
The Gist of the Gospel

“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:3–6).

Paul urged Christians to pray earnestly for all men, even “for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:2). His admonition concerning prayer, he said, is in harmony with one of God’s basic desires. He has always wanted His people to live the life His Son purchased for them—fully, “. . . in all godliness and dignity,” and freely, unhindered by outward disturbances (in tranquility) and undisturbed by inner fears (in quietness of life). Praying this way, Paul stated, “is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (v. 3). Yes, the God of peace yearns for a life of peace for all of His children.

However, God has permitted His desire to be somewhat at the mercy of the moral freedom of the human race. “Kings” and “all who are in authority” are in positions to provide freedom and serenity for Christians. Sometimes they make wholesome decisions, and sometimes they yield to the wiles of the devil. Even though God has a heart of love and generosity for Christians and all people, He has chosen to allow those in positions of leadership to make choices that can make life difficult for righteous people. Therefore, prayer is always in order. Even though God chooses to answer some prayers in the affirmative and some in the negative, it is important that we understand, according to Paul, that prayer does make a difference and that we should pray.

God’s concern is not only about the peace and tranquility of Christians. When He grants peace to His people, it also descends upon the whole race of sinners who occupy this world;

for He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (v. 4). Whatever else we may see when we look into God’s eternal heart, we will see a prevailing missionary spirit. Coming clearly into view are His plan for the world, His priority for action, and His continual passion. This is love in its highest form. We see its ambition—“who desires”; its scope—“all men”; its goal—“to be saved”; and its methodology—“the knowledge of the truth.”

The universality of the gospel is clearly expressed. It begins with the singularity of God, with the fact that “there is one God” (v. 5a). “One God” created the world, “one God” loves the world, and “one God” is seeking the salvation of the world. The undergirding truth of life is that there is “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). Therefore, when sin is committed by the human race, God is the *offended* One and people are the *offending* ones. This fact declares the need for the gospel and the demand for a person—a divine yet human person—to walk between God and us and remove the barrier that separates us. Jesus, the second member of the Godhead, who became man, was sent to be this person. First Timothy 2:5b tells us that He was chosen of God to be the “one mediator . . . between God and men.” Jesus, as this mediator, stands in the middle, holding hands with God on one side and man on the other side. To use another figure, He is serving as a spanning spiritual bridge over which man passes as he comes back to God. Man simply cannot reach God without this bridge.

How did the mediator create the bridge? Paul expressed the answer in one short verse, explaining that He “gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:6). This verse, as short as it is, conveys the foundation of the gospel.

This description begins with the price that was paid: “Who gave Himself.” The chasm was so wide and so deep that Jesus was required not only to identify with us, but also to die for us. He had to approach the challenge and put into it everything that He had to give. He gave “Himself”—His body, spirit, blood, and life.

This description continues with the purpose: “as a ransom for all.” He became a substitute for us. He ransomed us from the death, condemnation, and judgment of our sinfulness. By suffering on the cross, by using the cross as an altar of atonement, He offered Himself to be the payment, the satisfaction that God’s righteousness demanded so that our sins could be forgiven.

This description concludes with the proclamation: “the testimony given at the proper time.” The words “testimony” and “proper time” stand out in this line. The fact, meaning, and reality of Jesus’ sacrificial death became known through its proclaimed testimony during the Christian Era. This fact had to be the case. The message could not be discerned by human wisdom. “. . . the world through its wisdom did not come to know God,” Paul said. No, but “God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). The testimony had to be proclaimed. It was proclaimed, and it is being proclaimed.

In 1 Timothy 2:6, the NASB has “at the proper time”; the ASV has “its own times”; the KJV has “in due time”; and the NIV has “in its proper times.” The ASV is more literal, while the KJV, NASB, and NIV are somewhat interpretive. This phrase is much like the phrase “the fullness

of the time” in Galatians 4:4. It refers to the chosen time of revelation, the divine revealing that corresponds with God’s eternal purpose. Only during the Christian age could this great mystery of the death of Christ be made known. This great salvation through the cross and its relation to the body of Christ was, in a sense, a mystery that “. . . in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:5).

A group of visitors in Jerusalem paused for a devotional on the Mount of Olives. They wanted to pray and meditate upon a brief Scripture before they continued throughout Jerusalem. The one chosen to read the passage was asked to select a Scripture that would summarize the earthly life and mission of Jesus. He quickly turned to 1 Timothy 3:16 and read:

By common confession, great is the mystery
of godliness:
He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.

These few lines are comprehensive and yet brief. Lost in their depth and overwhelmed by the breadth of their message, we also realize, “That verse says it all!”

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With these thoughts in mind, let us all echo the words of Paul: “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Timothy 1:15).