

**THE GOSPEL'S  
POWER AND  
MESSAGE**

# Recovering the Gospel



*The Gospel's Power and Message*

*The Gospel Call and True Conversion*

*Gospel Assurance and Warnings*

# THE GOSPEL'S POWER AND MESSAGE

PAUL WASHER



**Reformation Heritage Books**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*The Gospel's Power and Message*

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Published by

**Reformation Heritage Books**

2965 Leonard St. NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246

e-mail: [orders@heritagebooks.org](mailto:orders@heritagebooks.org)

website: [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org)

*Printed in the United States of America*

12 13 14 15 16 17/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Washer, Paul, 1961-

The Gospel's power and message / Paul Washer.

pages cm. — (Recovering the Gospel)

ISBN 978-1-60178-195-6 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Christian life. 2. Salvation—Biblical teaching. 3. Evangelistic work. I. Title.

BV4501.3.W374 2012

230—dc23

2012035293

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## Series Preface: Recovering the Gospel

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The gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest of all treasures given to the church and the individual Christian. It is not *a* message among many but *the* message above them all. It is the power of God for salvation and the greatest revelation of the manifold wisdom of God to men and angels.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that the apostle Paul gave the gospel the first place in his preaching, endeavored with all his might to proclaim it clearly, and even pronounced a curse upon all those who would pervert its truth.<sup>2</sup>

Each generation of Christians is a steward of the gospel message, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God calls upon us to guard this treasure that has been entrusted to us.<sup>3</sup> If we are to be faithful stewards, we must be absorbed in the study of the gospel, take great pains to understand its truths, and pledge ourselves to guard its contents.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, we will ensure salvation both for ourselves and for those who hear us.<sup>5</sup>

This stewardship drives me to write these books. I have little desire for the hard work of writing, and there is certainly no lack of Christian books, but I have put the following collection of sermons in written form for the same reason that I preached them: to be free from their burden. Like Jeremiah, if I do not speak forth this message, “then...in my heart [it becomes] like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.”<sup>6</sup> As the apostle Paul exclaimed, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”<sup>7</sup>

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1. Romans 1:16; Ephesians 3:10

2. 1 Corinthians 15:3; Colossians 4:4; Galatians 1:8–9

3. 2 Timothy 1:14

4. 1 Timothy 4:15

5. 1 Timothy 4:16

6. Jeremiah 20:9

7. 1 Corinthians 9:16

As is commonly known, the word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangélion*, which is properly translated “good news.” In one sense, every page of Scripture contains the gospel, but in another sense, the gospel refers to a very specific message—the salvation accomplished for a fallen people through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In accordance with the Father’s good pleasure, the eternal Son, who is equal with the Father and is the exact representation of His nature, willingly left the glory of heaven, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and was born the God-man: Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>8</sup> As a man, He walked on this earth in perfect obedience to the law of God.<sup>9</sup> In the fullness of time, men rejected and crucified Him. On the cross, He bore man’s sin, suffered God’s wrath, and died in man’s place.<sup>10</sup> On the third day, God raised Him from the dead. This resurrection is the divine declaration that the Father has accepted His Son’s death as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus paid the penalty for man’s disobedience, satisfied the demands of justice, and appeased the wrath of God.<sup>11</sup> Forty days after the resurrection, the Son of God ascended into the heavens, sat down at the right hand of the Father, and was given glory, honor, and dominion over all.<sup>12</sup> There, in the presence of God, He represents His people and makes requests to God on their behalf.<sup>13</sup> All who acknowledge their sinful, helpless state and throw themselves upon Christ, God will fully pardon, declare righteous, and reconcile unto Himself.<sup>14</sup> This is the gospel of God and of Jesus Christ, His Son.

One of the greatest crimes committed by this present Christian generation is its neglect of the gospel, and it is from this neglect that all our other maladies spring forth. The lost world is not so much gospel hardened as it is gospel ignorant because many of those who proclaim the gospel are also ignorant of its most basic truths. The essential themes that make up the very core of the gospel—the justice of God, the radical depravity of man, the blood atonement, the nature of true conversion,

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8. Acts 2:23; Hebrews 1:3; Philippians 2:6–7; Luke 1:35

9. Hebrews 4:15

10. 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Isaiah 53:10

11. Luke 24:6; Romans 1:4; Romans 4:25

12. Hebrews 1:3; Matthew 28:18; Daniel 7:13–14

13. Luke 24:51; Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 7:25

14. Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9; Philippians 3:3



and the biblical basis of assurance—are absent from too many pulpits. Churches reduce the gospel message to a few creedal statements, teach that conversion is a mere human decision, and pronounce assurance of salvation over anyone who prays the sinner’s prayer.

The result of this gospel reductionism has been far-reaching. First, it further hardens the hearts of the unconverted. Few modern-day “converts” ever make their way into the fellowship of the church, and those who do often fall away or have lives marked by habitual carnality. Untold millions walk our streets and sit in our pews unchanged by the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and yet they are convinced of their salvation because one time in their life they raised a hand at an evangelistic campaign or repeated a prayer. This false sense of security creates a great barrier that often insulates such individuals from ever hearing the true gospel.

Secondly, such a gospel deforms the church from a spiritual body of regenerated believers into a gathering of carnal men who profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him.<sup>15</sup> With the preaching of the true gospel, men come to the church without gospel entertainment, special activities, or the promise of benefits beyond those offered by the gospel. Those who come do so because they desire Christ and are hungry for biblical truth, heartfelt worship, and opportunities for service. When the church proclaims a lesser gospel, it fills up with carnal men who share little interest in the things of God, and the maintenance of such men is a heavy burden upon the church.<sup>16</sup> The church then tones down the radical demands of the gospel to a convenient morality, and true devotion to Christ gives way to activities designed to meet the felt needs of its members. The church becomes activity-driven rather than Christ-centered, and it carefully filters or repackages the truth so as not to offend the carnal majority. The church lays aside the great truths of Scripture and orthodox Christianity, and pragmatism (i.e., whatever keeps the church going and growing) becomes the rule of the day.

Thirdly, such a gospel reduces evangelism and missions to little more than a humanistic endeavor driven by clever marketing strategies based upon a careful study of the latest trends in culture. After years of witnessing the impotence of an unbiblical gospel, many evangelicals seem convinced that the gospel will not work and that man has somehow

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15. Titus 1:16

16. 1 Corinthians 2:14

become too complex a being to be saved and transformed by such a simple and scandalous message. There is now more emphasis on understanding our fallen culture and its fads than on understanding and proclaiming the only message that has the power to save it. As a result, the gospel is constantly being repackaged to fit what contemporary culture deems most relevant. We have forgotten that the true gospel is always relevant to every culture because it is God's eternal word to every man.

Fourthly, such a gospel brings reproach to the name of God. Through the proclamation of a lesser gospel, the carnal and unconverted come into the fellowship of the church, and through the almost total neglect of biblical church discipline, they are allowed to stay without correction or reproof. This soils the purity and reputation of the church and blasphemes the name of God among the unbelieving.<sup>17</sup> In the end, God is not glorified, the church is not edified, the unconverted church member is not saved, and the church has little or no witness to the unbelieving world.

It does not become us as ministers or laymen to stand so near and do nothing when we see "the glorious gospel of our blessed God" replaced by a gospel of lesser glory.<sup>18</sup> As stewards of this trust, we have a duty to recover the one true gospel and proclaim it boldly and clearly to all. We would do well to pay heed to the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

In these days, I feel bound to go over the elementary truths of the gospel repeatedly. In peaceful times, we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth which lie far afield; but now we must stay at home, and guard the hearts and homes of the church by defending the first principles of the faith. In this age, there have risen up in the church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach, and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe, and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the word of life, and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Romans 2:24

18. 1 Timothy 1:11

19. Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (repr., Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications), 32:385.

Although the *Recovering the Gospel* series does not represent an entirely systematic presentation of the gospel, it does address most of the essential elements, especially those that are most neglected in contemporary Christianity. It is my hope that these words might be a guide to help you rediscover the gospel in all its beauty, scandal, and saving power. It is my prayer that such a rediscovery might transform your life, strengthen your proclamation, and bring the greatest glory to God.

Your brother,  
Paul David Washer



# **PART ONE**

## **An Apostolic Introduction**



*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*

—1 Corinthians 15:1–4



## CHAPTER ONE



# A Gospel to Know and Make Known

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*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you.*

—1 Corinthians 15:1

A writer or preacher would be hard-pressed to produce a better introduction to the gospel of Jesus Christ than the apostle Paul gives to the church in Corinth.<sup>1</sup> In these few lines, he provides enough truth to live on for a lifetime and to bring us home to glory. Only the Holy Spirit could enable a man to say so much, so clearly, and in so few words.

### **KNOWING THE GOSPEL**

In this small portion of Scripture, we find a truth that all of us must rediscover. The gospel is not merely an introductory message to Christianity—it is *the* message of Christianity, and the believer would do well to give his life in the pursuit of knowing its glory and making its glory known. There are many things to be known in this world and countless truths to be investigated within the realm of Christianity itself; nevertheless, the glorious gospel of our blessed God and His Son Jesus Christ ranks high above them all.<sup>2</sup> It is the message of our salvation, the means of our progress toward sanctification, and the pristine fountain from which flows every pure and right motivation for the Christian life. The believer who has comprehended something of its content and character will never lack in zeal nor be so impoverished that he seeks to draw strength from broken, waterless cisterns hewn by the hands of men.<sup>3</sup>

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1. 1 Corinthians 15:1–4

2. 1 Timothy 1:11

3. Jeremiah 2:13; 14:3

First Corinthians 15:1 explains that the apostle had already preached the gospel to the church in Corinth. In fact, he was their father in the faith!<sup>4</sup> Yet he sees the greatest need to continue teaching the gospel to them—not only to remind them of its essential ingredients, but also to expand their knowledge of it. At their conversion, they had only just begun a journey of discovery that would encompass their entire life and carry on through the endless ages of eternity, discovering the glories of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As preachers and congregants, we would be wise to see the gospel anew through the eyes of this ancient apostle and to esteem it worthy of a lifetime of careful investigation. For though we may have already lived many years in the faith; though we may possess the intellect of Edwards and the insight of Spurgeon; though we may have memorized every biblical text concerning the gospel; and though we may have digested every publication from the early church fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, and up through the scholars of this present age, we can be assured that we have not yet even reached the foothills of this Everest that we call the gospel. Even after an eternity of eternities the same will be said of us!

We live in a world that offers us an almost infinite number of possibilities, and countless options vie for our attention. The same may be said of Christianity and the broad range of theological themes that a student might pursue. There is an almost infinite number of biblical truths that a man might spend a lifetime examining. However, one theme rises above them all and is foundational to the understanding of all other biblical truth: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through this singular message, God's power manifests itself most in the church and in the life of the individual believer.

As we look through the annals of Christian history, we see men and women of unusual passion for God and His kingdom. We long to be like them, and we wonder how they came to have such enduring fire. After a careful consideration of their lives, doctrine, and ministries, we find that they differed in many things, but there was one common denominator among them: they had all caught a glimpse of the glory of the gospel, and its beauty kindled their passion and drove them on. Their lives and legacies prove that genuine and enduring passion comes from an ever-increasing, ever-deepening understanding of what God has done for His

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4. 1 Corinthians 4:15



people in the person and work of Jesus Christ. For such knowledge there is no substitute!

In days gone by, the Christian gospel was often referred to as the *evangel*, from the Latin word *evangelium*, meaning gospel or good news. It is for this reason that believers are often referred to as evangelicals. We are Christians because we find our identity, life, and purpose in Christ. We are evangelical because we believe the gospel and esteem it as the great central truth of God's revelation to men. It is not a foreword, a byword, or an afterthought; it is not merely the introductory class to Christianity; it is the entire course of study. It is the story of our lives, the unfathomable riches we seek to explore, and the message we live to proclaim. For this reason, we are most Christian and most evangelical when the gospel of Jesus Christ is our one hope, our one boast, and our one magnificent obsession.

Today, evangelicals design so many conferences, especially for our youth, with the intention of exciting the believer's passion through fellowship, music, eloquent speakers, emotional stories, and impassioned pleas. Yet whatever excitement they create often quickly vanishes. In the end, these experiences build little fires in little hearts that burn out in a few days.

We have forgotten that genuine, enduring passion is born out of one's knowledge of the truth, and specifically the truth of the gospel. The more you know or comprehend its beauty, the more its power will apprehend you. One glimpse of the gospel will move the truly regenerate heart to follow. Every greater glimpse will quicken its pace until it is running recklessly toward the prize.<sup>5</sup> The truly Christian heart cannot resist such beauty. This is the great need of the day! It is what we have lost and what we must regain—a passion for knowing the gospel and an equal passion for making the gospel known.

### **MAKING THE GOSPEL KNOWN**

The apostle Paul was one of the greatest human instruments of the kingdom of God in the history of humanity and the story of redemption. He was responsible for the spread of the gospel throughout the entire Roman Empire during a time of almost unequalled persecution, and he is

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5. Philippians 3:13–14

an outstanding example of what it means to be a Christian minister. Yet he accomplished all of this through the simple proclamation of the most scandalous message ever to reach the ears of men. Paul was an exceptionally gifted man, especially with regard to his intellect and zeal. Yet he himself taught us that the power of his ministry did not lie in his gifting, but in the faithful proclamation of the gospel. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes his great disclaimer: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.... For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

The apostle Paul was, above everything else, a preacher. Like Jeremiah before him, he was constrained to preach. The gospel was like a burning fire shut up in his bones that he could not hold in.<sup>7</sup> To the Corinthians, he declared, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken,"<sup>8</sup> and also, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"<sup>9</sup> Such a high estimation of the gospel and the preaching of it cannot be feigned when it does not exist in the heart of the preacher, and it cannot be hidden when it does.

God calls all types of men to carry the burden of the gospel message. Some of them are more solemn and grave, while others are more lighthearted and jovial. Yet when the conversation turns to the gospel, a change comes upon a preacher's countenance, and it seems as though an entirely different person is standing before us. Eternity is etched across his face, the veil has been removed, and the glory of the gospel shines forth with an unfabricated passion. Such a man has little time for quaint stories, moral antidotes, or sharing thoughts from his heart. He has come to preach, and preach he must! He cannot rest until the people have heard from God. If Abraham's servant could not eat until he had delivered the message of his master Abraham,<sup>10</sup> how much less can the

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6. 1 Corinthians 1:17, 22-24

7. Jeremiah 20:9

8. 2 Corinthians 4:13 KJV

9. 1 Corinthians 9:16

10. Genesis 24:33

gospel preacher stand at ease until he has delivered the gospel treasure entrusted to him!<sup>11</sup>

Although few would disagree with what we have said so far, it seems that for the most part, such impassioned preaching has gone out of style. Many would say it lacks the refinement and sophistication that are necessary to be effective in this modern era. The postmodern man, who prefers a bit more humility and openness to other viewpoints, considers a passionate preacher who proclaims the truth boldly and unapologetically to be an obstacle. The majority argument is that we simply must change the way we preach because it *just looks foolish* to the world.

Such an attitude toward preaching is proof that we have lost our bearings in the evangelical community. It is God who has ordained the “foolishness of preaching” to be the instrument for bringing the saving message of the gospel to the world.<sup>12</sup> That is not to say that preaching should be foolish, illogical, or outlandish. However, Scripture is the standard for all preaching, not the contemporary opinions of a fallen and corrupt culture that is wise in its own eyes and that would rather have its ears tickled and its heart entertained than to hear the Word of the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

Everywhere the apostle Paul traveled, he preached the gospel, and we would do well to follow his example. Although the gospel may be shared through many mediums, there is no medium so ordained by God as that of preaching. Therefore, those who are constantly seeking innovative means to communicate the gospel to a new generation of seekers would do well to begin and end their search in the Scriptures. Those who would send out thousands of questionnaires asking the unconverted what they would desire most in a worship service should realize that ten thousand unanimous opinions of carnal men do not carry the authority of one jot or tittle of God’s Word.<sup>14</sup> We must understand that there is a great gulf of irreconcilable differences between what God has ordained in the Scriptures and what our present carnal culture desires.

We should not be amazed that carnal men both inside and outside the church desire drama, music, and media in the place of gospel preaching and biblical exposition. Until God regenerates a man’s heart, that man

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11. Galatians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14; Titus 1:3

12. 1 Corinthians 1:21

13. Romans 1:22; 2 Timothy 4:3

14. Matthew 5:18

will address the gospel in the same way the demons of the Gadarenes addressed the Lord Jesus Christ: "What have we to do with You?"<sup>15</sup> The carnal man can have no true interest or appreciation in the gospel apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and yet this miracle takes place in the heart of a man through the gospel preaching which he at first disdains. Therefore, we must preach to carnal men the very message they do not want to hear, and the Spirit must work! Apart from this, sinners can no more see beauty in the gospel than a swine can find beauty in pearls, or a dog can show reverence toward sanctified meat, or a blind man can appreciate a Rembrandt.<sup>16</sup> Preachers do no service to carnal men by giving them the very things their fallen hearts desire, but preachers do serve men by putting true food before them until, by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, they recognize it for what it is and they taste and see that the Lord is good.<sup>17</sup>

Before we conclude this brief discussion of gospel preaching, we must address one final issue. Some theorize that our present culture cannot tolerate the type of preaching that was so effective during the great awakenings and revivals of the past. The preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, and other like-minded preachers would be ridiculed, lampooned, and laughed to scorn by modern man. Yet this theory fails to take into account that in their day, men ridiculed and lampooned these preachers! True gospel preaching will always be foolishness to every culture. Any attempt to remove the offense and make preaching "appropriate" diminishes the power of the gospel. It also defeats the purpose for which God chose preaching as the means of saving men—that men's hope might not rest in refinement, eloquence, or worldly wisdom, but in the power of God.<sup>18</sup>

We live in a culture bound by sin like bands of iron. Moral stories, quaint maxims, and life lessons shared from the heart of a beloved pulpiteer or spiritual life coach have no real power against such darkness. We need preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ who know the Scriptures, and by God's grace face any culture with the cry, "Thus saith the Lord!"

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15. Matthew 8:29

16. Matthew 7:6

17. Isaiah 55:1–2; Psalm 34:8

18. 1 Corinthians 1:27–30