

LET'S PREACH
THE
GOSPEL

**Do You Recognize the Importance
of Preaching the Gospel to
Both the Unsaved and the Saved?**

*For the message of the cross is foolishness
to those who are perishing, but to us who are
being saved it is the power of God.*

- 1 Corinthians 1:18 -

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Let's Preach the Gospel: Do You Recognize the Importance of Preaching the Gospel to Both the Unsaved and the Saved?

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PREFACE

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest message a voice could ever utter and an ear could ever hear. But when I have asked people over the years, "What is the Gospel?" they have normally given me a fuzzy or inaccurate answer to this crucial question. My desire in writing this booklet, which was first printed as a series of articles in the *Grace Family Journal*, is to highlight ten scriptural principles about the Gospel of God's grace. In doing so, may the Holy Spirit open the spiritual understanding of both the unsaved and the saved to the importance, content, evidences, and correct response to the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is my prayer God will raise up a generation of believers in Christ who clearly and compassionately proclaim the Gospel far and near to a lost world and a confused church that need a crisp answer to the plea of desperation of the perishing who ask, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). To God be the glory!

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

A BIBLICAL BALANCE NEEDED

The apostle Paul begins the great “resurrection” chapter of the Bible (1 Corinthians 15) by writing:

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)

Someone has wisely said, “It is not merely what you teach, but what you *emphasize* that people remember.” If this is true, it is interesting to notice the imbalances and extremes prevalent in evangelical, Bible-believing circles when it comes to preaching the Gospel.

Unfortunately, there are some churches where little of the Bible is taught from the pulpit as sermonettes for Christianettes are given. Yet in some Bible-teaching churches a Gospel message is preached every Sunday as the saints are evangelized week after week. However, the other extreme (often reacting to this) has pastors seldom preaching the Gospel, unless the immediate text they are covering addresses it. Does it have to be one extreme or the other? Can’t one teach “all the counsel of God” while still emphasizing “the Gospel”? I believe the solution to this imbalance is to consider ten principles from the ministry of the apostle Paul regarding this matter of preaching the Gospel and its scriptural emphasis.

PRINCIPLE 1

Pastors need to KEEP PREACHING and believers need to KEEP HEARING THE GOSPEL.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel...
(1 Corinthians 15:1a)

Paul begins chapter 15 by writing, “*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel.*” This passage is the most definitive section in the entire New Testament regarding the *content* of the Gospel. Interestingly enough, it was *not* even written to unbelievers, but it was penned to *believers* (“*brethren*”).

The word “*declare*” (*gnōrizō*) means “to make something known which was previously unknown or to assert things already known.” In the case of these Corinthian believers, they had already heard and received the Gospel message a few years before. What Paul expounds and explains in the following verses is the precise content of his evangelistic preaching when he arrived in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Yet, Paul believed they still needed to hear it again. In fact, this is not the first time that Paul made reference to the Gospel in this epistle of 1 Corinthians.

In chapters one through four the apostle addressed the problem of *carnal divisions* in this church due to *human wisdom* and focusing on *human leaders* (1:10-13; 3:1-4). Paul’s solution was to focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ which smashes human wisdom, elevates God’s grace, and helps one realize that God’s messengers are but servants of the Lord by whom the Corinthians had believed.

*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 the*

message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, **it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.** (1 Corinthians 1:17-21)

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, **that no flesh should glory in His presence.** But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "**He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.**" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but **ministers through whom you believed**, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is **anything**, nor he who waters, but **God who gives the increase.** Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (1 Corinthians 3:5-8)

*For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now **if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?** (1 Corinthians 4:7)*

Re-sharpening the focus of these carnal believers back to the Gospel of Jesus Christ was God's solution for this problem of human wisdom and its unbiblical elevation of human personalities.

In chapter five, *church discipline* is commanded by Paul to address the sexual sin of "*fornication*" (incest) by a believer in the church. In doing so, he again reminds these believers of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed **Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.** (1 Corinthians 5:7)*

In the beginning of chapter six the ugly problem of *believers suing other believers* by going before the unsaved is tackled. How does Paul begin and close this section?

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? (1 Corinthians 6:1)

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. **But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.** (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)*

In the last half of 1 Corinthians 6, *the misuse of the believer's physical body* is challenged. What is the basis of the correction?

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? **For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*** (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul hits head-on the issue of love and the proper use of a Christian's liberty. While one may be free to partake of meat from the temple, believers are warned:

*But beware lest somehow **this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.** For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, **for whom Christ died?*** (1 Corinthians 8:9-11)

First Corinthians 9 continues the theme of a believer's liberty as it relates to Paul's apostolic ministry. And what was the focus of his ministry?

*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who **preach the gospel** should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.*

*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, **woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!** For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, **I have been entrusted with a stewardship.***

*What is my reward then? That **when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ** without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:14-18)*

While correcting the Corinthian believers' terrible misuse of the Lord's Supper, the apostle to the Gentiles reminds them of what the elements symbolize and how they needed to examine themselves so as to partake in a worthy fashion.

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is **My body** which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

*In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in **My blood**. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the **Lord's death** till He comes.*

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Now here in chapter 15, again the beloved Paul refers to the Gospel in order to warn about a *serious doctrinal deviation* threatening the Corinthian church.

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

As one considers these various passages, one truth becomes very clear. While a teacher of the Word of God needs to teach the whole counsel of God and to address the various problems within the church as they arise, the focus of their preaching needs to be on **Jesus Christ** and **the Gospel**. This leads to Christ-centered preaching. That alone will bring the believer's focus back to the true essence of biblical Christianity which centers in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In emphasizing the centrality of Jesus Christ in our preaching, Warren Wiersbe writes:

I suggest that preaching Christ means proclaiming the Word of God in such a way that Jesus Christ is clearly presented in all the fullness of His person and the greatness of His work. He is glorified as the eternal Son of God, Creator, Savior of the world Lord of history, and Head of the church. He is magnified as the heart of every Christian doctrine and the motivation for every Christian duty. When Christ is preached the Holy Spirit can use the message to enable God's people to respond to Christ with greater love, faith, and obedience and to draw unbelievers to Christ in saving faith.¹

In his often quotable way, Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers of the nineteenth century emphatically declared:

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Dynamics of Preaching* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), pp. 31-32.

If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ's name in it, it ought to be his last, and certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach.²

Spurgeon goes on to state without apology:

The best sermons are the sermons which are fullest of Christ. A sermon without Christ is an awful, a horrible thing. It is an empty well; it is a cloud without rain; it is a tree twice dead plucked up by the roots.³

Dear reader, this is no artificial emphasis in the New Testament *epistles*, as revealed by the words that are employed. Referring to Jesus Christ and His finished work, we find the following words used (and there are even more!):

THE EMPHASIS OF THE EPISTLES

- "Jesus" (at least 260 times)
- "Christ" (at least 330 times)
- "Lord" (at least 210 times)
- "Jesus Christ" (at least 216 times)
- "Lord Jesus Christ" (at least 96 times)
- "gospel" (at least 72 times)
- "blood" (at least 17 times)
- "cross" (at least 10 times)
- "sacrifice" (at least 5 times)
- "death" or "died" (at least 20 times)
- "gave Himself" (at least 5 times)
- "offered" or "offering" (at least 7 times)
- "propitiation" (at least 3 times)
- "redemption" (at least 5 times)

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 13, p. 489.

³ Quoted in Ralph G. Turnbull, *A Minister's Obstacles* (Revell, New York, 1946), p. 45.

These all considered, Jesus Christ and His finish work are referred to at least *1,250 times* in the epistles alone, or approximately *10 times per chapter*. It is safe to say that this is *no small emphasis!*

Thus, the cross-work of Christ becomes:

- the means of *propitiation* (Romans 3:25)
- the ground for *justification* (Romans 5:9)
- the reason for *reconciliation* (Romans 5:10)
- the focus of the *Lord's Supper* (1 Corinthians 11:25-26)
- the basis of *redemption* (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19)
- the means for the *forgiveness of sins* (Colossians 1:14)
- the means of *Jew and Gentile unity* in the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:13-16)
- the basis of *access to God* (Hebrews 10:19)
- the ground of *sanctification* (Hebrews 10:29)
- the *example of separation* from religious systems (Hebrews 13:11-12)
- the basis of the *everlasting covenant* (Hebrews 13:20)
- the means of *practical sanctification* (1 John 1:7)
- the power of *salvation* (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18)
- the means by which *the world was crucified unto the believer and vice versa* (Galatians 6:14)
- the *supreme example* of considering the needs of others in doing God's will (Philippians 2:5-8)
- the means of *destroying false concepts of spirituality* such as legalism, mysticism and asceticism (Galatians; Colossians 2:8-23)
- the *pattern for husbands* to follow in loving their wives (Ephesians 5:25)
- the means of *destroying Satan's domain* (Hebrews 2:14-15)

- the way of breaking the previous master-slave relationship of the sin nature over the believer via identification with Christ (Romans 6)
- the basis of *hope and comfort in the Rapture* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
- the *example and encouragement to love others* (Ephesians 5:1-2)
- the reason *believers will escape the day of the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10)
- the *greatest motivator to live for Jesus Christ* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- the basis of *eternal security* (Romans 8:31-39)
- the *reason to pray for the lost* (1 Timothy 2:1-6)
- the basis for *living a post-salvation life zealous of good works* (Titus 2:14)

Are you catching the point? The cross of Christ is the basis of our spiritual blessings in Christ and integrally connected to a worthy walk in Christ. As my good friend Jay Chappell says, "We must never wander from the shadow of the cross."

In contemplating this truth a number of years ago the thought dawned on me, "If in 20 minutes I can read Philippians, and if Paul could refer to the Gospel several times within four chapters, shouldn't I be including it in a 60 minute message?" Bible-believing pastors, I exhort you: believers, like the unsaved, *need to hear the Gospel*.

Unfortunately, there are too many believers in Christ who are like the Athenian philosophers of Mars Hill who "*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.*" (Acts 17:21)

I have found in my teaching that communicating the Gospel on a regular basis has been beneficial for several reasons.

- 1) It has kept the focus on our Lord Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

- 2) It has helped in establishing new believers in the truth of salvation and their riches in Christ.

If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:23)

- 3) It has laid the groundwork for explaining how to live the Christian life by grace, just like one has been saved from sin's penalty.

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. (Colossians 2:6)

- 4) I often present the Gospel early in my message to set the doctrinal context for specific truths we are studying.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)

- 5) Bringing in the Gospel helps further equip believers as to how they can explain the plan of salvation to the unsaved as opportunities arise.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work

of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:11-12)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

- 6) It has proved beneficial for the unsaved who are visiting our church as they hear the preaching of the cross.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:14-17)

Dear friend, can you join the glad refrain, which says:

<i>I love to tell the story,</i>	<i>'Twill be the old, old story</i>
<i>For those who know it best.</i>	<i>That I have loved so long.</i>
<i>Seem hungering and thirsting</i>	<i>I love to tell the story!</i>
<i>To hear it like the rest.</i>	<i>'Twill be my theme in glory</i>
<i>And when in scenes of glory,</i>	<i>To tell the old, old story</i>
<i>I sing the new, new song,</i>	<i>Of Jesus and His love.⁴</i>

⁴ *I Love to Tell the Story*, Words by Katherine Hankey, 1866.

PRINCIPLE 2

The Gospel, by its very nature, is GOOD NEWS FROM GOD TO MAN.

... *the gospel*... (1 Corinthians 15:1b)

The word “gospel” (*euangelion*) literally means “good message or good news.” Paul employs this term to refer to:

- the Gospel of *the grace of God*
But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)
- the Gospel of *God*
Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God. (Romans 1:1)
- the Gospel of *His Son*
For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers. (Romans 1:9)
- the Gospel of *Christ*
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16)
- the Gospel of *peace*
And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15)
- the Gospel of *your salvation*
In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word

of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. (Ephesians 1:13)

The Gospel is the greatest message of good news that anyone could ever hear and that any believer could ever preach. This is why Paul wrote to the Romans saying:

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:14-17)

Dear believers, the Gospel is *good news from God*. It is good news that is "*the power of God to salvation*," starting with *justification* before God (Romans 3-5), *sanctification* in time (Romans 6:1-8:17), and *glorification* in the future (Romans 8:18-39). Responding by faith to God's Gospel of grace not only results in an actual change in your destiny (from a Hell you deserve to a Heaven you don't), but to a potential transformation in your daily living, while you wait for the day God will take you home to Heaven—saved by grace! No wonder we should "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*" (Philippians 4:4).

Dear believers, in a world of delusion and lies, and which bad news dominates every headline of the daily newspaper, God wants you to personally know, believe, and proclaim the *good news* of the Gospel of grace.

PRINCIPLE 3

The Gospel is the message which BELIEVERS ARE TO PROCLAIM TO THE LOST.

...I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you... (1 Corinthians 15:1c)

The word “preached” (*euangelizō*) is the verb form of our noun *euangelion* (“gospel”). What did Paul preach when he visited Corinth on his missionary journeys? Literally, he “gospelled” the Gospel. He preached the good news of the Good News.

This is very noteworthy, for Corinth was a morally vile city. Yet when Paul came into town, he did not start the Moral Majority, or picket the local abortion clinics, or placard the gay bars in town. Paul did not get on Christian radio and bemoan the corruption of the present political administration. Furthermore, he did not join hands with apostate religion in an effort to clean up the town. So what *did* he do?

*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom **declaring to you the testimony of God.** For I determined not to know anything among you except **Jesus Christ and Him crucified.***

*I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.** (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)*

He preached *Christ crucified*! And what did God do? He used the message of the Gospel to save for eternity those who believed in Christ alone. Wow! God *then*

began to transform their lives, first having changed their destinies.

Evangelicalism is so misfocused today as believers are entrapped in “good cause” syndromes ad infinitum, ad nauseam, at the expense of the Gospel. Dr. J. Vernon McGee said it well years ago on his *Through the Bible* radio ministry: “God did *not* call believers to clean up the fish bowl. *He called us to catch fish.*” I wonder how much time, energy, and money is being spent by believers to clean up the fish bowl? If the same resources were utilized by the church to catch fish through preaching the Gospel, don’t you think the results would be far better? And what eternal value is there any way in a drunk going to Hell sober?

Christian radio talk shows beautifully illustrate this modern day misfocus. A few years ago I challenged Christians to listen for one week and count the times the name “Clinton” comes up, versus how many times the name “Jesus Christ” is mentioned. And this is a *Christian* talk show? I assure you that there was more focus on President Bill Clinton than on Jesus Christ. What a tragedy! And while I am deeply concerned about the moral decay of our society, we must remember the clear mandate of God!

*And He said to them, **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*** (Mark 16:15)

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*** (Acts 1:8)

*Now then, **we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.***
(2 Corinthians 5:20)

Do not misunderstand me, as I am greatly saddened and concerned about how many precious babies have died via abortion since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. Yet, I am even more concerned about how many precious adults have died without Christ and have gone to an eternal Hell during the same time.

Dear believer, I exhort you to consider this challenge. If you would go to a caucus to promote pro-life or write your congressperson to oppose government legislation while never going with the Gospel to your neighbor, workmate, friends of family, and others, you are not only *not* catching fish but you have totally missed the entire boat!

May the mandate of God, the love of Christ, and the destiny of the lost compel us to go and preach the Gospel to those who are perishing. This encouragement is also needed for churches where believers are taught sound doctrine but lack evangelistic vision. Too often, believers get spiritually “fat,” inverted, and may have little vision or burden to win the lost to Christ. Let us *not* be Arctic-River Christians—frozen at the mouth. Who knows, the fish might be biting!

Years ago the late Dr. C.I. Scofield answered this relevant question in his book *The Question Box*:

The Question: “Is it not part of the mission of the church to correct the social evils of our day?”

His Answer: “The Church has but one mission, defined in Luke 24:47, 48; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; and the Church works most powerfully toward the solution of social problems not by turning reformer, but by preaching the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. When Christ was on earth all the social problems—slavery, intemperance, prostitution, unequal distribu-

tion of wealth, oppression of the weak by the strong—were at their worst. To cure them He put into the world one message—the Gospel, one means—regeneration, one agency—the Holy Spirit in the church. The best help a pastor can bring to the social problems of his community is to humble himself before God, forsake his sins, receive the filling with the Holy Spirit, and preach a pure Gospel in tender love.”

My response to this is a hearty “Amen!” The Gospel is the message which believers are to proclaim to the lost.

PRINCIPLE 4

Hearing the Gospel is not enough as PEOPLE NEED TO PERSONALLY RECEIVE IT.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you,... which also you received...
(1 Corinthians 15:1d)

These Corinthians did not merely hear the Gospel of salvation via Paul, *they received it*. The verb “received” is in the aorist tense referring to a completed past event. The Gospel is received when one *believes* it (15:2, 11). The active voice of this verb indicates that the Corinthians chose to receive it. The indicative mood shows that their reception was actual, not superficial.

Hence it is that a simple trust in the Savior opens the way into the infinite power and grace of God. It is “*unto everyone that believeth,*” “*for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*” This one word “believe” represents all a sinner can do and all a sinner must do to be saved. It is believing the record God has given of His Son. In this record it is stated that He has entered into all the needs of our lost condition and is alive from the dead to be a living Savior to all who put their trust in Him.⁵

Dear reader, while the Gospel is good news from God about His gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, it is of no personal value to you until you receive it or accept it by believing it. Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone and His finished work on the cross for you? Christ believed is the Gospel received.

⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation* (A Clear Doctrinal Analysis), Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), pp. 31, 33.

*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. **But as many as received Him**, to them He gave the right to become children of God, **to those who believe in His name.** (John 1:11-12)*

PRINCIPLE 5

BELIEVERS need to STAND for THE GOSPEL.

...and in which you stand... (1 Corinthians 15:1e)

"In which" refers back to "the Gospel which I preached unto you." The perfect tense of "stand" is employed to indicate a past event with abiding results in the present. Paul not only preached the Gospel to the Corinthians resulting in their salvation upon receiving it, but they chose in the past and continued in the present to take a definite stand for the Gospel message. How this is needed in our day!

Due to the intense desire for human approval and ecumenical unity, coupled with a sappy sentimentality disguised as "love," it has become unpopular to take a stand for the Gospel. Instead, the world's spirit of "toleration" and "compromise" has beaten down ministries which once stood for the Gospel of grace. This is a snare of Satan. We fear being labeled as "unloving," "judgmental," "critical," and "narrow-minded," even by other so-called believers. The pragmatic practice of the "end justifies the means" has dominated evangelicalism for the last forty years resulting in the line of demarcation between truth and error being seriously blurred. May God raise up a generation of believers who will *"hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 1:13), even if they must suffer because of it. Have we forgotten the following:

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. (Philippians 1:29)

*And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then **the offense of the cross has ceased.*** (Galatians 5:11)

*But we preach Christ crucified, **to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.*** (1 Corinthians 1:23)

*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? **For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*** (Galatians 1:10)

*Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, **for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.*** (2 Timothy 2:8)

A stand for the Gospel does not happen by accident. It must be chosen (active voice of “stand”) due to strong biblical convictions that the Gospel is true, coupled with a desire to please God and not man.

Does this describe you? Are you willing to take a stand for the Gospel of grace in a day of unholy alliances and doctrinal compromise? If you are wavering, perhaps a reminder of the stark reality of the evaluation of your post-salvation works at the judgment seat of Christ can pierce your conscience into the Pauline mindset of 2 Corinthians 5:9-11:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

(2 Corinthians 5:9-11)

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

PRINCIPLE 6

The Gospel offers the good news of SALVATION to us.

...by which also you are saved...(1 Corinthians 15:2a)

"By which" refers back again to the Gospel which Paul preached and which they had received and stood for.

"You are saved" is a present, passive, indicative verb. The passive voice clearly indicates that no sinner can save himself or herself; it is *God* alone who saves us. The indicative mood is the mood of fact or assumed reality. This means one's salvation by God's grace is not a "hope-so" one, but a "know-so" one.

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may **know that you have eternal life**, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)*

The present tense of "saved" may be viewed in two possible ways. First, Paul may be communicating that these Corinthians via the Gospel were being presently saved from the *power of sin* in their Christian lives as long as they remained steadfast to the Gospel, just like they had been saved from the *penalty of sin* (Hell) when they had trusted in Christ. In other words, the Gospel they had received would continue to have saving effects from spiritual damage upon their lives "if you hold fast the word which I preached to you."

In the second view, the apostle may be indicating that the Gospel continues to bear fruit in Corinth by various sinners continuing to receive it, and as a result being "saved."⁶

⁶ Both views are presented by Dr. S. Lewis Johnson in his comments on 1 Corinthians in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1255.

In either case, what is obvious is that more than anything else, the Gospel offers God's *salvation* to unworthy sinners and progressively being sanctified saints. This is the very reason why Jesus Christ came to earth the first time.

*For the Son of Man has come **to seek and to save** that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)*

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.** He who believes in Him is not condemned;*

but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **to redeem** those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5)*

*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**, of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15)*

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, **for it is the power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16)*

Man's real problem is not low self-esteem, for by nature we are born alienated from God as hopeless, helpless, and Hell-bound sinners. All of our good works are as "*filthy rags*" before a thrice holy God (Isaiah 64:6). We are desperately in utter need of what only God can provide and offer to us, namely salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

When is the last time you listened to a Christian psychologist on the radio who said to a listener, “Dear friend, your real bottom line problem is *not* a bad marriage, or that you came from a dysfunctional family or an alcoholic home, nor is it a failure to bond with your dad, or the need to rid yourself of your inner child. Your real problem is that you are *lost* and you need to be *saved* by the amazing grace of God!” Reader, please do something for me. Listen to your favorite “Christian psychologist” on the radio for the next month. Please write down every time you hear the word “sin.” Please record every Scripture verse mentioned. Please note every time the Gospel is given. Then ask yourself, “Is this person addressing the real needs of people via the Gospel?” Like the song says, “People need the Lord,” and Jesus Christ is Who the Gospel of salvation is all about. Unfortunately, few people are hearing the real solution to their eternal destiny and life’s problems—which is *Jesus Christ*, Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

If you could talk to someone about salvation, abortion, politics, or homosexuality—which would it be? I was reminded of this a number of years ago when I came face to face with an abortion clinic picketer. He happened to be a believer who had been previously a part of our local church some years ago.

Me: “Hi Mike! How are you doing?”

Mike: “Fine. Just out picketing.”

Me: “Do you do this very often?”

Mike: “About once a week.”

Me: “Why do you do it?”

Mike: “Well, we just want to let the public know that babies are being aborted at this clinic.”

Me: "Oh, that's terrible. Do you get much response?"

Mike: "Not really. Occasionally someone will sneer at us, while sometimes someone applauds us."

Me: "That's interesting, Mike. But, do you ever tell people passing by the *good news*?"

Mike: "What do you mean?"

Me: "Certainly it is bad news to hear of babies being aborted at this clinic, as I too am totally against abortion. But do you ever tell all these needy people the good news of how God loves them; how Christ died for them and their sins and rose again, and how through faith alone in Christ alone they can be eternally saved by God's grace?"

Mike: "No. I guess I've never told them 'the good news'."

Me: "You know, Mike, when the apostle Paul came into Corinth it was laden with every sexual sin imaginable including abortion. But instead of trying to clean up the symptoms of their problems, he presented to them the gospel of grace. As a result, people trusted in Christ and were saved. Then God began to change their lives. The people on this street need to hear the good news of salvation."

Mike: "I never looked at it this way before."

Do not forget that the Gospel offers *God's* solution to man's greatest need, which is *salvation*. By regularly emphasizing the Gospel, believers are reminded of this and can actually learn *how to present* it and *how to enjoy* it.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power

of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10)

PRINCIPLE 7

Believers need to HOLD FAST to the truths of the Gospel, as false teaching and doctrinal compromise can successfully undermine it.

... if you hold fast that word which I preached to you... (1 Corinthians 15:2b)

The phrase “hold fast” is one Greek word, *katechō*, which means “to hold fast; to hold firm.” Paul is exhorting these believers to remain doctrinally faithful to the Gospel in light of verse 12.

*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, **how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** (1 Corinthians 15:12)*

Over time, there has always been numerous doctrinal assaults on the Gospel. But what is clear from these verses is this: *even believers who have been doctrinally established and taught by the apostle Paul can be led astray.* This is why Paul wrote to the Galatian churches:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, **preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.***

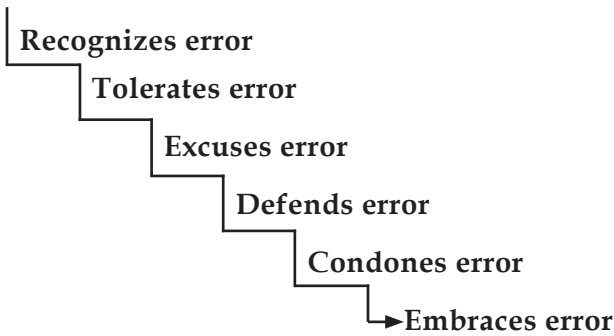
*As we have said before, so now I say again, **if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.** (Galatians 1:6-9)*

The apostle Peter echoes the same warning when he wrote:

*You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also **fall from your own steadfastness**, being led away with the error of the wicked. (2 Peter 3:17)*

Do not forsake or ever compromise the Gospel of grace, as it alone is “*the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes*” (Romans 1:16).

The downward path of the compromising believer:



While a failure to “*hold fast*” to the Gospel does not affect one’s eternal salvation and guarantee of glory as that depends on Christ’s faithfulness and not ours,⁷ a lack of doctrinal steadfastness to the Gospel of grace will result in serious ramifications in a believer’s daily living (salvation from sins power) as they shift from living by grace to legalism (Galatians 5:1-4) or license (Jude 3-4) or mysticism (Colossians 1:23; 2:18-19).

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will

⁷ See John 5:24; 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:13.

profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:1-4)

PRINCIPLE 8

The Gospel which Paul received and preached is of PRIMARY IMPORTANCE.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received...(1 Corinthians 15:3a)

“*Delivered*” indicates that Paul’s teaching was authoritatively presented. He didn’t design it, but he did deliver it. He was not the manufacturer of the message; he was the distributor. How the church needs careful exegetes and fearless expositors to clearly and accurately proclaim the Gospel which Paul received from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12).

The phrase “*first of all*” (*en prōtois*) communicates that the Gospel was “of primary importance; first and foremost.” While the doctrine of creation is foundational, the Gospel is of primary importance. And if understanding the biblical doctrine of creationism does not ultimately lead someone to the Gospel of salvation, does it ultimately matter whether one goes to Hell as a creationist or as an evolutionist?

While prophecy is interesting and needful, the Gospel is the first and foremost message that Paul preached to the Corinthians. Is the Gospel the emphasis of our preaching and teaching? Is the Gospel of first and primary importance? It was with Paul!

But why is Paul so sure of the truthfulness of the Gospel he preached which is of primary importance? It is because he “*received*” it directly from Jesus Christ.

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.
(Galatians 1:11-12)

Paul was dogmatic and unbending about the Gospel of grace that he preached for he received it directly from Jesus Christ apart from any human source or means. In light of the certainty and primary importance of the Gospel, it should not surprise us to read in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2:

*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. **For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*** (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

Dear reader, the Gospel needs to be of primary importance in our thinking, in our teaching, and in our churches. And Paul practiced what he preached! This is why when addressing the problem of legalism⁸ that was plaguing the churches of Galatia, what did Paul do? He refocused them on the person and work of Jesus Christ that he initially preached to them on his first missionary journey as the antidote for legalism.

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes **Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*** (Galatians 3:1)

In light of these truths, it stands to reason that Paul would write:

*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, **woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*** (1 Corinthians 9:16)

Do you agree?

⁸ Legalism is the mental attitude that seeks to earn or merit the blessings of God by religious rituals or good works for either salvation (justification), security of salvation, or progressive sanctification.

PRINCIPLE 9

The Gospel centers in the PERSON, WORK, and ACCOMPLISHMENT of JESUS CHRIST.

... how 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 15:3-4)

First of all, the Gospel of salvation centers in a specific PERSON—JESUS CHRIST: “...how that CHRIST...”

This is significant because of *Who* Jesus Christ is:

*For there is one God and **one Mediator** between God and men, the Man **Christ Jesus**. (1 Timothy 2:5)*

*Jesus said to him, “**I am the way, the truth, and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)*

In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit directed the apostle to devote the prologue (1:1-18) to answering the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” The answer:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. (John 1:1)*

***And the Word became flesh** and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

In accomplishing this objective and developing this necessary frame of reference, the numerous salvation verses contained in this primarily evangelistic book

(John 20:30-31),⁹ would not be read or understood in a historical or doctrinal vacuum but with the recognition that Jesus Christ is the unique God-man, the “Son of God.”

Paul, the apostle, lays the same groundwork in the tremendous doctrinal treatise of the book of Romans.

*Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, **separated to the gospel** of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, **concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.** (Romans 1:1-4)*

According to these verses, an integral part of the Gospel Paul preached was the recognition of the person of Jesus Christ—God in human flesh.

Why is this the case? For being the unique God-man, Jesus Christ alone qualified to be our Redeemer as He was born and lived outside the slave market of sin. Furthermore, being deity assures us that His work on the cross is a perfect work. In addition, being born as a man, Jesus Christ then could not only reveal God to man (John 1:18), but could “die” in full payment for the sins of the entire world.

*But we see Jesus, **who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death** crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might **taste death for everyone.** (Hebrews 2:9)*

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of **flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the***

⁹ The exception to this evangelistic thrust in the book of John is the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17, which is devoted toward those who were already believers.

same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

When preaching the Gospel, remember that you are not preaching a church (as no church can save); nor are you declaring a ritual to be performed (as no works are needed). Furthermore, you are not proclaiming an experience (as the Gospel involves historical facts). You are heralding first of all, a *person*—the unique and eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the World.

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. (John 8:24)

Second, the Gospel of salvation centers in a specific WORK: "... how that Christ DIED... and that He ROSE AGAIN..."

The word "*died*" underscores that Christ's death is a completed past event (aorist tense) that He voluntarily chose (active voice). It is a fact of history, not some religious myth (indicative mood).

Jesus had to die to provide salvation for mankind, as the penalty for our sin is "*death*" (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12; 6:23). Furthermore, "*without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin*" (Hebrews 9:22).

Thus, Christ's sinless life, amazing miracles, flawless example, deep compassion, divine teaching, and royal birth line clearly indicated that He was nothing less than God manifested in the flesh and the rightful heir to the throne of David. *Yet, it was only His death that could pay for our sins. And what is the proof of His death? "...And that He was buried."*

So when Paul came to Corinth to evangelize these lost pagans, he not only heralded the *person* of Christ but also His *finished work* as part of the Gospel.

*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 the **message of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:17-18)*

*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except **Jesus Christ and Him crucified**. (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)*

The second aspect of Christ's work is that He "*rose again.*" This underscores for us the importance of Christ's bodily resurrection. The phrase "*He rose again*" (*egēgertai*) is a perfect tense verb indicating past completed action with abiding present results. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the third day and He remains alive to this very day. He is a living Savior who got out of death, Hell and the grave alive!

The passive voice of "*rose again*" indicates that God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the canceled check that Christ's death satisfied every holy demand of God relative to our sins so that He raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 4:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The indicative mood again portrays Christ's resurrection as a historical fact, not a religious fable. And what is the proof that Christ was raised from the dead? "*And He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve*"

(1 Corinthians 15:5).¹⁰ Thus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ was an integral part of Paul's evangelistic Gospel-preaching. This amazing biblical truth caused him to conclude in light of certain deniers at Corinth:

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.
(1 Corinthians 15:14-15)¹¹

Further proof that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a necessary component of the Gospel we need to preach and believe can be found in the following verses:

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel.
(2 Timothy 2:8)

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
(Romans 10:9-10)

Third, the Gospel centers in a specific ACCOMPLISHMENT: "...Christ died FOR OUR SINS ..."

Why is this significant? First of all because it indicates a *substitutionary sacrifice*. The Greek word "for" (*huper*) is one of three Greek prepositions that underscore the

¹⁰ Though the burial of Christ's body, as well as His being seen by others after His resurrection, are not integral components of the Gospel (as "according to the Scriptures" are not attached to these statements), they do act as historical proofs of the reality of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

¹¹ The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was a major theme in the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles in the book of Acts.

concept of substitution (*huper; anti; peri*). *Huper* communicates how Christ died *on behalf* of our sins.

*For when we were still without strength, in due time **Christ died FOR the ungodly.*** (Romans 5:6)

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, **Christ died FOR us.*** (Romans 5:8)

*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed **Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed FOR us.*** (1 Corinthians 5:7)

*Who **gave Himself FOR our sins,** that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. (Galatians 1:4)*

*For **Christ** also suffered once for sins, **the just FOR the unjust,** that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)*

The second reason “*for our sins*” is significant is because it reveals Christ’s death as a *completed sacrifice*. Note how “*for our sins*” is only attached to Christ’s death. Why? Because when He cried, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30), the sins of all mankind for all time were *paid in full* on the cross. He need not be “*buried*” for our sins or “*raised*” for our sins as His *death* fully accomplished the paying of our sin debt to God.

*Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, **when He had by Himself purged our sins,** sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3)*

*By that will we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.***

*And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, **after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. **For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.** (Hebrews 10:10-14)*

What does all of this mean? It means that no mass, no fires of purgatory, no sacraments, no amount of good works, no personal suffering, no indulgences, or the like can atone for our sins. ***"It is finished!"***

This also indicates that our sins, though making us worthy of God's judgment, will never ultimately condemn us to eternal Hell. Why? Because Jesus Christ fully paid for our sins past, present, and future. In fact, all of our sins were future when Christ died for us. What ultimately condemns a sinner to Hell is not their sins, but their rejection of Christ through their unbelief.

*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, **because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.** (John 3:18)*

*And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, **because they do not believe in Me.** (John 16:8-9)*

*And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth**, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12)*

*Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance **on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.** These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired **among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.** (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10)*

This means that regardless of the nature or amount of sins that we have committed, God, by His grace, is willing and wanting to save us. And without compromising his holy character, God will save every sinner who places their faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work alone, since Christ died for all of their sins and rose again.

*Being **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation **through faith in his blood.** (Romans 3:24-25a)*

*To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, **that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.** (Romans 3:26-28)*

*Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. **But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.** (Romans 4:4-5)*

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

No wonder the Gospel is called *good news*! But you might be wondering, "But is the Gospel of Jesus Christ credible and verifiable?" Paul gave us three evidences from 1 Corinthians 15 to affirm its fruitfulness.

Proof 1: The Gospel is "ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES."

"According to the Scriptures" is underscored for us twice, once in verse three connected with Christ's death, and once in verse four attached to His resurrection. The person, work and accomplishment of the Lord Jesus Christ was predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures hundreds of years before these events actually happened. Biblical Christianity is different and unique from all the religions of the world which are minus fulfilled prophecy. Over 100 specific prophecies were fulfilled in Christ's first coming, including the prediction of His death on the cross and His bodily resurrection (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10).

Those who deal with the laws of probability inform us that the mathematical odds of these prophecies being fulfilled by one person are astronomical. But as Jesus Christ proclaimed to His disciples, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

Proof 2: The Gospel is HISTORICALLY CREDIBLE and VERIFIABLE.

And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After

*that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.
Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one
born out of due time. (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)*

Jesus Christ, after His bodily resurrection, made various appearances to actual people. One could call to the witness stand numerous individuals to testify that they saw the risen Christ. Those specifically mentioned here are:

- *Peter* (v. 5), who was the chief apostle and previous thrice-denier of Jesus Christ.
- *The Twelve* (v. 5), who were the chief authorities of the early church and who previously deserted Jesus Christ.
- *500 believers* (v. 6), who saw the risen Christ at one time. Now that is a lot of witnesses! Ask any lawyer.
- *James* (v. 7), the half-brother of Jesus, who had been an unbeliever prior to Christ's resurrection (John 7:5).
- *All the apostles* (v. 7), which included Thomas, the chief doubter (John 20:26-31).
- *Paul* (v. 8), who previously had been the chief persecutor of Christians (Acts 8:3).

This is quite a large and valid group of eyewitnesses, would not you say?

Sir Edward Clarke said:

As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. For me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on

evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect; the Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.

The historian Thomas Arnold of Oxford adds:

The evidence for our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be and often has been shown to be satisfactory. It is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece as carefully as every judge summing up on an important case. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is better proved by fuller evidence than the great sign that God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.

Proof 3: The Gospel is PERSONALLY TRANSFORMING.

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:9-11)

How does one explain the conversion of Saul of Tarsus into the apostle Paul apart from the destiny-changing, life-transforming message of the Gospel?

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

If we are going to preach the Gospel of salvation accurately in our day,¹² we (like Paul) must be certain to teach the *person, work, and accomplishment* of Jesus Christ. As we do this, we can be assured that our message is *according to the Scriptures, historically credible*

¹² While God's first promise of a Redeemer from sin and Satan was announced in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15), and though certain pieces of God's redemptive plan unfold in the Old Testament, it is not until the New Testament that the details of the Gospel are expanded and clarified due to progressive revelation. Thus, the Holy Spirit directs Paul in defining the content of the Gospel as the person, finished work, and accomplishment of Jesus Christ which demands a response of simple faith alone from one's works in order to be saved.

*and verifiable, and has the power to be personally transforming in the lives of those who respond to it. And through preaching the Gospel, lost sinners will come to personally understand the amazing grace of God in truth. For though we deserve the judgment of God in Hell, God will forgive all of our sins and give us eternal life as a gift because of *who God is* and because of *what Jesus Christ has done for us*. Now that's grace!*

*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your **faith in Christ Jesus** and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of **which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel**, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you **since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth**. (Colossians 1:3-6)*

PRINCIPLE 10

The only proper RESPONSE to the Gospel is simply to BELIEVE it.

*By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless **you believed** in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:2)*

*And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and **your faith** is also empty. (1 Corinthians 15:14)*

*For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, **your faith** is futile; you are still in your sins! (1 Corinthians 15:16-17)*

How had the Corinthians responded to the Gospel that was preached to them? They simply *believed* it. Our word translated “believe” (*pisteuō*) means “to rely on, to trust in, to depend on, to believe.” Being in the aorist tense (in vv. 2 and 11) does *not* indicate a required ongoing action (present tense), but a definite decision at a point in time. The active voice indicates that they chose of their own volition to believe the Gospel. The indicative mood reveals the reality of their decision to trust in Christ alone.

“*In vain*” (v. 2) means “without a basis or cause.” Paul here is hinting at the issue he will take up as the chapter progresses, namely:

*But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And **if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.** (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)*

Let me again call your attention to the only right response to the Gospel. One is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ and His finished

work alone. In light of Christ's death for our sins and bodily resurrection, the issue in salvation is *not do, but done*. The basis is *not our walk*, but *Christ's finished work*. The means is *not our works*, but *simply faith in Christ alone* as presented in the Gospel. This is why when Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Corinthians in his first visit to them, they responded by simply *believing* it. For in hearing and understanding the person, work, and accomplishment of Jesus Christ, it was obvious that there was nothing left to do to atone for their sins before God by religious rituals or good works, for Christ had done it all. His work at Calvary was not merely necessary; it was enough! No wonder we read in verse 11:

Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:11)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25-26)

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39)

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:28)

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. (Romans 4:5)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

As these verses set forth, the Bible clarifies the way of salvation by explaining both how one *is* saved and how one *is not* saved. Believers cannot be too clear on this issue. As someone has humorously said, “A fog in the pulpit creates a mist in the pew.”

For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? (1 Corinthians 14:8)

Dr. Charles Ryrie has wisely stated:

Just as words were the means God used to record the Gospel in the Scriptures, so words are the means we use to explain the Gospel to others. Therefore, a correct choice of words is important, even essential, in stating the Gospel well.¹³

In heeding this good counsel, let us not garble the Gospel, nor muddle the means to everlasting life by confusing the condition of salvation through telling people such erroneous conditions such as:

- “asking Jesus into your heart,” since He comes in when you believe the Gospel, not by asking Him in (John 1:12; Galatians 4:6).¹⁴

¹³ Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁴ An expanded explanation of this can be found in my book on Seven Reasons Not to Ask Jesus into Your Heart: Answering the Question: “What Must I Do To Be Saved?” See “Other Available Materials” section at the back of this book.

- *“giving your life to Christ,”* since salvation involves you not giving anything but you receiving the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ who gave His life for you (Romans 6:23).
- *“making a commitment to Christ,”* since salvation is not assured by your promise or pledge to Christ but on God’s promise/pledge to you (1 John 2:25; 5:13).
- *“turning over the controls of your life to Christ,”* since Romans 12:1 is an exhortation to believers (*“brethren”*), not to unbelievers.
- *“believing plus baptism,”* since a believer’s water baptism is to be done as a public testimony of one’s faith and identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection as a result of being saved—not as a means to salvation (1 Corinthians 1:17; Acts 8:36-38; 18:8).
- *“believing and keeping the Ten Commandments,”* since God never designed the Ten Commandments to be a way of salvation, but to show us our sin and need of the Savior (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:10, 24-26).
- *“submitting to Christ’s mastery or lordship in your life,”* since James 4:7-10 is clearly a passage for believers (James 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:1, 11), not for unbelievers. And while there is no debate that Christ is Lord, the issue in salvation is ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”*** (Acts 16:31).
- *“repenting of or confessing your sins,”* since 1 John 1:9 is a condition for believers to have fellowship with God (1 John 1:3, 6, 7) as a child of God (1 John 2:1), *not* a means to be born again for the unsaved (John 1:12-13). And while one must see he is a sinner before a holy God in order to see his need of a Savior, the solution is not confessing one’s sins to God. Instead, it is believing that Christ made full payment for your sins upon the cross (1 John 2:2;

4:9-10). Otherwise, how many sins must you repent of, how often, in what areas, and how perfectly in order to know you are saved? Confusing, isn't it? One must repent (change their mind) about trusting Jesus Christ versus trusting something else.

- *"praying the sinner's prayer,"* which is found nowhere in the Bible. Where do you find anyone in Scripture leading someone else in prayer to be saved? Nowhere!
- *"coming forward,"* since the issue is not getting out of your seat to come to the front of an auditorium, but coming to Christ by faith in Him alone (John 6:35-40).

Now I can almost hear someone screaming out, "But isn't this all simply a matter of semantics?" My reply to that objection is "yes" and "no" depending on what you mean. Yes, it is a matter of semantics if you mean that word meanings and definitions are very important. On the other hand, this is *not* a matter of semantics if you mean that "trusting in Jesus Christ alone" and one of these inaccurate, misleading statements is really saying the same thing.

Charles Ryrie again comments on this matter of semantics:

Furthermore, it seems to me that those who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible ought especially to be concerned with accuracy in communicating the truth. All the Bible is inerrant and important to us. But certainly how we as Christians express the Gospel ought to be our greatest concern. We do not want to confuse or shortchange or obscure God's good news of His grace—how He gave His Son so that we might have eternal life through faith in Him. Semantics is key in understanding and communicating the Gospel.¹⁵

¹⁵ Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, p. 24.

Dear friend, if *pisteuō* (“believe”) was good enough for the Holy Spirit, is it not good enough for you? I exhort you. Do not let your pride (“*I’ve taught that cliché in the past*”) or your emotions (“*I’ve prayed this with my kids*”) or your religious traditions (“*our church has always said that*”) get in the way of truth and biblical accuracy on the most important issue that anyone must address. I appeal to you to do away with these “*sacred cows*” of modern evangelicalism, and let us return to the authoritative Word of God to embrace what the Lord says about our eternal salvation.

And brought them out, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”
(Acts 16:30-31)

LET'S REVIEW

PRINCIPLE 1

Pastors need to KEEP PREACHING and believers need to KEEP HEARING THE GOSPEL (1 Corinthians 15:1a).

PRINCIPLE 2

The Gospel, by its very nature, is GOOD NEWS FROM GOD TO MAN (1 Corinthians 15:1b).

PRINCIPLE 3

The Gospel is the message which BELIEVERS ARE TO PROCLAIM TO THE LOST (1 Corinthians 15:1c).

PRINCIPLE 4

Hearing the Gospel is not enough as PEOPLE NEED TO PERSONALLY RECEIVE IT (1 Corinthians 15:1d).

PRINCIPLE 5

BELIEVERS need to STAND for THE GOSPEL (1 Corinthians 15:1e).

PRINCIPLE 6

The Gospel offers the good news of SALVATION to us (1 Corinthians 15:2a).

PRINCIPLE 7

Believers need to HOLD FAST to the truths of the Gospel, as false teaching and doctrinal compromise can successfully undermine it (1 Corinthians 15:2b).

PRINCIPLE 8

The Gospel which Paul received and preached is of PRIMARY IMPORTANCE (1 Corinthians 15:3a).

PRINCIPLE 9

The Gospel centers in the PERSON, WORK, and ACCOMPLISHMENT of JESUS CHRIST (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

PRINCIPLE 10

The only proper RESPONSE to the Gospel is simply to BELIEVE it.

CLOSING COMMENTS

What is the bottom line point we have learned from this study on 1 Corinthians 15? What can we learn regarding balance and emphasis from Paul's ministry? *While the purpose of the gathering of the church is clearly for the edification of the believers (1 Corinthians 14:1, 12, 17, 26), does not the emphasis and focus still need to be on Jesus Christ and the Gospel? It certainly does!*

*But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, **to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.** And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. **For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.** Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which **He purchased with His own blood.** (Acts 20:24-28)*

Let's preach the Gospel, trusting the Lord to use His Word via the Holy Spirit to convict a lost and Hell-bound world of their need and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (John 16:7-10), and to instruct the saved in their position and privileges in Christ.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who

has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:3-7)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)