it has a glory in it exceeding that of the law, and the dispensation of it (2 Cor. 3:11), for the clearness, fullness, and suitableness of its doctrines to the state and condition of men; and in

which the glory of the person of Christ as the Son of God, and of his officers as mediator, and of the blessings of grace that come by him, is held forth in great splendor and brightness.

4d. It is an everlasting gospel, which is the epithet given it (Rev. 14:6), it was ordained in the council and covenant of God before the world was, of which it is a transcript, and so was from everlasting (1 Cor. 2:7), and "the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached" (1 Pet. 1:25), and which will continue until all the elect of God are gathered in, maugre all the craft and cunning, force and power of earth and hell.

5. Fifthly, I shall close this chapter with a brief answer to some queries relating to faith, repentance, and good works; as, to what they belong, whether to law or gospel.

5a. Whether faith is a duty of the moral law, or is to be referred to the gospel? to which it may be answered, that as the law is not of faith, so faith is not of the law. There is a faith indeed which the law requires and obliges to, namely, faith and trust in God, as the God of nature and providence; for as both the law of nature, and the law of Moses, show there is a God, and who is to be worshipped; they both require a belief of him, and trust and confidence in him; which is one part of the worship of him enjoined therein: moreover the law obliges men to give credit to any revelation of the mind and will of God he has made, or should think fit to make unto them at any time; but as for special faith in Christ as a Saviour, or believing in him to the saving of the soul; this the law knows nothing of, nor does it make it known; this kind of faith neither comes by the ministration of it, nor does it direct to Christ the object of it, nor give any encouragement to believe in him on the above account; but it is a blessing of the covenant of grace, which flows from electing love, is a gift of God's free grace, the operation of the Spirit of God, comes by the hearing of faith, or the word of faith, as a means, that is, the gospel; for which reason, among others, the gospel is so called; and it is that which points out Christ, the object of faith; and directs and encourages sensible sinners under a divine influence to exercise it on him; its language is, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

5b. Whether repentance is a doctrine of the law or of the gospel? the answer to which is, that such who sin ought to repent of sin; this God has commanded, the law of nature teaches; and so far as this is to be considered as a duty incumbent on men, it belongs to the law, as all duty does; but then the law makes no account of repentance for sin; nor does it admit of it as a satisfaction for it; nor gives any encouragement to expect that God will receive repenting sinners into his grace and favor upon it; this is what the gospel does, and not the law; the law says not, repent and live, but do and live. Moreover, there is what may be called a legal repentance and contrition; for by the law is the knowledge of sin, without which there can be no repentance; and it works a sense of wrath in the sinners conscience, and a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation from an incensed God; but if it stop

here, it will prove no other than a worldly sorrow, which worketh death. The Spirit of God may make use of this, and go on and produce spiritual repentance, such a repentance as is unto life, even life eternal; and unto salvation, which needeth not to be repented of: but such a repentance is not the work of the law; for life and salvation come not by any work of the law; but true repentance, which has salvation annexed to it, is, as faith, a blessing of the covenant of grace; a grant from God, a gift of Christ as a Saviour, and with it remission of sins; a grace produced in the soul by the Spirit of Christ, by means of the gospel, which only encourages to the exercise of it; (see Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Cor. 7:10; Gal. 3:2). And so is a doctrine of the gospel, and not of the law, as appears from the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, who exhorted and encouraged to repentance from gospel motives; and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4). But what has the law to do either with baptism or the remission of sins? His ministry was evangelical, and ran in the same strain with the apostles, as appears from their answer to a question put to them; "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" A serious question, put upon thought and reflection by persons upon the bottom of a covenant of works, as the Jews rally were; and especially under a sense of guilt, as those were, desirous to know what must be done by them, that they "might be saved;" as it may be supplied from the jailor's words, when in the same case; or whereby they might make atonement for, and obtain the pardon of so great a sin, of which they were guilty: to which a proper answer is returned, putting them off of legal works for such purposes, and directing them to evangelical ones; "repent and be baptized, everyone of you, for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:37,38). And this is also clear from the story of Christ himself; who came, not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance; which was not a legal, but evangelical repentance. He began his ministry thus; "repent, and believe the gospel" (see Matthew 9:13; Mark 1:15). With which agrees the ministry of the apostles in general; who, by the direction of Christ, preached repentance and remission of sins in his name; which most certainly was the gospel; the one, as well as the other, a doctrine of the gospel (Luke 24:47). And the apostle Paul, who was a most evangelical preacher, divides his whole ministry into these two parts; "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

5c. Whether good works belong to the gospel, or to the law? or rather, whether there are any works that belong to the gospel distinct from the law? to which it may be replied, That the gospel, taken in a large sense, as has been observed in the beginning of this chapter, includes both the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel; and the one, as well as the other, are taught, and directed to be observed; yea, all good works, which the law requires, are moved and urged unto in the ministry of the gospel, upon gospel principles and motives: the gospel of the grace of God, which brings the good tidings of salvation, instructs and urges men to do good works, and to avoid sin (Titus 2:11,12; 3:8). But the gospel, strictly taken, is a pure declaration of grace, a mere promise of salvation by Christ. All duty and good works belong to the law; promise and grace belong to the gospel; the works of the law, and the grace of the gospel, are always opposed to each other (Rom. 3:20,24,28; Eph. 2:8). And if there were any works distinct from the law, and not required by it,

which, if not performed, would be sin; then the apostle's definition of sin, as a transgression of the law, would not be a full and proper one (1 John 3:4), since then there would be sins which were not transgressions of the law; wherefore, as all evil works are transgressions of the law, all good works are required and enjoined by it.