

THE GOSPEL – The Power of God

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

With a deep sense of my own inability and trusting only in the Lord, I wish to briefly proclaim the subject that shall be the burden of this paper—THE GOSPEL.

I. The Gospel of Which Paul was “Not Ashamed.” Although the Author and essential Subject of the Gospel was hanged on a tree—and its doctrines are foolish to unregenerated professors and sinners alike (1 Cor. 1:23)—its genuine professors are insignificant and unpopular people of low rank (1 Cor. 1:26-28)—yet Paul, once a persecutor himself of all Gospel lovers, having felt the power of the Gospel in his own heart and by faith seeing the glory of God in the person of Christ therein (2 Cor. 4:6), was not ashamed to be numbered with this despised Christ and His little flock; yea, he gloried in the Christ of the Gospel (Gal. 6:14).

Ah, my friend, is this not the language of the saints of God? Regardless of the opinion of others, the true disciple has received the truth in the love of it (2 Thes. 2:10) and he clings to the Word of truth for eternal life (John 6:66-69). The false professor professes to believe the Gospel which he hopes to use as a fire escape from Hell (Titus 1:16; Matt. 7:21-23), but the child of God humbly cries from his heart, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee” (Psalm 73:25). The language of Psalm 19:7-14 is also the language of a new creature in Christ, regarding God and His Word. Let writer and reader alike examine ourselves thereby as for eternity.

II. “THE GOSPEL.” What constituted the message of which Paul was not ashamed? Was it related to the message that is heralded in the vast majority of the organized religious institutions of today? To the law and to the testimony we appeal for our answer.

Firstly, *there is a “gospel” which is not another but it is a perversion of the Gospel of free grace.* “For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted” (2 Cor. 11:4). It proclaims another Jesus who saves people “in” instead of “from” their sins, and this Jesus is Lord over nobody; yea, say its preachers, He can save no one unless the sinner lets Him. They proclaim another Spirit which calls not dead men to life, but brings men to an intermediate state to choose life. Such a powerless Jesus, such a powerless Spirit is not of God, but it is the creation of the imagination of the mind of natural men. And this other “gospel” that presents these helpless “gods” of men’s imagination and constantly cries “love,” when God knows nothing of love apart from His Son, is not the Gospel of free grace!

Paul was not only ashamed of another gospel, but he was scared to death of it, knowing that those who proclaim it are under the curse of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6-10). To reject the Gospel and believe another gospel (which is a lie) is to be damned (2 Thess. 2:10-12). Reader, this is a solemn subject. It is a vital issue. May we all be driven to the Word of God to seek the truth.

Secondly, *What is the GOSPEL?* Quoting from *Cruden’s Concordance*, “It is called the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1) as it came originally from the Father. It is called the gospel of the

grace of God (Acts 20:24) because it proceeds from and manifests His favour and is the means whereby His grace is bestowed. It is called the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16) as He is the immediate Author, and the subject matter of it. In the same passage it is said to be the power of God unto salvation; it is the means which, by the influence of the Spirit of God, is made effectual to salvation. It is called the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:13). It brings the good news that salvation is to be had ... it shows the way how it is attained; it works grace to fit for, and bring men to salvation.”

In short, the Gospel is a manifestation of the Person of God Almighty as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, His authority and power. It is not a description of one attribute of God, such as His love (notice that this first chapter of Romans doesn't even mention His love), but it consists of the whole revelation of God's Person, and the revelation of the whole Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, and of His perfect work in relation to the treatment of sin and the complete accomplishment of salvation.

The Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ is good news to guilty, lost, helpless sinners. It is not a begging appeal for sinners to save themselves but it is a proclamation of the Person of salvation in all of His offices and it tells helpless sinners to look away from themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:45-47; John 3:14-15).

The Gospel is not a message independent of God's Holy Law. It is not an announcement that God has lowered His standards or relaxed His justice. The Gospel shows us God's hatred of sin and the sword of His justice in smiting His own Beloved Son in order that atonement (satisfaction) might be made for the transgressions of His people. To quote another, “Our idea and apprehension of the gospel will be erroneous and wrong just as far as we have wrong notions of God's law” (Samuel Hopkins, 1880).

The Gospel is not the mere announcement of the fact of the cross but it is the preaching of the whole message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). It proclaims that Christ died for our sins, but that's not all. “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried and He rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The phrase, “According to the scriptures,” makes all the difference in the world. That encompasses the whole message of the Word of God. Its scope reaches farther than the historical fact of the cross. It embraces the whole Christ in all His Person and Work in the stead of God's elect for the glory of His Father. The Person and work of Christ from the womb to the throne, yea, from eternity to eternity, is the theme and substance of the Gospel.

The Lord of the Universe came into this world through the miracle of the Virgin Birth. As a Baby in the manger, He was God's Salvation (Luke 2:25-32). He made Himself responsible for all that law and justice demanded of the sinner. He took the whole debt upon Himself and paid it by doing and by suffering in the stead of His people as their Surety. Instead of destroying the law, as the dispensationalists would lead us to believe, He magnified the law. He made it honorable by His perfect obedience (for God demands perfection) and His suffering of its curse in the stead of sinners. The Gospel shouts forth the all-sufficiency of the Saviour and comes to the heart of the awakened sinner with the wonderful news that all that is necessary for our reconciliation with an offended God has been abundantly paid for and purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace. “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17).

To quote a dear Puritan brother, “The gospel then, you see, tells men that they are ungodly; it tells them that God is just, infinitely and undeviatingly just; it brings these two truths plainly

before the mind, and then calls upon it to admire and adore the wisdom and goodness which could reunite them, and make them harmonize together; it tells, in short, of Jesus Christ, of Him who came to preach good tidings unto the meek, who was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison door to them that are bound.”

III. WHEREIN the Power of the Gospel Consists.

Firstly, *the Gospel is not powerful in the hands of the sinner*. To the contrary, it is a major part of the revelation of God against which man is in rebellion and vehement hatred. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d” (John 3:19-20). Man in his natural state is not only in rebellion against God but he is dead toward God (Eph. 2:1; 4:18). God commands men to repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15). Man’s reply is, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). No man seeketh after God (Rom. 3:10). Man has not the will to come to Christ. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8). In his present state he cannot save or help save himself. “Who then can be saved? With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:26-27). Man’s will is to sin, to have his own way, to lord over his own life, and that continually (Gen. 6:5). Salvation is not of the will of man (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16).

Although man has not, since the fall of Adam, the ability to repent and believe, God has not cancelled His commands or lowered His standards. It is not our intention to give a full description of the total depravity of man but enough has been said to show the wicked and helpless condition of fallen man and his desperate need for a Saviour that completely saves helpless sinners. Ah, my friend, dead sinners must be raised from spiritual death to life (Rom. 6:13). The Gospel, falling upon the ears of deaf, dead men is completely powerless if left to the decision of such men. To such it is a dead letter and nothing else, according to 2 Cor. 3:6.

Secondly, *the Gospel is not powerful in the hands of the preacher*. He can preach and pray but he can’t make sinners live. He can call dead Lazarus from the grave but Lazarus will not come forth. He can preach to the dry bones and they will continue to sleep in their spiritual death. He can preach the truth with wisdom yet it availeth nothing. Salvation is not of the will of the preacher (See John 1:13). “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9). The preaching of the Gospel is foolishness to the natural man and it is powerful to those only who are effectually called by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:18). The Gospel does not derive its power from the hands of the preacher, for neither the will of the sinner nor the persuasive tactics of the preacher can bring men to Christ. Christ said, “No man can come to me, except the Father draw him” (John 6:44).

Thirdly, *the Gospel is the power of God in the hands of God*. We feel that a few observations must be made before proceeding with this truth:

- (1) God’s chief design in and through the Gospel is His own glory.
- (2) God’s Word will and always has accomplished exactly what the Lord intended it to do (Isa. 55:11). And,
- (3) Was the Gospel given to save all? NO! Please read Acts 2:39 and Acts 15:14 carefully. Paul did his utmost to preach to all but, knowing something of the deep depravity of the

human heart and the sovereign purpose of Almighty God, he only expected the Gospel to “save some” (1 Cor. 9:16-22).

There is no true Gospel preaching without the preaching of the Law. Men are to be saved from sin and sin is the transgression of the Law. The Gospel is addressed to sinners, not moralists or religious professors, but sinners, miserable sinners. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). A bulldozer operation must be performed in the heart by the Holy Spirit before the Gospel is the good news to a sinner.

In short, first comes the Law, stripping the sinner of all self-righteousness, bringing him low in the dust before a holy and just God. Then comes the Gospel and lifts him up with the call, not in mere words but in power, Repent ye! The Law kills but the Gospel goes forth with a Divine effectual call for Lazarus to come out of his grave. And, the Lord’s biddings are His enablings. That call that bids the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth, enables; yea, it brings that hand forth. Such is the power of God’s call (not the preacher’s) to salvation in Christ. “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified” (Rom. 8:30). “Show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Again quoting a dear Puritan brother, “The powerful voice of Christ is the key that opens the door of the soul to receive Him.” Ah, is that not the language of all those who have truly tasted of the free grace of God in Christ. The written Word has no power whatever but in the hands of the Incarnate Word. It is only powerful unto salvation when it comes out of the mouth of God Himself into the hearts of His chosen people. We read of Lydia, “Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). “Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

My friend, *it is God who makes the Gospel powerful*. “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:5). He makes sinners to know and hate themselves (Ezek. 36:31). It is God who makes convicted sinners to desire this Christ in whom they once beheld no beauty, but now He is the Precious One to their heart. It is God who hath shined in the heart and revealed the glory of God in the Person of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6; John 1:14). The true prophet is an instrument in God’s hand (1 Cor. 3:5-7), the Gospel is the means that God uses (James 1:18), but power belongeth unto the Lord Himself (Psalm 62:11). We request the prayers of the saints, and we beseech all concerned souls to seek the Lord.

— Lynn V. Connell, in *The Gospel Witness* (July 1969)