

#264 “A Gospel Review”

By Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

It never hurts to rehearse the gospel message because it is easy to forget things, and it is always wise to have the message of good news on the tip of our tongues. The gospel is the main message of Scripture, and thus we must get it right. If there is any one thing that provides Satan with the most leverage to keep people in chains to sin and death, it is to attack and alter the gospel message itself. There sure are a lot of gospels out there. Some people think salvation or their version of heaven or the life after is a result of being a good person or doing enough charitable things. Others rely upon sacraments or an official church organization to grant them entrance into heaven. Others have no assurances of their eternity, but they do religious activities anyway. At the crux of the matter is always the cross. For some, Jesus was just a prophet and not God, thus rendering His death meaningless in terms of salvation power. Actually, isn't this the critical issue interlinking all other religions outside of true Biblical Christianity? If Jesus wasn't God, then nothing else matters, and we are all dead in our sins. Denying the deity of Christ becomes a reason, albeit a false one, for people to try to come up with a new method, a new revelation, a new add-on to the Bible, and a new message. So many different religions and cults exist, and all of them will deny that Jesus is God and that He died and rose again to save people from their sins. **We must never lose sight of how powerful, how convicting, and how unique this message is compared to all of the rest of the teaching out there in the world.**

What is sad is that too many professing Christians think that they need to modify or enhance the message to make it more culturally relevant or interesting to the masses. The temptation and the devil's urge is to try to get more people to make subtle changes to the message or to work people into a feeling of conversion without the Spirit's participation. Some alter the message to state that God's love means that He also wants people to have a wonderful life. This communicates that God wants all people to experience earthly prosperity, diminishing the importance of their eternity and offering false hope for the present. Others use the cross to be a guarantee of all sickness and disease being taken away, so the gospel is turned into a promise of good health. Others promise wealth, successful relationships, better marriages, and career advancement. While God does make relationships better if Christ is in the hearts of both parties, the impetus for believing in the gospel is not better relationships but being saved from hell. **The Spirit's job in gospel proclamation is to convict not of health, wealth, and prosperity but of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).** The gospel is lost if it is merely a life improvement or circumstance enhancement message. Rather, the gospel is a message concerning the soul of man and his need to be saved from his sin lest he end up facing the wrath of God and be cast into hell. Man needs to see that his violation of the commands of God and his fallen sinful nature make him an enemy of a righteous and holy God (Ephesians 2:16, James 4:4). It is God Who then has reached out to man in love by demonstrating mercy to Him in sending Christ to die as a sacrifice for sin (Romans 5:8). Man must respond in faith and repentance in order to receive the righteousness of Christ and the promise of heaven.

The gospel is not merely a bailout for sinners such that no heart change is needed and sin can continue so that grace may abound (Romans 6:1-2). The gospel changes people at the deepest

level such that they literally become new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). They are given a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26), made into a new person (Colossians 3:10), are no longer slaves to sin and the flesh (Romans 6:6, 13:14), and are able to love God and others (John 13:34-35). True saving faith has fruit as clear evidence of repentance (Matthew 7:16). Jesus spoke of repentance (Mark 1:14-15), Paul spoke of repentance (Acts 17:30-31), and yet the modern church is too often scared of preaching sin, hell, and repentance. While there is nothing inherently wrong with telling people to have a relationship with Christ, we would be wise to explain why they need it, why they don't have it now, and just what the nature of that relationship is. Christ is more than just a friend, for He is that and also Savior and Lord of all. The gospel is so wonderful that we shouldn't seek to water it down, oversimplify it, or minimize the whole gospel story. Rather, the gospel, though it is simple enough for a child to understand, is still profound enough to keep learning about. It is foretold in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:6), explained in Christ (John 1:18), and preached in the epistles (Acts 7:52). It is everywhere in the Bible (e.g. Genesis 3:15), and as we uncover it more and more, we grow to appreciate Jesus' sacrifice even more.

The gospel is summarized by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 which says,

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Christ died for our sins which were put on Him even though He was innocent (2 Corinthians 5:21). He faced God's wrath so that we could be saved, and He rose from the dead, proving His victory over sin and death. What we could not do, God did through Christ in the most emphatic example of love that the world will ever see. This event actually happened a couple thousand years ago, and it makes all the difference.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” It is God's grace that reached out toward us in Christ and that calls to all people to repent. By faith we receive Christ, not because of anything we can do or have done, but only because of the work which He accomplished on our behalf on the cross once for all. The writ of condemnation that stood against us on account of our sin was nailed to the cross with Christ (Colossians 2:14). He alone deserves all the glory when it comes to salvation, and we can boast only in Him. 1 Corinthians 15:14 says, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.” But as Paul adamantly declares, Christ is risen, death has no sting (1 Corinthians 15:55), and through Christ we are victorious over sin, death, and the devil. Our Savior is not in the grave, but He reigns and sits at God's right hand (Ephesians 1:20). In Ephesians 2:6, He promises that we who have received Him are also seated there with Him in heaven. This is great news for a world that desperately needs good news. Yet even though most scoff at this message, it still has the power to save, and we must not be ashamed of it (Romans 1:16).

The gospel makes life make sense, it makes life after death hopeful, it makes clear what is good and what can make one happy, and it connects people to the only ultimate source of joy, Christ Himself. What can be more important than being saved from eternal condemnation and given eternal life and being freed from captivity to sin and Satan and being adopted as children of God? Why tip-toe around, alter, or minimize something this wonderful, life-changing, and powerful? The gospel is what we should live for and what we should be willing to die for because Christ died for us and we have been raised to new life with Him.