

Se Pt1 - What's Wrong With American 'Christianity'

by Paul Washer

The Church has lost the gospel and has become man-centered and built around men, leading to a lack of understanding of the importance and priority of the gospel.

Duration: 39:30

Scripture: Genesis 6:5, Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:10, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Topics: "Gospel Message", "Church Critique"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He reminds the audience, both Christians and non-Christians, of the significance of the Gospel in their lives. The preacher criticizes the current state of the church, stating that the Gospel has been reduced to simplistic cliches and that there is a lack of understanding regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. He emphasizes that the Gospel is the only means of salvation and urges Christians to continually remind themselves of its message.

Transcript

Father, I come before you in the name of your Son, to whom belongs the throne and the crown and the scepter, in all glory, in all honor, in all praise, in all riches, in all power, in every kingdom, every knee and every tongue. To Him and Him alone, Father, be the glory forever and ever. The only one worthy to take the book, the only one worthy to die and to live again.

Oh, Father, I count it a gracious privilege to stand before you and to talk about things I know so little about. Who are we, God? But a bucket of dust. You are so good.

Your mercy endures forever and your loving kindness upon those who fear you, knowing that they fear you only because you've taught them to fear. What is man that thou shalt take thought of him, O Lord, or the Son of man that thou shalt be concerned for him, but you are. No, God, what happens here is utterly dependent upon you.

There is no one here who seeks you. There is no one here who would ever open up their heart. There is no one here who would ever embrace your love, because we are a rebellious people.

And so we're so dependent, God, upon your mercy for you to turn away your justice from us and to be merciful to those who deserve only justice. We are dependent upon you to open up our eyes. We are dependent upon you to open up our hearts.

We're dependent upon you to give us faith and repentance. We're dependent upon you, Lord. So please, Father, as I babble, overcome human weakness and human sin by your grace and for your glory.

And again, Father, to him who's on the throne be for him, by him, and through him are all things. In Jesus' name, a name I'm not even worthy to pronounce. I'll be reading today from 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

If you have your Bibles, it would be a good thing to turn there. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 1. And let's stand as we read God's word. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 1. Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel you are saved. If you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you've believed in vain. For what I passed on to you as of first importance, for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

You may have a seat. Thank you. Today I want to talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And you might think that that's kind of unusual. After all, this is a Christian school. After all, most do profess Christ.

And after all, we do live in America, where one would think that everyone is gospel-hardened, or that we've heard it so many times that it really shouldn't have much effect on us. But I want to tell you something. America is not gospel-hardened.

America, and not only America but the Christian Church in America, has lost the gospel. What's being preached today is by and large so far from good news that it is not good news. It is man-centered and it is built around men.

But the gospel I'm going to preach today is not. I'm not here to tell you about you or to tell you about your needs or to even tell you how to meet your needs, because the gospel does not center around you. It centers around God.

In America today, the Church is basically repeating one word, man, man, man, man, man. Everything for man. How can man have his needs met? What can God do for man? But that's not Scripture.

In Scripture, it is God, God, God, God. Not all things for man, not all things for you, and not all things for me, but all things for God, for His glory, His purpose, and His good. And this glorious, mighty, majestic God has done a wonderful thing that men like you and I, and women like some of you, might know Him, and might be embraced by Him, and might be saved.

So I want to talk about the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. If you're a Christian, I hope that it will help you reorientate your message. If you're not a Christian, I hope that today you'll be born again, that you might know the pleasure of God.

Let's look at the first verse. Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preach to you. The word remind really means I want to declare to you, I want to make known to you the gospel.

Paul is talking to Christians, and he realizes something here. Christians have a deep need to hear the gospel preached correctly, to hear it over and over and over and over again. The primary motivation of all Christian living, the primary motivation to come to God is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The good news that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, and that in Christ, rebellious men and women like ourselves can be saved. Men and women who deserve nothing more than the justice and condemnation of God can now be brought into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. And we need to be reminded of that, and reminded of that, and reminded of that, and we need the gospel to be made known to us.

Today in America, the gospel has been reduced down to four tiny little laws or cliches, and that's wrong. We have come to believe that doctrine and theology and Bible study and things such as that are useless in the Christian life, and that's why the church is in such a mess today. We've heard so much about the dumbing down of America.

I want to tell you something. With regard to the gospel, we have the dumbing down of the church. Men do not know what really happened on that tree, and men do not realize the importance of the resurrection, and men do not realize that God has done only one thing in this world whereby men might be saved, and to reject that one thing is to be lost, to be lost.

So we're going to study this gospel. He says, Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. After the message of the gospel is usually preached in America today, someone is told that they should receive Jesus, pray a prayer, and ask Him into their heart, and if they do that, they're born again.

Well, like so many other cliches in our Christianity, that's simply not true. The Bible does not say that. The Bible says in order to be saved, a man must repent of his sins, he must turn from his sins, and he must place his faith upon Jesus Christ.

But salvation is more than just some little tiny decision in which you open some magical door to your heart and graciously ask Jesus Christ to come in. That is not salvation. Salvation is a mighty work of God by which God Himself, in His own power, turns a man's heart and changes him, and gives that man repentance and faith, and that man believes in Jesus Christ, and on believing he is saved, and the evidence of his salvation is not some little prayer.

It's a changed life. As one old preacher told me, and we ought to listen a lot more to old preachers, if your religion hasn't changed you, you'd better change your religion. It's worthless.

Paul didn't say just a gospel that you received, but upon which you had taken your stand. In other translations, in which you stand. A gospel in which you stand.

What does it mean to stand? It means two things. First of all, it's more than just some superficial praying a little prayer and wham, I'm in. That's not the gospel.

It is the idea of standing upon something, to be convicted about something, to hold as true, to hold as something worthy of risking your entire life. A man who has simply opened up some little door and received some little Savior, is not saved. But it is the man who hears the claims of God in Christ, that Christ died for our sins, that He rose again from the dead.

It's that man who believes that, and risks his entire life upon that. A faith with conviction. A faith that obeys.

A faith that transforms. If you have just got your ticket to get into heaven, you're not going there. Also, to stand means to stand in the presence of God.

And I want you to think about something. Today we have so watered down the gospel that God frightens no one. God is some, this warm and fuzzy little man that we can do whatever we want to with.

Or He's some beggar on the street that no one cares about. We feel like if we put a little religious tip in His tin cup, at least we've done better than everyone else. You need to realize something, and we're going to see here in a moment, that God is God.

And all the nations tremble before Him. And they're like a drop in the bucket before Him. And that heaven and earth will flee away from Him.

And like the psalmist said, if God counted our sins, who could stand before Him? The answer, of course, is no one. There is only one way to stand before God. And it is not a religion.

It is not a denomination. It is Christ, and Christ alone, who is not a ticket to heaven. He's the creator of the universe, and the glory and splendor of heaven.

He's God. And if you truly come to know the gospel, you've taken your stand upon it. It's the most important thing in your life, and the thing that directs every other thing in your life.

The world and the things of the world mean very little to you, because you have come to stand upon other ground. The ground of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, by this gospel, in verse 2, you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you've believed in vain.

There is a doctrine, and it's called biblical assurance. It means that once a man has come under the power of God and has been converted, that the same God who transformed him and saved him is the same God who will keep him. That has nothing to do with the false ideas taught today of eternal security.

Now, what am I saying? We have developed a new doctrine in America today, a false eternal security. It's the idea that if one time in your life you prayed a prayer, then you're in. If one time in your life you walked down an aisle, then you're saved.

But Paul doesn't teach that. The evidence of salvation is not praying a prayer and asking Jesus Christ to come into your heart. The evidence of salvation is not writing the date of your conversion in the back of your Bible, or driving a stake in the back of your house with your name on it.

The evidence of salvation is that you continue on in the gospel, you continue believing the gospel, and you continue obeying the gospel. If you do not live that way, you can have no assurance whatsoever that you've ever been born again. Paul said you are saved and you'll be able to know it if you continue in your salvation.

That's what we need to understand, and that is what was taught before, when doctrine was important, when the Bible was more important than cliches. If you're not acting as a Christian should act, you can have no security that you are one. I am not teaching that you can lose your salvation.

I'm teaching you you've never had it, because Paul says you will continue on. Otherwise, you've believed in vain. There are many people who profess a faith in Christ, and yet it's a vain faith.

As the book of James tells us, faith without works is dead. He's not combining faith and works together as a means of salvation there. No, what he's teaching you is this.

If your faith does not produce a Christian life, it is not faith. You have not come to know God in Christ. That's Paul's introduction to the gospel.

Now, let's get to verse three. He says, for what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance. Will you listen to that? Christianity in America today is a circus, and I don't know where it's running, but I see a lot of clowns leading it.

And I want to tell you something about it. You know why it's a circus? Because the gospel doesn't have priority. It is a little thing.

I was reading through a book when I was in Peru about spiritual warfare that someone had written and someone else had given it to me to check it out. And it was basically Eastern mysticism in which there were about 13 levels of knowledge. And do you know what the most basic childlike knowledge in this type of Christian faith was? The first childlike thing that you could come to understand was repentance and faith and the gospel.

And then after that, there was all kinds of new knowledge that people had received from new revelations, and it can't be found in the Bible. We have become a circus because we don't realize what is the priority. The priority in Scripture is the gospel.

The book of Revelation is not the deepest thing God has ever written. Possibly the first three chapters of Ephesians are, because there we hear about the gospel and the glory and the majesty and the power and the working and the design of God. Spiritual warfare is not important.

As a matter of fact, spiritual warfare that's being taught today is not even what the Bible teaches. Spiritual warfare is not you yelling at the devil. It's you living a godly life so that even though he has you martyred, you will not blemish the name of Christ.

What we need to understand is that the most important thing today and forever is Scripture, and Scripture teaches us that the thing of first importance is what God has done for you in Christ. Let me share something with you, and let me finish it before you throw a stone. Your testimony is not that important.

Do you want to know what's important? God's testimony about Jesus Christ. And since so many of us know so little about what God has said about His Son, our own testimonies don't do very well in carrying the gospel to others. We are so self-absorbed today.

What God has done for me, what God has done for me, what God has done for me. But the priority in Scripture is what God has done in Christ. When you open your mouth as a Christian, you shouldn't be able just to tell some experience you've had.

You should be able to tell people what God has done in Jesus Christ. If you're going to follow Christ, you need to know what the gospel is, and you need to know what Scripture says about the gospel. You need to dedicate yourself to a life of discovering and chasing after God.

Before I was a Christian, I chased after so many things, and all of them were empty, and all of them were just a step to chasing after something else, until one day God revealed Himself. And when God reveals Himself, all chasing after other things becomes stupidity, because God is the only One whom you can seek out and chase after that has no end. Do you think, actually think, that heaven is heaven because of some puny little streets of gold? Or that it won't be boring because God is going to have a lot of entertainment up there? Heaven is heaven because God cannot be exhausted, because His glory is so infinite, His beauty is so great, that every day, if one could say such a thing, of eternity, will simply be discovering more of God.

And if you're not excited about knowing God, I've got news for you, you're not going to heaven, because heaven is the purpose. No, because God is the purpose of heaven. Now, what is this gospel that's so important? That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

So simple, isn't it? Three little things, but so misunderstood, so misunderstood. We're going to take a look at this gospel and try to see something maybe we haven't seen before, so that our apathy will be scalded away by the flame of God's truth, and so that we'll never sit in another chapel and apathetically mouth words of praise. But that we'll give ourselves to it like it was our very life.

Now, when we talk about the gospel, what do we have to deal with? I'll tell you what we have to deal with. A holy God. A holy God.

Holy beyond all other things, and in a few days we're going to be talking about the holiness of God. But in talking about the holiness of God, and just mentioning that God is holy, something clicks in our heart, and you know what it is. Upon hearing that God is holy, the thing that clicks in our heart is that we're not.

We have come to a point in Christianity in which we have toned down the attributes of God. We don't even know what they are. And we have so exalted man.

As a matter of fact, I spent a great deal of my time wasting my time studying neo-orthodoxy, and I was basically told this, you be careful of preaching a God that's so big and so glorious and so holy that man cannot attain Him. Well, I want to tell you something. After several years of study in the jungle, I learned better.

My job as a preacher is to preach God as He is, so holy, so great, so magnificent that He is unattainable, and I am to preach man in such a fashion as so low and so despicable that even carnal Christians will be offended at my sermons. And only then does Christ become so necessary that a man would be a fool to turn from Him. You see, when we talk about the gospel, we have to deal with our sin, and that's what I want to do.

I want us to look at a few passages that talk about you. Turn with me to Genesis. Let's go to chapter 6, verse 5. The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

You should know this well, because it's a good description of you and of me. One time I was speaking, and a man told me, that's not so. And I said, well, if I could put the thoughts of your heart on a video projector, and I could show the thoughts of your heart to everyone in this village, you would run out of this village and you would never return because you thought things so evil that you could not even tell your

best friend, even up to this moment, sitting there in the pew.

And you're the same way. You see, we are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners.

And no outward form of change is going to do us any good. You are corrupt. You were born in sin and depraved of anything that could ever please God.

You have no handle upon God because you're not holy. You see, He's no man's debtor, and even if He was, man couldn't offer anything to win His favor. You and I are depraved.

And your own heart knows that. Your own mind understands that. That there is a darkness in us that we cannot control.

And that it's not just some little social error that someone can take care of from the very roots of our being. The purest thoughts we have are an abomination before God. And all of it one day will be exposed before Him.

Every thought of your heart will be exposed before God. Now look at Genesis chapter 8, verse 21. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.

Very famous Presbyterian theologian that I'm kind of fond of was going to a baptism one day. He was asked to go to an infant baptism, and he was there, and they were bringing the babies to him. And he was an old grouchy man, so he could say whatever he wanted to.

And he looked around as they brought him the babies, and he saw all these little pretty white roses all over the baptismal area. And he said, well, he picked one up and he said, What are these flowers for, these white roses? And some lady in the church stood up and said, Well, that represents the purity of the child. And he said, Well, then what's the baptism for? You see, a child is not pure.

You don't have to teach a child how to lie. You have to teach him how not to lie. You don't have to teach him how to manipulate.

He knows that from the very first day. Once I was walking through the Amazon, and I came around this village, and there were two children playing in a stream. And I thought, Well, how pretty they were.

They were just building something there. And I thought, How innocent and unsoiled they are. I walked for a few minutes down the river, and I came back, and I found that they were literally beating one another's faces against the sand.

And I thought to myself, Well, goodbye, paradise. Hello, Cain and Abel. And God seemed to speak to my heart and said, Yes, the purity of man, even when he's in a perfect environment, no television, no corruption, no anything.

His heart is an abomination to me. It's wicked beyond knowledge, beyond understanding. Now, let's go for a moment to the book of Isaiah, chapter 64.

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. So many people think that God has a balance somewhere in heaven, a scale, and that if we've done more good things than bad things, we somehow get in. It's simply not true.

Let's say that my body was covered with sores and oozing pus. Even if I put on the most beautiful garment of white, in just a few moments, that garment would be stained with me. Well, that's the same way about our works and about our nature.

We are a fountain that corrupts every stream it touches. In us, we have no good thing before God, and therefore the works that we try to produce before Him amount to nothing. You see, my good friend, we're told today so many things about man, even in the church.

And I don't hear people preaching the reality of Scripture that we are totally, totally depraved and totally in need of the mercy of Almighty God. If you're sitting there today breathing, you are in dire need of the mercy of God. If you are a Christian, you are in dire need of the mercy of God that it might continue in your life.

If you are a lost man, you are in dire need of the mercy of God, because apart from the mercy of God, you will continue in your path and you will go on to destruction. We're not here today so that I can soup you up with some message so that you'll get inspired somehow and make a few superficial carnal decisions. I am preaching only in hopes that the mercy of Almighty God might be manifest and your hearts might be opened by His power and you might know Him in a way that you've never known Him.

And so my preaching has underwritten on top of it, around it, begging prayers to God that He might show divine favor and mercy upon you and upon me. Let's go to Romans chapter 3, verse 10. As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one.

There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. I don't know if some of you ministerial students, I just want to throw this in for you. This idea of seeker-friendly churches, it's really kind of silly.

Do you want to know why? There's only one who seeks and it's not men. It's God. And if you want to be friendly to someone and you want to adapt your services to please someone, then adapt it not to men, but to God.

Men do not seek God. I hear so many men stand up and give their testimony and talk about how they were wandering and wandering until finally they found God. And I realize either they're lying or they don't know what they're saying because no one seeks after God.

It is God who seeks after man. And the only hope that you ever might have is that God comes and seeks after you. If He leaves you alone to do what you want to do, you'll perish forever.

The first prayer that ought to ever come out of any man's mouth is, oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Come after me because I will not come after you. No one who seeks God, all have turned away and they have all together become worthless.

There is no one who does good, not even one. Look at the word worthless there. Do you know one of the chief attributes of a lost man is that he is of no service to God.

We go into churches today in America and we could run through this campus today and we could ask ourselves how many of the student body are being used of God to fulfill his purpose. If you are not actively participating in God's work and you are not serving God, then you carry about yourself the chief attribute of a man who is lost. God is not using you.

You've become worthless to him. Now what do we say about all this? But all these hard things that this man is saying. What's to become of people like us? Well, let me tell you what should become of people like us.

The wrath of Almighty God. Yes, wrath. Do you know what wrath is? The holy, just, merciless, violent anger of God against the sin of men and against the men who commit that sin.

Have you ever heard the saying, God loves the sinner and hates the sin? It's a wonderful thing. The problem is it's false. Psalms chapter five.

Read it well. Read it several times when you leave here. God hates all those who do iniquity.

You see, we've so made God into cliches and so protected man from God. I mean, God can take care of himself. Someone's got to protect man from God.

But it says that God hates all those who do iniquity. You and I do iniquity. How can we be saved? Only that He not come to us in justice, but He come to us in mercy.

You see, you need to realize something. The condemnation of God abides on those who reject His Son. And the only way to escape the justice that you and I deserve is to run to the Son of God.

He is the city of refuge. There is no other escape. If men who rejected the law of Moses suffered punishment, how much more those who trample upon the Son of God and reject the salvation that He purchased on Calvary.

You see, there is consequences to sin. And one of them is the wrath of God. The other is spiritual death.

You see, you are dead if you are outside of Christ. You are spiritually dead and there is nothing you can do to stop being dead. I could preach to you all day and you cannot respond, as though I was teaching a dead man to do jumping jacks.

He couldn't get up and do them. In the same way, when I preach, if you're there and you're troubled about your heart, you have to cry out to God. God, give me mercy that I might understand.

God, show me the way. Apart from you, I'm lost. Salvation is from the beginning to the end, God.

And unless God moves on your behalf, you're in trouble. We're so haughty and arrogant today about the gospel, to decide when and to decide not when to trust Christ. But you need to realize that you're in a precarious situation.

Jonathan Edwards described it like this. Imagine a man pulling back a bow and he's got the arrow pointed right at your heart. And his hand begins to tremble.

The mercy of God is what holds that hand back. But there will come a time when the time of salvation comes to an end. You see, God is sovereign.

And he taught Nebuchadnezzar that and he would do well to teach us that. That he is sovereign, my friend. Salvation is open.

Come and be saved. But there will come a time when the doors of salvation will close. God can lift up his hand and no man can bring it down.

God can set his hand down on the table and no man can pry it up, no matter how sincere or how much he manipulates. You and I need to realize something, dear friend, that we need God and we need his mercy. And he is not little something that we can tag on to our life.

He is life. He is life. And apart from him, there is absolutely nothing.

What is it with you? How are you now? Do you know God? Let me phrase that a different way. Does God know you? Does he? Is there evidence of it in your life? Or do you have a real tidy, neat, harmless, 20th century Christianity that will tell you, you're in. My friend, you're probably not in, if that's the way you look at things.

We are so full of sin and we are so in need of God. And do you know what's going to be so troubling? Not that I've preached this way, but that when a great deal of you leave this morning, you're going to be saying, my, that young man is so unbalanced. He talks so hard against us when actually we're not that bad.

Oh, you're far worse than even I can describe. And so am I. And that is why there is such need to take our position, bowing before God and asking not for justice, my friend. You do not want justice.

Don't you ever cry out that God gives you justice. Because justice will get you hell. Cry out for mercy.

If you've sat through this and you've only talked to your friend and you've thought, my, this man preaches too long. You don't realize this. You're lucky you're not in Peru because I just got through my first point.

But if you're sitting there today and you're saying, my, we just got to get to class. Or if you're kind of bothered about what I'm saying and not taking much interest in it. It doesn't appeal to you much.

As a matter of fact, there's no seriousness about you at all right now. Just a little snicker in your heart here and there. You ought to be very afraid.

And do you want to know why? Because you can't be saved. My gosh, who in the world have they brought to this campus? You know why you can't? Because apart from repentance that brings a seriousness before God and a hunger in your heart and a sorrow for sin, apart from that, you can't be born again. I'm not going to fool you.

And if you walk out like that today, then I'll tell you something. Go out in a field somewhere or a barn or go back to your room and cry out to God, have mercy on me. Take away this attitude of mine that treats my sin as something almost like a joke.

Teach me about your holiness. Show me your son. Help me save me, oh God.

I love you and I desperately desire the best for you. But it begins here in this dungeon. Tonight I'm going to preach about Christ and what God has done for you and him.

But I had to preach this way this morning. Do you want to know why? The gospel has no power today because we don't tell men the predicament that he's in before God. You see, I don't hear joy in my heart when I hear keys ringing.

Do you want to know why? I'm not in a cell. You put a man in a cell and allow him to hear the jailer come with the keys ringing and his heart will leap for joy. Many people today in America disdain the gospel

because they don't realize the predicament they're in before a holy God.

I pray it's not that way with you. There'll be no invitation. There's no invitation needed.

An invitation is not what you need. You need God and you need to get alone with God. One time I did this and the minister said, how could you let him go? And I said, if I can't let him alone to God, who can I trust him with? So you go to your class or you go home and you go wherever you need to do, wherever you need to go, and you get before God and you ask him to reveal your heart to you to know whether it's well with you.

And please come back tonight. Why? Because I've been terribly hard this morning and after maybe a morning and an afternoon of sorrow, tonight we truly will hear some good news. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, oh Lord, reveal to us who you are, but Father, in a real way, that we might know what we are so that we might discover the glories of Christ after this season of darkness. In Jesus name.

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