

Gospel

by Stephen Olford

The gospel of Christ is the good news of God's redeeming act in Christ, and it is not subject to human philosophy or interpretation.

Duration: 37:35

Scripture: Galatians 1:8

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance and uniqueness of the gospel of Christ. He explains that the gospel is the good news of God's redeeming act in Christ, which offers deliverance from sin and the evil world. The preacher highlights that the gospel is a divine provision and cannot be equaled by any man-made religions or philosophies. He also emphasizes that the gospel is a complete and final truth, and there is no need to add or subtract from it. The preacher warns against the confusion and moral bankruptcy of those who claim to have new truths, asserting that the gospel is eternal and objective.

Transcript

pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which ye have, we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

For do I now persuade men of God, or do I seek to please men? For if yet pleased men, I should then not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, I lay it down the line, as someone has put it. Brethren, that this gospel was preached unto you.

Of me is not of men, neither did I receive it from man, neither was I taught it. And then this tremendous statement, but by the revelation, the direct act of revelation of Jesus Christ. Speak, Lord, in the stillness, while we wait on thee.

Hushed, each heart to listen, in expectancy. For thy dear name's sake. Amen.

The opening words of Paul's letter to the Galatians constitute one of the most solemn and severe attacks on defectors from the gospel that we find anywhere in the New Testament. Indeed, as Martin Luther points out in his commentary on the epistle of Paul to the Galatians, Paul is so stirred up to righteous indignation that he's prepared to curse the very angels of heaven, were they to be responsible for introducing another

gospel. According to Paul, there is no other gospel, for there's only one gospel.

That of our Lord Jesus Christ. Young people and dear friends here this morning, in a day of theological confusion and moral bankruptcy, no words to my mind could be more appropriate, more relevant, and more reassuring than the few verses we have read together, in the context, of course, of the total epistle. And I want us to consider this morning, very briefly, two aspects of this only gospel which we have here in this passage.

My two points are God's provision of the gospel, and secondly, man's possession of that same gospel. Look at God's provision of the gospel, and the only gospel. Verses 6 and 7, I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another gospel, but there be some that trouble you and would pervert you from the gospel of Christ.

The apostle marvels that these sickle Galatians had so soon defected from the gospel of God's provision. And there are two phrases he uses here which help us to understand the nature of God's provision of the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. One phrase is the grace of Christ.

The other phrase is the gospel of Christ. The grace of Christ and the gospel of Christ. And for our purpose here this morning, one represents the redeeming act of God in Christ, the once-for-allness, as one theologian has put it, the once-ness of God's redeeming act in Christ.

And the other represents what I'm calling the revealing act of God in Christ. Let's look at those just for a moment. The grace of Christ, the redeeming act of God in Christ.

When Paul speaks of the grace of Christ, we're left in no doubt as to what he really means. Look at verses 3 and 4. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father. Young people, the gospel is the good news of God's redeeming act in Christ, whereby he made possible through his death at Calvary's cross a means of deliverance from sin and from this evil world, that we might live to the glory of God the Father forever and forever.

Amen. You can search all mad-made religions, philosophies, and movements, and you'll find nothing to equal such a gospel as this. Only God could have conceived, initiated, and cultivated such a redeeming work as we see manifested in the grace of Christ.

This is God breaking into time at a given point in history, and in his beloved Son carrying out that redemptive program which whereby he's made possible the deliverance of men and women from human sin in all its many facets, in all its many hideous aspects, and not only from sinfulness but from worldliness from this present evil age. This is the redeeming act of God in Christ. This is the grace of Christ.

This is God's provision of the gospel. But in the second place, and for our purpose this morning perhaps even more important, in that second phrase, the gospel of Christ, the good news, the spelled-out message of the gospel, represents the revealing act of God in Christ. Heaven's message is called the gospel of Christ.

And Paul goes right on to say, I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after men. For I neither received it as men, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The distinctiveness of the Christian religion is that it's not man's search after God, but God's search after man.

It is he who has taken the initiative to break into time and reveal himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And our problem at this hour, ladies and gentlemen, is the fact that so many people are telling us the truth evolves and we're moving on to something new. I want to state quite categorically this morning that as I understand my Bible, truth is complete.

It's eternal, it's objective, and it's final. It is the faith once for all delivered unto men. And that's not only in terms of a point of time.

It's the oneness of revelation from God. We can't add to it, we can't subtract from it. It is truth in its completeness and finality.

And John the Apostle warns his converts in his second epistle concerning those who transgress the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he says, Whosoever transgresseth the doctrine of Christ is not of God. And any of you who know your Bible well enough will know that John is speaking of transgression in the sense of going beyond that which has been revealed. Someone has said there is a sense of advance which leaves fundamental principles behind, for that in fact it is not progress but apostasy.

And the revealing act of God in Christ is final. Paul dutifully argues this in his Roman epistle, where in chapter 10 verses 6 to 9 he says, You know the word of faith? It speaketh on this wise. Who shall ascend into heaven? That is to bring Christ down from above.

Or who shall descend into the depths? That is to bring Christ again from the dead. What saith it? The word is nigh, even in thy mouth, that is the word of faith which we preach. That if thou shall confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

What he is simply saying is this, nobody went up to heaven to bring Christ down from heaven. It's God's initiative, it's God's thought, it's God's conception. From beginning to end, God has revealed himself to us in Christ.

Nobody has gone into the depths, that is to bring Christ up again from the dead. That miraculous deed by which God raised up his son by his very glory and set him at the throne is entirely a work of God. So initiated and consummated by God is this gospel.

It is a divine act of redemption. It's a divine act of revelation. Man can add to it, subtract from it.

It's totally, objectively, eternally God. The natural man could never have conceived such a way of salvation. Only through the revelation of the gospel and the illumination of the Holy Spirit can men and women understand the true nature of God's provision of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I do commend to some of you young people the study of 1 Corinthians 1, the full chapter and 2, for Paul deals there with the very problems we're facing at this very hour. The Greeks seek after wisdom, the Jews require a sign, but God will not budge one inch, I may say reverently. He has decreed finally that by wisdom the world shall not know God.

He has decreed that by wisdom, that is to say human philosophy, that is to say human reasoning, God has decreed finally forever that the world, even if it goes to hell, shall not know God except in his revelation. So it's nothing to do with the scientific method, it's nothing to do with a philosophical approach. The scientific method is the sign required by the Jew.

The philosophical approach is that Greek who seeks after wisdom. And God says, I've shut up my gospel to Jesus Christ my son, who's my revelation, and outside of him I've got nothing to say, even for a world condemned. And the sooner we see that, the sooner we'll be on the straight road in understanding God's provision of the gospel, God's provision of the gospel.

But having stated this, Paul proceeds to speak very solemnly on what is really my main burden this morning, man's perversion of the only gospel, man's perversion of the only gospel. Look at verses six and seven again. I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another, but there be some that trouble you, mentally torture you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Now an examination of these words makes it plain that there is a twofold process by which the gospel is perverted. First of all, man deserts the gospel. First of all, man deserts the gospel.

That's the meaning of verse six. I marvel that you're so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel. That word Greek, that Greek word removed is one which is regularly used for a deserter, a turncoat, or an apostate, whether in religion or in politics.

One commentator points out that the verb is often used for migrating from place to place or changing one's religion or political views, and nothing could be more descriptive of the restlessness and changeableness of so-called professing Christians today. They will gladly listen to the preaching of the gospel until it conflicts with their own philosophy, and then they turn to some other gospel, if they were Christians at all, leaving the only true gospel. Let me illustrate this by one of the most popular names in the field of philosophy and theology today.

Professor Paul Tillich died just a few months ago at the age of 79, and he has left a legacy for the Christian Church that will take perhaps centuries to combat and overcome, though most of what he said wasn't necessarily new. In a little book entitled *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, the professor has written the first chapter entitled *An Intellectual Autobiography*. In his introductory words, Paul Tillich speaks of himself as an objector to all forms of authority, a romanticist.

He goes on to tell how he developed this outlook. It was a direct and definite rebellion against the conservatism of his parents, both father and mother. And because he wouldn't accept the demands and disciplines of the gospel as seen in the lives and heard from the lips of his two parents, being this sort of romantic type who liked to live in a world of fantasy, and at the same time, and it often follows, an objector to all forms of authority, he deserted the gospel.

There came a point in his life when he deserted the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as a result he lived and taught and died an apostle of another gospel. This will be made even more evident when we come to our next thought. But I want to just add in my own simple fashion that in terms of church members and young people and other contacts I've made throughout 25 years of my ministry, it's the same old story.

When the challenge of the lordship of Jesus Christ in his gospel, through the disciplines of the gospel, has impinged upon the mind and heart and will and conscience of the would-be hearer and believer, and they have said, no, I'm not accepting that. To accept that means I have no more freedom to work out my own philosophy of life and satisfy my own desires, my own ambitions. So I say no.

The man who does that and deserts it inevitably becomes an apostate, because the scripture teaches us here that when man deserts the gospel, secondly, man distorts the gospel. Man distorts the gospel. That's the process.

He deserts it, removed as the turncoat. Then he distorts the gospel. There be some that trouble you, mentally torture you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Lift up that word pervert for a moment. Look at it. That word pervert is an extremely strong one.

Look it up afterwards. It means to reverse or to change to its very opposite. To reverse or to change to its very opposite.

These Galatians had perverted the gospel of Christ by substituting a gospel of righteousness by works for the doctrine of reconciliation through the free forgiveness which God has provided through faith in Jesus Christ. And that's the whole thesis of the Galatian epistle. And this has always been true down through the ages.

When a person deserts the gospel, he quickly distorts it in order to rationalize his self-chosen philosophy of life. I could stand here all morning and give you illustrations of people I know, but since we have chosen Paul Tillich for our illustration this morning, let's take him up again. This is true of Tillich.

Professor Bernard Graham has evaluated Tillich's theology under the following guidelines. There are five of them. First, Tillich was not a biblical theologian by any stretch of imagination.

After reading his so-called theology, you wonder where in the Bible he could have ever found such notions. As he teaches, he is a case in point of a man transgressing the doctrine of Christ, which is not of God. Secondly, Tillich radically altered the thought calculus of scripture.

Tillich took most of the articles of the Christian faith and so adjusted them to the demands of philosophy and metasidic physics that they lost their personalistic character. And the whole thought calculus of scripture, as far as he was concerned, was altered. It wasn't a revelation of God.

God has not spoken once and for all. He couldn't stand with Saint Augustine, who says this, when God speaks, the scriptures speak. In the third place, Tillich reduced faith to existential insight.

Tillich said that God is the ground of all being. What he really meant by this is obscure, but what he denied is not. Tillich denied all biblical supernaturalism.

Nels Ferre, one of the most radical liberals of our day, and I say radical liberals of our day, evaluated Paul Tillich when alive thus. He said, and I quote, Tillich is the most dangerous theologian alive. Tillich was an anti-supernaturalist, and I make direct quotes here.

The virgin birth, quote, is an obvious legendary story, end of quote. The bodily resurrection of Christ, literally understood, quote, becomes compounded into blasphemy, end of quote. Prayer is a conversation between two persons, the divine and the human, quote, is a blasphemous and ridiculous notion, end of quote.

Certainly Tillich denied the incarnation as it's historically understood. Tillich's doctrine of God hovers between atheism, in that God is not a person, and pantheism, in that God is the ground of all being, and in so doing he excluded the incarnation of God in Christ. There was no objectivity concerning God.

The Bible concept of God as existing apart from us and existing where I, to recognize it or not, God, eternal, invisible, ever blessed forevermore, as the apostle says, was not a concept at all in Tillich's thinking. He was the ground of our being, some kind of subjective feeling. Could there be anything more outstanding in its illustration of the utter perversion of the gospel in our day and generation? And yet this is what happens in varying degrees to all men and women who desert the gospel of Christ.

Having removed themselves from the gospel, become turncoats, they distort it to fit their own self-chosen philosophy of life. It's the combination between this so-called romanticism and this objection to authority, which is so characteristic of our modern age. Now my dear young friends, just to take this a further and bring it right up to date, the God is Dead movement, the God is Dead movement, which has been popularized by Altizer and Hamilton and others, is a case in point again to illustrate this distortion of the gospel.

I might just take as an aside here that Altizer went to Chicago to have a dialogue and debate with Paul Tillich, and Altizer looked into that old man's face and said, we owe to you this God is Dead movement. Tillich took issue with him on this and couldn't completely agree that he was the father of it, though Altizer said he was. But they had such an amazing dialogue of excitement that Tillich turned around and said, it's late, I must go to bed.

And he went up to his room so moved and inspired by this entire movement that had started in what he called new thinking, that starts people thinking he died that night. That was the night he died. The God is Dead movement is likewise the result of the perversion of the gospel.

And once again, drawing a little from Dr. Bernard Graham in an article recently published, he helpfully analyzes for us this modern trend. He points out that there is a sense in which God is dead, according to them, philosophically. Beginning with the Scottish philosopher David Hume, 1711, 1776, and reinforced by that great modern philosopher we all know about, Immanuel Kant, 1724, 1804, right down to this present day, as it were decade by decade, philosophy has been stripped entirely of metaphysics.

And since the notion of God was bound up in the metaphysical aspect of philosophy, and philosophy now having been stripped of metaphysics, because metaphysics in that element is dead, therefore God is dead. Philosophers no longer need the concept of the being of God to explain the universe, or the world of knowledge. The modern attitude is singularly revealed in a reply of a philosopher-professor when asked whether he was an atheist, and I quote exclaim, I'm so bored with the question I'm too bored to be an atheist.

God is philosophically dead. God is culturally dead. In our culture God doesn't do anything.

So they tell us, we don't need him in science, we don't need him in technology, we don't need him in medicine. We explain things theoretically by science, we solve our problems by technology, we heal our bodies by medicine, hence modern culture towards God is cool. God is culturally dead.

And you know this is a far cry from a previous age. We could take the year 1300, when culture depended upon God, so to speak. The Christianum corpus, as it's known, was all built about God.

All our great music, all our art that comes down from antiquity, all that's beautiful was bound up with God. The entire cultural world was baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. But consider modern culture now.

When did you last see a piece of art that depicted anything from the gospel? When did you last hear music that was celebrated? In terms of our Christian faith, when did you see culture demonstrated in sculpture? Leonard Bernstein has written one of the greatest pieces of music, they say, of this decade. You know what that music is about? He has a theology as a commentary for the entire sweep of that music. It's a cry, where are you God? Where are you God? Because you don't exist.

God is culturally dead. Once more, God is theologically dead. Part of the smashing success of Jack Robinson's book, *Honest to God*, now past its 300,000th mark, has become popularized because of the implicit thesis that God is dead.

You see, the world has come of age. It knows that the universe is not run by demons or by angels, providences, or by prayers, but by scientific law. Therefore, man must think of the world as if God weren't there.

And as Altaize says, it's about time we blotted out the name of God, and for 20 years we didn't bring him back into our vocabulary. As a result of such philosophical, cultural, and theological thinking, many of our religious leaders have deserted the gospel of Christ. And so we have the panic of the present moment, and it's broken up into several groups.

Men and women are still in the process of distorting it. We have one group using existentialism to rebuild a so-called Christian theology. Another group who say that Christianity is identification with a contemporary struggle for social justice, and so try to whip up a new life into the old horse of the social gospel.

And hence we're told that if you get up behind your desk and you preach that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried in the third day, he rose again, and this is the gospel by which men are saved, and the grace wherein we stand is a lot of welcome. What you should be doing is going down to Alabama or anywhere else and joining in the great peace processions and civil rights processions and all the rest of it. This is the gospel.

The smaller group has said that man's problems are mental and emotional, and that the Christian church ought to be concerned with psychotherapy instead of the old-fashioned gospel. And alas, alas, a lot of evangelicals, so-called, have gone right out into extreme Pentecostalism and tongues movement across the country, made that as if that were the gospel, as if that were the answer, when the only place it has in the scripture is one of faith, godliness, caution all the way along, and one little distinct secondary gift as against the mighty movement of the Holy Spirit to evangelize the world. The last word of our Savior from heaven was this, he shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be a movement for tongues, though ye shall be witnesses unto me, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth.

It's distortion, you see. The moment you say no to the demands of the lordship of Christ in your life, you'll distort anything to meet your own particular whims and desires. It is into this context, my beloved friends, as I close in a few moments, that Paul counts with thundering authority, and I want to read those words literally, but though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached left in the earth, the motto of the reformers was *ad fonte*, back to the fountain, back to the sources, back to the origins, back to the purity of truth, and we need to do that today.

This is exactly what Paul urges in these opening words of his Galatian epistle, and in the very, very briefest comfort, because my time is gone, I want to conclude by drawing our attention to three

tremendous, tremendous fundamental facts to which Paul wants us to return. Taken from this very passage, Paul calls us, first of all, to return--listen carefully--to the grace of God, to the grace of God. I'm only taking them in the order in which they occur, not in order of importance or any particular sequence.

I return to the grace of God. I marvel that you're so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ and to another gospel. Young people, older ones here this morning, let me say the test of the gospel is g-r-a-c-e, grace.

If the message of the gospel excludes grace or mingles with grace, any foreign element as a means of justification, sanctification, or glorification, preaching is under the anathema of God. Grace rules out anything that man can say or do with regard to God's saving acts. If God is going to pick up Stephen Ofer, the hell-deserving wretch, and save him and make him a man ready for glory, it's all of grace, all of grace, all of grace.

God's got to start it, God's got to continue it, God's got to finish it, and my part in it is the most unmeriting thing that God could ever conceive of. It's faith, which is only an empty hand, and you can't add anything to the gospel. You can't add anything to the gospel.

Unless anyone should take me up wrongly, let me say this. Grace is the implementation of law and the disciplines of the lordship of Christ in our lives, and I'm not conflicting between law and grace, for grace makes possible the keeping of the law by the indwelling of Jesus Christ. What I'm talking about is these foreign additions that we bring into the gospel so that we save by something I can do myself.

And Paul says, I marvel, I marvel, I marvel that you've turned against the grace of Christ, that you've removed yourselves, you've deserted it from the grace of Christ. Secondly, Paul calls us to return to the word of God, and I take this in the general sense, a return to the word of God. As we said before, I say, I say, I say now again, says Paul, by emphasis, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that which he have received, let him be damned.

Young people, all the ones here this morning, let me say, if this were the last thing I ever said here at Columbia, the preaching of the gospel has only one textbook, and that's the bible. Any other preaching, however plausible, which does not measure up to a sound exegesis of scripture is strange, fierce, and must be categorically rejected. When Paul talks of another gospel, he uses another term here, as you'll see by your study of the Greek text.

There is no other gospel because there's only one gospel, and that's this revealed gospel, which is really the revelation of God. Here it is, and there's only one textbook. There's no other place in all the universe where you can find this revealed gospel saved in this book, and it's my plea that we return, we return, we return to the word of God.

In the little book to which I made reference last night, Hacker points out that not since the Reformation has there been such a famine of the word of God, and he opens that little book with a chapter called The Lost Word, The Lost Word, and when I was up at Wheaton for the convocation last Friday, I shared my burden with that entire faculty in that entire school by taking my text from 2 Timothy 4 verses 1 to 4, preach the word in instance, the instant in season, out of season, and fulfill thy ministry right to the very end. Don't give up, Timothy, don't give up. I'm on my way to heaven, my head's to fall from my shoulders.

I'm waiting for the crown of righteousness, but whatever you do, don't give up, preach the word to the very end, and if there's one thing I covet for young men and young women for that matter from a campus such as this, that you're going to be scattered from this place as expositors of the eternal truth of God, and there's only one book, it's the Bible, and there's only one gospel, it's the Bible, and it's about time we return to the word of God. My last word is simply this. Paul calls us to return to the grace of God.

Paul calls us to return to the word of God. Paul calls us here to return to the church of God. Paul speaks of the churches of Galatia in verse 2, and describes them, will you notice please, carefully, and describes them as Christian communities representing those who've been delivered from sinfulness and worldliness that they might do the will of God forever and ever, amen.

To belong to any church where these standards are not maintained by belief and behavior is to be out of the will of God and therefore well on the way to a perverted gospel. Believe you me, I've come to the place, and I say quite publicly and unashamedly, whatever it costs me, that I have no patience or time with any assembly of God's people, so-called, or any church that doesn't take its stand on what is meant by the local church, a community of men and women who've been delivered from sin and been delivered from this present evil age to live in the will of God forever and ever to the glory of God, amen. And anyone who belongs to any church that doesn't stand by that belief and behavior is under the anathema of God.

So we've seen what is meant by God's provision of the gospel. We've seen what is meant by man's possession of the gospel. There is only one choice so far as I'm concerned, and that is the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ, the only gospel.

My closing word to you all as you think through your studies, as you come to settled convictions, as you face the goal of your ministry, and finally the judgment seat of Christ where you have to answer and be able to say or not to say, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, notwithstanding I have fought a good fight. Yes, if you're ever going to do it, my friends, though an angel from heaven come to preach any other gospel, will you stand with me and say there's only one gospel? You, this day, whom you'll serve. Amen.

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