

What is the Gospel? (part 4)

2Co 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: **4** In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. **5** For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. **6** For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. **7** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Notice these words in verse 4: “the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Paul gives the gospel a name, when he is discussing what it is, how it works, and what some of it's effects are. He calls it: “The glorious gospel of Christ”.

1. It is The Glorious Good News.

Here he calls the good news “the glorious gospel of Christ”, and in 1Tim. 1:11 he calls it “The glorious gospel of the Blessed God”. Here is a quick and easy proof of the Deity of Christ. Christ is equal to God because He is God.

Any gospel which is not about our God Jesus Christ, is false gospel. He is the sum and substance of the good news. And that is truly “glorious”.

“Glorious”...just the sound of it, evokes images in the mind of something spectacular and shining, something regal and majestic. It is the Greek word: δόξα *doxa*, from which we get our word Doxology, which most people will recognize as some sort of a worship word. It can mean dignity, glory, gloriousness, honour, praise, worship, luminousness, brilliance, and radiance.

The true Gospel is a glorious affair, not having originated on the dark and sullied soil where men walk. It comes to us from the realms of glory, brightness and truth. The fact that it is so glorious, also explains why it cannot be put into a test tube, or quantified by a few human propositions. When the gospel is spoken, dead men are called to life, souls are re-united to their God, and life comes down from heaven to radically transform even the chiefest of sinners. It is a living, moving and powerful thing; so don't imagine that you can say...“these words here...these are what the gospel is comprised of, and nothing else”. Nobody can say that of the true gospel, because it is a glorious gospel.

I know a man, who had an altogether, and quite evil false gospel, which he

declared that every preacher must preach. He said this is it...this is the true gospel, and anyone preaching anything other than this is a God-hating heretic. Nobody ever got saved during his preaching. His church was full of hateful and vindictive people, who did not resemble Christ at all. And this man actually condemned some of the greatest gospel preachers of all time, because they did not follow his paltry little gospel formula. Well, that's what I'm talking about. The true gospel is glorious. It cannot be reduced to a formula, a code, or a few simple steps. It cannot be boiled down to six or ten propositions. It cannot be contained within a couple of paragraphs in a statement of faith. It is in fact "wholly other". It defies definition. It is the bringer of life. It is the call to the lost. And it takes many different forms, and comes with many different words, because the people whom it reaches are all different. It's tailored to every one of them individually. It may hit someone over the head like a baseball bat, and the person sitting next to them, gets nothing. Sometimes it may be speaking to a drug addict who needs to find Christ, the one who can take away dependency on needles or pills, and it will speak to him differently than it does, when it is trying to reach a young mother, who cannot seem to find a moments peace while she is raising 4 young children. People have different needs, and the gospel can meet all of them, and part of it's glory is that it does just that. The light of life, is penetrating and powerful, life conquering and life changing. So don't let anyone put limits on it's glory, because the moment you do that, you began preaching a false gospel.

2. It is The Everlasting Good News

Rev 14:6-7 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, **7** Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

1Pe 1:25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

The gospel, is not a New Testament idea, people have been being saved by it since the dawn of time. It is "The everlasting gospel". And this too, is part of it's glory. I have to laugh at the preachers who think that the gospel is just the preaching of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. While those truths might form part of it, they do not form all of it. Millions of people were saved in the Old Testament, without so much as a word about Christ's atonement, or resurrection. They were indeed saved through that atonement and resurrection, and by its efficacious power, because there is no salvation any other way. But they did not know it, and understand it the way that we do. They believed the word of God that they had received up to that point, and they accepted it's gospel salvation by faith, the same as we do. But did they have a vision and understanding of the glorious and full light and knowledge that is in the New Covenant? Absolutely not. Their's was a gospel of types and shadows at best, but it was still the

power of God to save them, and it was still the gospel of Grace none the less..

The gospel is present any time God stoops down by Grace to save any of His own dear children. It was the gospel which saved Adam and Eve, when God stooped down in Grace, and slew an innocent lamb to make them coats of skins. It was the gospel which saved Abraham, when God called him out of the Ur of the Chaldees. It was the gospel which saved the children of Israel, when the blood was on their doorposts, as the death angel passed over Egypt. Whenever God stoops down in Grace, to save His people, the gospel is always there doing it's powerful work in peoples hearts.

The gospel is never about perfectly understanding the finished work of Christ, or about perfectly understanding any doctrine for that matter. Nobody would ever be saved if that were the case, because nobody is capable of understanding the great transaction between the Father and the Son, which secured justification and propitiation, for all God's elect in every age. I tell you nobody can understand that, and that's exactly why understanding it, is not part of the gospel. We do not need to understand the intricacies of salvation, in order to be receive it. We need to meet Christ, and have Him change us. There is a big difference. And thank God, salvation does not depend upon our knowledge, it depends on God's grace. We are all ignorant people, when it comes to God.

3. It is The Gracious Good News

Act 14:3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace.

Act 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: **9** Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Grace is the keyword of the gospel, because it is not about anything that man does, and it is about everything that God does for man. People are not preaching any gospel at all, if they are turning it into a bunch of stuff that men must do to be received by God. Men can do nothing to gain admittance into God's presence. If God brings people to Himself, it is because He took the initiative before the foundation of the world. It is because He reaches down in time, and calls, draws and saves them, creating faith in them and bringing them to repentance from dead works. It is because when Christ said "it is finished", it was in fact done. Salvation is God's work, and because it is, it is by His Sovereign Grace alone, that anyone is ever saved. Works of any kind play no part in it, and that's why they are no part of the gospel.

This may seem like a moot point to some of you, because you say that you

believe the gospel of Grace, but in actuality and practice you deny it. You tell men that they must come forward in an "altar call" in order to be saved. You tell them that they must pray a certain "sinners prayer", or repeat certain words after you, in order to be saved. And certainly people have been saved in spite of these well intended works. But they are works none the less. When you tell people these things, you are telling them that they must do something in order to be saved. And thus you turn the message of Grace, which you think you are preaching, into steps, deeds, activities or works, that men must do in order to receive God's Grace and forgiveness. Shame on you! Many people are damned this way, probably more than are genuinely saved. They think they are saved, because they walked an aisle with tears in their eyes, during an emotionally charged plea at the end of a service, or because they repeated words that you told them to say, and in actuality they are still lost. They think they are saved because they "gave their heart to Jesus" or because "They asked Him to come in" to their filthy and polluted heart. You misled them, by teaching a false gospel of works. Now some people might indeed be saved this way, because God is, in fact Gracious, and God can use His word despite what people do to mutilate it. But to present these as steps to salvation, is nothing short of lying to people. It ought never to happen.

Salvation is by Grace, and here's how it works. Grace chose who would believe before the foundations of the world. And when the gospel is preached, Grace reaches down, opens the blind eyes, so they can see; unplugs the deaf ears, so they can hear; calls the dead to life; plants the seeds of everlasting life within them; brings the blood of Christ in power to cleanse and forgive them; creates faith where there was none; and unites them to the Savior, because He gave His life for the sheep, and that's what they are, they are sheep, and they hear His voice, and follow Him when He calls. That's Grace, and that's the gospel. Man does nothing, and Christ does everything, through the working of the Holy Spirit. The gospel of Grace, is the Trinity in action saving the elect.

And when Grace has operated, the dead will know that they have been resurrected and changed. It is impossible to be called by Christ to salvation, and not know it. That's why the saved have lives that are visibly changed. They are not changed because of something they have done. They are changed, because they are now new creatures. They have received freely, and now, all of a sudden, as if by magic, they have new desires, new tendencies, and they want Christ, and His word more than anything else. They were not taught this, as though salvation were a matter of education. God put within their hearts a hunger and thirst after the things of God. You do not have to tell a genuine Christian, that he should seek God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. That is now his new nature, and he just does it. You do not have to tell a genuine Christian to read his Bible, or to pray to his heavenly Father, or go to church, or to grow in the Lord, because these are the new things that he always wants to do, because now he is saved, and the nature of Christ has been infused in him. Grace is a complete work of transformation, and none who are

touched by it, remain the same. All who meet Christ, become like Him, in some measure.

4. It is The Transforming Good News

Col 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Eph 2:1-10 And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; **2** Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: **3** Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. **4** But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **5** Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) **6** And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: **7** That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: **9** Not of works, lest any man should boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

There is no possibility, of a person coming under the gracious sound of the gospel, and being called to life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, without being radically transformed into a new creature in Christ. All those who are saved by the gospel of Grace, are changed into new creatures by it. The nature of Grace, is that it regenerates people, birthing them into God's kingdom. A person who is not a new creation, is not in God's kingdom. A person, who is not transformed by the gospel, is simply not saved! This does not mean that Christians are people who have become sinless, or are people who are above temptations, or are people who know everything about God and the Bible. No. Christians are still humans, just like everyone else, but they are humans who have been translated, or who have been brought into God's kingdom of light and truth. This means that they will always exhibit signs of divine life. Because they are now alive, they will automatically act it. They will begin to do things which were formerly repugnant to them. They will actually want to learn about God. They will actually desire to pray and find out God's will for their lives. They are believers now, so everything centers around their new found faith. Christ is now the center of their life, not an obscure, and unknown person out on the periphery somewhere. This is what the gospel always does. This is what the gospel is about. When Christ say's ye shall know them by their fruits, this is what He is talking about. The true believer shows fruit of a new and converted life. What was dead before, now evidences the life of God in it.

People who are translated into Gods kingdom of Light and Life, all enter the kingdom the same way. They become as babes, and enter by a new birth.

Now, babes don't know a lot, about the world into which they are born, but they do have the capacity to grow and to learn things as they grow. Every babe, knows how to eat when he is hungry, and knows how to cry to his mother for food. The same is true in the spiritual realm. The new babes in Christ, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. And indeed they do grow. Grace does not merely begin a good work in their souls, it finishes it, and moves it steadily along till the day they reach heaven itself. And that means that it operates throughout their new life, until it brings them safely home to heaven. They will feed, and grow, learn and struggle, but at last they will all reach heaven, for Christ died to bring them there. He will lose none. So do not insult, Christ, or the gospel, by saying that anyone can be truly saved, without being truly transformed. The notion is ridiculous.

When I see a person, who makes a profession of faith in Christ, but who has no desire for the things of God, no desire to live differently than he did before, he is reluctant to repent of known sins such as pride or idolatry; I know without a doubt that that person is not actually saved. Saved people, bear the fruits that come with being saved. God's children are clearly recognizable. They have definite marks and characteristics, and a lack of desire for Christ is not one of them. A desire to remain worldly is not one of the marks of God's children. A desire to rebel against God's clear words are not marks of being saved. These are marks of being lost. God's children hunger and thirst after righteousness, and that's just the way that it is. They are new creatures, and thus they are changed creatures. No change, means no salvation. That's the way that it is. Because Grace is transformational. The gospel brings a radical cleavage with the old nature, and old ways.

This should make people who are church members in name, but not in actuality, do some heart searching. If you claim to be Christ's but still think the old way, and live the way you want, instead of the way of the kingdom, then you are not saved. Professing Christ without possessing Him, is a serious error, which can send you to hell, even while you are singing in the choir, serving on the deacon board, playing the organ, or are teaching Sunday School. Many who simply say Lord, Lord, will not make it. It is not enough to say, that He is your Lord, you must in fact bow to His Lordship in all things. True Christians become like Christ, because they have been changed by Him. To be hard hearted, and un-submissive to Him, is a sure sign that you do not know Him at all. Many a deacon and board member, will soon kiss the flames of hell. They may have fooled the preacher, and the people in church, but nobody fools God. All saved people are changed people.

I know that this sounds radically different than the modern preaching which seeks to declare that anybody who makes a profession of faith is automatically in the kingdom. Churches who rush people into the fold, who are not truly converted, have to then develop so-called discipleship programs, to train people who are actually lost, how to act and live like Christians when they aren't

Christians at all. This is how so many churches have become overrun with baptized lost people, and how so much worldliness has been welcomed into the body of Christ in recent years. Our methodology of getting people saved is all wrong. Instead of trying to give the lost, assurance that they are not entitled to, simply because they have supposedly asked Jesus to come into their heart, we should concentrate on keeping the lost out of our churches, rather than welcoming them in. I know this sounds unkind, and radical. I know you are thinking that our churches will never grow, if we take this approach. But we should not want our churches to grow, if it means welcoming in the lost at any cost. The church of Christ is an exclusive community of baptized believers only. Christ died for them exclusively, and to invite the devils children in, is high treason against the blood of Christ, who died for a sanctified Bride. Let the lost stay in the world, and keep them from becoming church members. The bride of Christ is composed of only the saved, and the preachers of America, need to quit their apostate practices, quit trying to play the Holy Spirit, quit trying to force people to be saved by persuasion and gimmicks, and return to God's program for getting lost men saved. That program is that we must preach the transforming powerful Grace of God. If it appears as "foolishness" unto them, then so be it. Only the gospel has power to save. If it excludes men, then so be it. If on the other hand, it does what it is supposed to do, and it reaches them and turns them into genuine new creatures, then by all means baptize them and welcome them into your churches. This is God's method. And God's method always works, and it always works perfectly. You cannot improve upon the old fashioned gospel of free and transformative grace.

5. It is the Powerful Good News

Rom 1:16 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.

1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1Th 1:5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance

One of the distinguishing marks of the true gospel, is it's power. It is able to do what it does, and reach even the biggest and worst of sinners with God's love and forgiveness, because it has a power that is not of this world. Paul calls it "the power of God unto salvation". Think about that for a minute. God stoops down and brings His free gift to men, and He is in no way thwarted, or limited, by mans unbelief, stubbornness, resistance, or their perpetual love for darkness, and hatred to truth. That is because the gospel is an otherworldly power, which is able to crush the hardest stones, and turn them into children of Abraham. It's

altogether amazing. There is nothing else like it in the whole universe.

Think about this for a moment. Men listen to the gospel being preached, and it is utter and absolute “foolishness” to them. They laugh at it. They think Christians are idiots. They mock God and the Bible, and all of a sudden, it’s Divine power kicks in, and Guess what? The mockers fall on their faces before God and repent. The scoffers bow before the Lord of Glory, and receive new life. The unbelievers, learn first hand, that this is indeed the power of Great and Living God, and Guess what? When they come under it’s power...They Believe! All of them fall before God and worship, the moment the power kicks in and calls them to life. Nobody can resist it. It is indeed irresistible grace, because the power is from God, and not from this world.

I love to read the stories of great preachers and great sermons, because they always teach us, that the power is of God and not of men. Jonathan Edwards preached his famous revival igniting sermon: “Sinners in the hands of an angry God“, while squinting and holding up his notes, and softly reading them word for word off pieces of paper, in a tone that could be barely heard, by a dim lantern, in drafty church in Enfield, Connecticut, and Guess what? The power of God came, and men thought that the floor was opening up under them and swallowing them alive into hell. Many were saved by that “foolish” preaching, because it is the power of God unto salvation. Anytime the gospel saves men, it does so, by “foolish” preaching. But when it does so, It is always by “foolish” preaching that is miraculously turned powerful, by the Holy Spirit.

God owns His own word, and He alone is able to turn it into a savor of life unto life, in the souls of them whom He wants to save. This is why, I urge all preachers incessantly, to forget about preaching their own human opinions about the word of God. Preach the word itself, and men will come under it’s power. The Gospel is the power of God, and not the power of man. You cannot embellish it, or improve it, by trying to doctor it up, or water it down. If you try to make it appealing unto men, it will lack the power to save them. Who cares if men think it’s foolish? That’s what they are supposed to think, because then when it’s power comes upon them, when it’s irresistible might overtakes them, they will have no explanation for what happened to them, other than the sheer mercy and grace of God. All room for boasting is removed, when the gospel is preached correctly. If men hate it, rebel against it, and resisted, all the better! Because When God turns it’s power on in their life, no man can boast. That’s the way God wants it. As preachers, we must be in agreement with God, if we are going to be used in God’s work of preaching, and God’s great work of gathering souls.

I have studied the great true revivals throughout church history in great detail, and I can tell you assuredly, that in all cases, they came when preaching the gospel was done without compromise, and with the accompanying power of the

Holy Spirit. Revivals are not the effects of man's causation, but are caused exclusively by the mighty power of God's word. They are actual demonstrations, that preaching the truth works! It works far better than men's feeble attempts to organize meetings, and coordinate music, and create an artificial atmosphere. Preaching works, because it is God's power. That's all it takes, and 2000 years of church history backs this up. When are we going to quite trying to organize and schedule revival? God has to send it. And His power is only in one thing..."preach the word"! That's it. Don't try anything else, because nothing else works. "Preach the word", because it is "the power of God unto salvation." No revival has ever come without a return to the word. Hearts are saved and made right, no other way. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

I know, from the authority of the Bible, that this is what our modern church so desperately needs. We do not need better buildings, programs, musicians, accoutrements, or machinery, we need better preaching, and faithful preachers. This is the crying need of our age, when dancing, and drama, and entertainment has replaced the pulpit. We need preachers who will preach the whole counsel of God, and who will not be afraid to let it say what it is says, or will not be intimidated by the worldlings who say it is "foolish". Who cares? Let them say what they say, and think what they think! We preach Christ, and Him crucified! That's what we need, and that's what we should do. If the gospel, is indeed God's power, then in preaching it, we shall be powerful. Powerful preachers are always gospel preachers. And when we have them, and they are preaching as they should. Guess what? Our church will grow. Revival will come. Souls will be saved. Christ will be magnified. The truth will go forth in the beauty of holiness. And Christians will be built up in their most holy faith. But if we preach it not, there will be a dearth in the land. The pulpits will be filled with pansy waist compromisers. The churches will be clogged with lost men trying to enter heaven by good deeds. The love of many will wax cold. And the disguised angels of light, will perpetrate their dark deceptions right in our pews, and right under our noses. It's either preach the word, or suffer the consequences. I think we have suffered the consequences far too long. Let's start preaching!

If you do not want to see God's power at work in your church, then keep on preaching what you are not authorized to preach, and believing what you are not authorized to believe. That's what got us into this 21st century messed up status of pretend church, that we are presently in. Keep on feeding the status quo. Go ahead, keep doing it. If you don't want to see the real power of God in your church, then keep preaching the watered down, weak and powerless humanistic false gospels of the age. They are a dime a dozen. Keep on letting people think that church is about "feeling good", and Christianity is about what greedy people can get from God. Keep on allowing your flock to believe that they are all basically good, and that everybody is going to the same place anyways. Keep on preaching a gospel, which is no gospel at all, if you don't want to see God do anything at all in your community and church. Keep attending your ecumenical

association meetings, and keep pretending that truth, and right, and doctrine, and heaven and hell, are not really important. Go ahead and be a blind guide if you are happy with the deplorable state of Christianity today. But if you want to witness God transforming people, and moving in your midst, then start doing what you need to do, and start preaching the gospel. The power of God accompanies it, and radical, dynamic, and transformative things will always happen where it is preached. When you start preaching it, like it should be preached, unaltered, and undiluted, then God will honor it, and do a work which no man can stop. The church today, needs only one thing. The Gospel, which is God's power unto salvation. May he put it into the hearts of preachers everywhere to return to that, and forsake everything else. There are no substitutes for Gods word, delivered God's way, and activated by God's Spirit. This is the power of life and death. This is the power of truth. This is the power of God. Let us have that, and we will have God's very best for our souls, and for our churches. Without it, we have nothing but dried up husks which the pigs eat. Let us return to our Fathers house, where there is bread enough, and to spare, and He will receive us, and restore us, to our rightful calling and position. Preachers, return to your gospel preaching task, and God will do the rest. Don't worry or fret about your popularity or fame. A church of 10,000 with no gospel, is an abomination. But a church of a few, where Christ is central, and the power of God is operating, is green pasture, and is a bubbling stream of life. Return to gospel preaching, and let God take care of the rest, and you will be an honorable servant your King, and you will be blessed indeed. This is our duty. Let us therefore, be doing this, and nothing more. Let us be preaching this and nothing else. The gospel is the only hope, for the lost, and the only refuge for the saved. Let us be busy with its proclamation then, and God will do everything else. This is the gospel that we need, and that we should love. Let us preach it till we die. And let us preach it faithfully. And God will own it and bless it in our midst. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.