

Gospel F.A.C.T.S.



*One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.*

Psalm 145:4

The church through the ages has proclaimed the Christian message to each successive generation in terms it would understand. Of course, the Christian gospel of what God has done in Jesus Christ always remains the same. But human culture is continually changing. If God's people proclaimed the Gospel in what may as well be a foreign language, people will not understand, and the church will go into decline. Our generation has bought the lie that religion is a private matter, and everyone is entitled to their own beliefs. After all, they say, religious beliefs are subjective, unlike objective scientific facts. We in the church must communicate the mighty acts of God to a generation that already denies the possibility of such things. Here is a presentation of the gospel facts as may be better understood in our time.



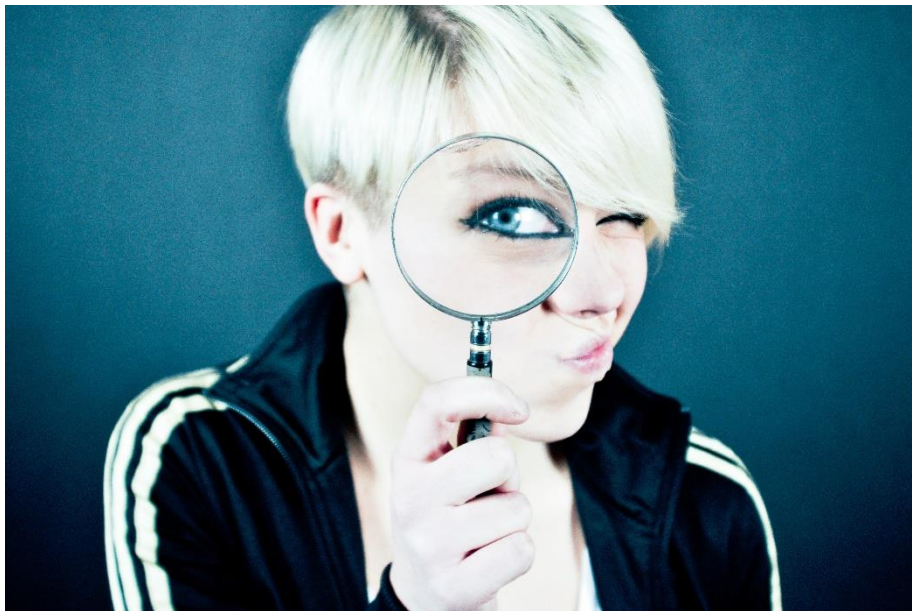
Gospel outlines of past generations were in the form of tracts, or

stick figure drawings, or diagrams of crosses between opposing cliffs. **Gospel FACTS** are presented in the context of personal relationships. You don't have to learn the outline word for word. It uses an acronym to help you remember the points, but you don't have to start at the beginning and work all the way through. When you are talking to people during everyday life or ministering to someone, use whatever part is appropriate. You can impart more of the good news about Christ the next to time you see them. The gospel is too good to keep it to ourselves. Here is the outline.

Faith

You've got to believe something. There is simply no getting around it. There is no other choice. It is how humans' function. There is no such thing as objectivity, as some believe, no neutral position from which we can determine the existence of God. We cannot judge God, who is ultimate reality, by any lesser reality.

Even scientists work in the pursuit of truth based on assumptions to which the scientific community are jointly committed. They presume the rationality of the universe, the uniformity of the laws that govern it (that experiments will always yield the same results under the same conditions), and the validity of reasoning. Scientists write up their findings in peer reviewed journals for assessment by the scientific community to ensure their findings are in conformity with commonly held scientific beliefs. Facts require theories to explain them.



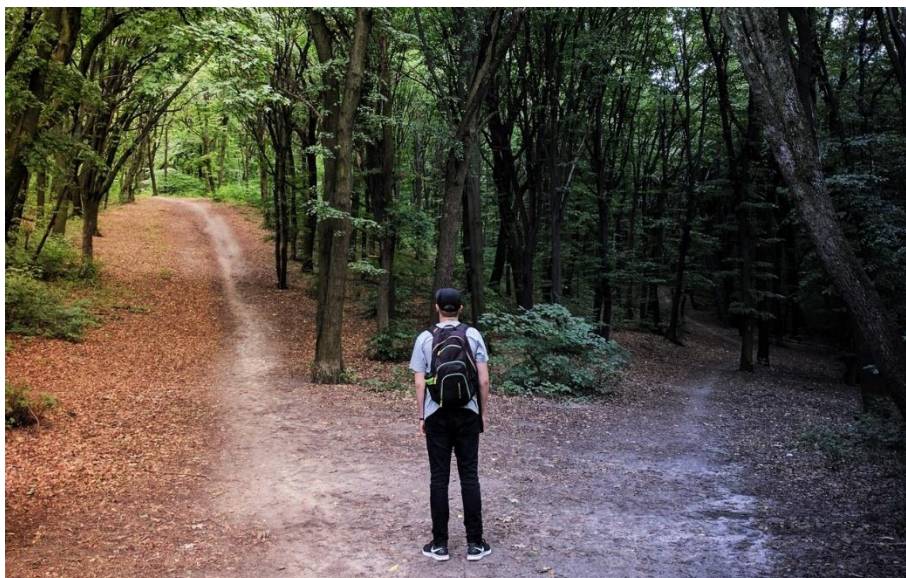
When it comes to believing in God, there is nothing more important. Our destiny is at stake. We must resolve doubt and uncertainty. The God in whom our faith rests, is faithful. When it comes to values, meaning and purpose to life we have no alternative but to make a faith commitment to what we accept as true. The sceptic will find this unsatisfactory. But doubt

is simply a state of mind, the attitude that arises from belief in oneself as the arbiter of truth. Scepticism offers no evidence for its own truth. We are justified in being sceptical of scepticism. However, the object of Christian faith is not within the human mind. Faith in God rests, not in our own confidence, but on a sure foundation outside of us. The myth of faith being subjective and therefore a personal matter, deliberately overlooks the reality of God to whom we are accountable. Human freedom extends to allowing us to disbelieve in God. But to do so means we have chosen to believe in ourselves, our own ability to determine what is truth.

Adam (or Abraham)

Adam and Abraham related to God in two contrasting ways. It is significant that the name "Adam" means mankind because he is representative of all of us. Adam believed he knew best in how to relate to God. The result hasn't been good. Just look at the world today: wars, immorality, sickness, suffering and death. Some people even try to blame God for making the world this way, as if humans have nothing to do with it.

Abram, on the other hand, was a man of faith. He was renamed by God as Abraham, which means "ancestor to many people". He was still sinful like everyone else, but unlike those the other descendants of Adam, he placed his faith in God who promised Abraham, and all people of faith who the Bible calls his spiritual descendants, that they would be blessed. God had a plan to reconcile with sinful humanity. Now imperfect people cannot come into the presence of a perfect and holy God. They would be destroyed because of the presence of evil in them.



How does God save people from going to their destruction? God made people for relationships with each other. We are social beings. Even our offences against one another can be repaired through forgiveness. Humans can befriend other humans despite their imperfections and sin,

even when that sin is directed towards themselves. The difference is because human existence does not depend on another human, unlike with a holy God who cannot sustain evil. God's plan to use this human capacity involved the Son of God taking on human form so that we could relate to Christ through faith.

The Bible has some 33 references to the Covenant of God, so it must be important. Now, it is very unlikely that God employs the human legal system in his Kingdom. Nor is it a covenant relationship as some have proposed since the Bible never uses the term "Covenant relationship". All of this suggests that the term "Covenant of God" is actually a metaphor for the steadfast relationship that God desires to have with humans. Abraham's faith demonstrated a way for God to relate to humanity.

But the plan does not guarantee the salvation of everyone. It allows us a choice. Will we believe in God like Abraham and place our faith in Jesus as our saviour?

Christ

The word Christ, (which comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah"), is a title, not a name. It means God's anointed, or chosen, one. Jesus is God in human form (Phil 2:7). In Scripture, Jesus is called the second Adam (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:45-55). He has faith like Abraham, but is without sin, unlike both Adam and Abraham. Christ sacrificed his life to save humanity (the name Jesus means "the Lord is salvation"). Jesus could have appealed to his Father to save him from death on the cross (Matt 26:53), but if he had done so, he would not accomplish his mission of salvation.



Jesus' death on the cross was a great miscarriage of justice. He was an innocent man, entirely sinless, and as God, worthy of worship. Jesus'

gracious sacrifice for his friends, moved God to overcome the evil done to Jesus by raising him from the dead and making reparation by exalting him to the highest place in God's kingdom. When God raised Jesus, he also committed to raising all those Jesus sacrificed his life to save.

This is why our salvation is not something we earn. Even our faith in Jesus does not win God's approval. It is what Jesus did to save us. Our faith in Jesus joins us to God's assessment of Jesus sacrifice. Our justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. The empty tomb is our confirmation, not only of Jesus' resurrection, but the promise of our future resurrection.

Transformed

Jesus calls everyone to be his disciples and friends. Those who respond in faith are transformed into members of his church. The Bible also uses other images such as being adopted into God's family and becoming God's own people. This transformation is obtained through no action or merit of our own. We cannot do good things to get God to accept us. Nothing we do can undo our sins. We are saved as God's reward for Christ. Salvation, for Jesus' friends, means we are transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, from being no people to being God's people. We seek to live in accordance with our new status. Christians do not have to live perfectly in order to be saved, for salvation does not depend upon how we live. Christians are free to live as God's family members. It is just the way God's people behave.



God transforms us from the futile drudgery of trying to justify ourselves before God, to joyous freedom in Christ who has won our salvation. This is one of the most misunderstood facts of the gospel. The devil spends a lot of time promoting the view that Christianity requires people to please God by obeying his laws. This would be nothing but dull hard work with no prospect of success. The devil has overplayed his hand.

The pay in the kingdom of darkness is nothing to get excited about. The truth sets people free from Satan's lies. The good news is that the kingdom of God is full of joy because we are forgiven, accepted, and loved by God.

Spirit

God in the person of the Holy Spirit, also called the Spirit of the Son of God (Gal 4:6), is given as a gift to abide with Christ's followers. No longer do we have to conduct our lives by a set of external rules to satisfy either society's standards or God's commandments (which were given to help God's people prior to the coming of Christ). Christians walk by the Spirit and follow his guidance. The Spirit of God who inspired the writing of Scripture will not lead us contrary to what is written in Scripture, but He will lead us so we can live as citizens of God's kingdom.



Jesus commissioned his followers and gave them authority to heal the sick, deliver the captives, and release the oppressed as the Spirit leads them. Obedience is not a matter of duty or obligation, but it is the way of life of God's family. This is only the first instalment of the adventure of eternal life (John 3:16). Resurrection to life everlasting without sin is yet to come. But Christians can say, "Death has lost its sting." (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The Spirit of God introduces us to the realm of the Spirit where Jesus rules. Jesus was victorious over the enemies of God. There is no fear when you are on the winning side in the spiritual realm. Miracles of healing and deliverance from evil spirits accompany the church. The church might not win every battle, but we know who wins in the end. The spiritual realm is where Jesus lives. It is our home, where we belong. It is where you can walk in the Spirit, worship in the Spirit, minister in the Spirit, etc. There is power in the name of Jesus, after all, he is the Lord of His Kingdom.

So what are you going to do?

Lesslie Newbigin wrote, "By the gospel we mean a factual statement about what God has done in Christ. The most important fact in the world." So, what are we to do about the gospel facts? We all must believe something.

What do you believe? Atheism? Secularism? Another religion? What if they are wrong? Jesus said he is the truth, and He will give you abundant life.



Why believe in Jesus? Why not! The gospel is based in historical facts: Jesus was crucified, dead and buried and rose from the dead. His followers were prepared to die rather than say it wasn't true. Jesus has had committed followers ever since, committed to believing in him.

Our confidence does not rest in our decisions, but in the faithfulness of God. Reason doesn't lead you to faith, we reason from faith. God doesn't want you to agonize over a decision, just believe in Jesus. He is the one who saves you.

Lesslie Newbigin told the parable of a man who was out for a walk coming across a building site. Wondering what was being constructed in his neighbourhood, he asked the builder, who was standing nearby, what he was building. The builder explained what he was constructing and what the owner intended to use the building for. It sounded like it was going to be very good for the community and the man was in favour of it. But then the builder invited the man to join his team and help construct the building. Knowing what God is doing is one thing but joining him in his project requires commitment.

So which way do you go? Jesus taught people to have faith in God. He calls us to come and follow him.

Derek Thompson, 2024.