

# What Makes the Difference

by Vance Havner

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*Vance Havner emphasizes the urgent need for the church to awaken spiritually and embrace the simple yet profound gospel to impact a sinful world.*

**Duration:** 22:48

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Acts 1:8, Romans 13:11-14

**Topics:** "Difference"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the simplicity of the gospel message - that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification. However, despite having more ways to communicate this message than ever before, the world is still filled with unconverted pagans and false religions. The preacher attributes this to a sleeping church that is not moved by the gospel themselves. He shares a story of missionaries in Korea who were amazed at the crowd's response to the gospel message, contrasting it with the lack of enthusiasm in today's church. The preacher warns against being snared by human wisdom and devices, and emphasizes the need for the Holy Spirit's power in bringing about conversions.

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## Transcript

Once in a while we hear the expression, it's about time, it's about time this happened, it's about time that took place. Paul, in the 13th chapter of Romans, verse 11, writes, and that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believe. The night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light.

Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. The theme of this conference sets before us a simple gospel for sinful times. I have neither the time nor the desire to dwell long on the sinfulness of this age.

It's easy to be more excited over the world's condition than over the Lord's commission. Every one of you has preached on the evils of these days, I'm sure. I don't know how dark you made the picture.

You can't paint it too black. It's as bad as you said it was, and worse. C.S. Lewis says that mankind is staggering between Vanity Fair and Armageddon.

The sinfulness of these times is spread across the front page of every newspaper, written in crime waves, the breakdown of authority, the wreckage of our homes, which has made America one vast disaster area. We hear it in the jungle music that bombards our ears day and night. I shouldn't call it jungle music out of respect for apes.

It appears in the cocktail lounges of Washington where the top brass outdo Belshazzar's feast and cannot read the handwriting on the wall. We see it in book racks so vile that it has been said that never since Manhattan Island was sold for \$24 has so much dirt been available for so little money. This is no time to boast over the wave of the future.

We're more likely to be drowned in that tide. And while we try to mount up to the stars, we mire down in the slime. It is the irony of the space age that unless we have an awakening spiritually, we will never hold out morally long enough to do what we want to do scientifically.

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes and yet is not washed from their filthiness, God's word says. And Jeremiah tells us, God speaking, though thou wash thee with niter and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God. Now if soap could cleanse iniquity, this ought to be the purest nation on earth, for the singing commercials have sold detergents until America is drowning in an ocean of soap, says.

But there is a cleansing agent in the simple gospel. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. When we say the simple gospel, we do not mean that there's nothing profound about it.

There is a height and a depth and a length and a breadth about it that will engage our wonder through all eternity. But in its basic truth, that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification, the gospel is so simple that the plainest man may believe it and be saved. Somehow we're not getting this simple gospel over to this sinful world.

We have more ways of communicating it than ever, but we have more unconverted pagans than ever. Communism, secularism, which somebody has called the practice of the absence of God, false religions increase and abound, but it has been predicted that by 1975, less than two percent of the Western world will be committed to Jesus Christ. This simple gospel is not moving this sinful world because of a sleeping church.

This might seem a strange time to say that. We never had more rousements. But most of it is not conquering energy conscious of its power, but feverish energy conscious of its impotence.

We have become by now, I'm sure everybody knows it, the largest denomination. Maybe we could take a moratorium now from making that announcement and begin doing something about helping the quality to catch up with the quantity. If Dr. Gamble could say in his day and generation that Baptists are many but not much, one wonders what he would say today.

Actually, most of our people are in a coma with a Don't Disturb sign on the door. I heard of a Baptist who joined one of the liturgical churches some time ago and said, I sure do like the lethargy in your church. We've got some of it among the Baptists, if I know anything about it.

Beloved, the church needs to do more than to wake up. The church needs to get up. Waking up is not getting up.

In the average so-called revival, the local church wakes up temporarily only to turn over and go back to sleep. Our Lord said, Rise, let us be going. It's about time to wake up and about time to get up.

Our Lord knocks at the door of Laodicea and the knock is disturbing. The church is in her robe and slippers and easy chair and resents the disturbance of the divine discomforter. One thinks of the little boy who misread his Bible verse and said, I will not leave you comfortable.

The Lord never meant to leave us that way. I don't know of any way to wake people up without disturbing them. A revival is a heavenly disturbance on earth.

It breaks up the fallow ground and if that ground could feel or talk, it would resent the plow. It pulls down the high places and builds up the low places and straightens up the crooked places and makes a way for the Lord. There isn't any way to put a freeway through town without disturbance.

And God's highway program creates a commotion. Revival rolls the stone away from Lazarus' sepulcher. But there are always those Martha's who object for fear of creating an unpleasant situation.

We dare not disturb the status quo, but God will not raise Lazarus until we roll away the stone. God never does the supernatural thing that he alone can do until we do the simple thing that we must do. It is time to wake up.

Anarchy in the world, apostasy in the professing church, and apathy in the true church call for an awakening. The gospel used to make people shout in the aisles. Now it puts people to sleep in the pews.

The only crowd that I see shouting today is when somebody wins a fur coat or an automobile on a TV giveaway show. I grew up in an old country church where going to heaven used to make people glad enough to rejoice in the aisles. I remember sitting on one of those benches with my boyish feet dangling and watching one dear old lady who could go up and down the aisles with her eyes shut, never running into a pew.

I don't know what kind of radar she had, but she certainly was happy in the presence of the Lord. I used to wonder how those timid country people could become so happy in the Lord that they lost all their inhibitions and rejoiced all over the place. The Quakers got their name from the fact that they quaked, they trembled under the power of God.

Well, at least their religion shook them. Not many are being shaken by their faith these days. Some Baptists are shaky about what they believe, but not many are shaken by what they believe.

It won't move us, it won't move anybody else. I've read of two missionaries in Korea who had given their message and then retired in a building next to the meeting place, but the crowd wouldn't leave. Finally the missionaries arose and dressed and came out and said, Friends, the meeting is over, you must get your rest.

But a spokesman for the crowd said, How can we rest? You've told us that God so loved the world that he gave his Son and that if we'll trust him we can live forever. Who can sleep after hearing that? Well, we go to sleep listening to it today. I heard a congregation not long ago singing one of the battle hymns of the Church, and honestly, I believe if they'd sung two more verses, they would have sung themselves to sleep.

No wonder somebody said the clock struck twelve at Sunday noon and the Church gave up her dead. Ah, there's too much balcony Christianity, too much onlooker, spectator, non-participating kind. We traffic in unfelt truth.

We handle treasures as though they were trifles. We play marbles with diamonds. We are like men dressed for lion hunting who spend their time chasing butterflies, or as Peter Marshall used to put it, men guard for deep-sea diving who spend their time pulling plugs out of bathtubs.

We announce the good news as though it were a rumor. We talk the facts as though they were fiction. We handle carelessly the coinage of God's truth and rarely examine it to see whose image and superscription may be thereupon.

How many churches do you know that are causing consternation among the forces of ungodliness and making the devil sit up late at night planning countermeasures? While I was preaching in a small Midwestern city some time ago, I noticed a chamber of commerce display in the lobby of my hotel. There were pictures of outstanding local industries and institutions, including a church building, along with cultural and educational organizations. I couldn't help thinking that in the days of early Christianity, no chamber of commerce in Jerusalem, Antioch, or Rome would ever have included a church if they'd had church buildings then in the showcase of civic attractions, because that despised sect was too disturbing a nuisance to be listed with pride by the city fathers.

Early Christianity created no small stir in Ephesus and exceedingly troubled Philippi and turned the world upside down. We would be the sensation of the season if we challenged the pattern of life in suburbia and aroused even a feeble protest. We claim an experience and we offer a performance.

We put up million-dollar launching pads to send up firecrackers. Orthodoxy alone is not enough. One trouble with orthodoxy today is it's sound.

Sound asleep. We need to be exercised about theology and doctrine. We are sheep among wolves, but we need to look out for the wolves among the sheep.

It's about time. The hot war of the 20s has become the cold war of the 60s, but the defenders of the faith are a weaker breed. If we don't wake up, the living faith of the dead will become the dead faith of the living.

There are those who would force the scripture into the procrustean beds of their own theories and make the Bible fit human explanation on one hand or human experience on the other. It's about time to let the Bible be the Bible and let God be true, but every man a liar. Once in a while I see an article boasting of the fact that in our organization today we have room for everybody, from the most extreme liberalism on one side to the most radical fundamentalism on the other.

That's too much room. The temple of God's truth, however, has never been heard as much by woodpeckers on the outside as by termites on the inside. They are deadly dangerous because they're so quiet and nice about it.

If we open our house to the termites, we'll soon have no house to open to anybody. We need a new program of pest control. The Eastern universities were founded on the Bible, and they did not backslide overnight.

They did it by a compromise here and a concession there, in the name of tolerance, one inch at a time. Our great chestnut trees in western North Carolina are there no longer. They were destroyed by blight from the top.

And other things besides chestnut trees are destroyed by blight from the top. But you can be as straight as a gun barrel theologically and be as empty as a gun barrel spiritually. Ephesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

They tried the false teachers, but they needed a flame of sacred love kindled in those cold hearts of theirs. Orthodoxy not set on fire from above degenerates into a bitterness that doesn't know the difference between being militant and being belligerent. Some of our brethren in other fellowships have learned the hard way that if we don't live in 1 Corinthians 13 while we preach out of Galatians 1, we will only split and sub-split and splinter into a free-for-all feud of Hatfields and McCoys.

Orthodoxy without experience is body without spirit. Experience without doctrine is spirit without body. And Christianity is neither a corpse nor a ghost.

Separation from the world is not enough either. It's about time we did something about that. When country club Christianity makes the church less and less a place to pray and more and more a place to play.

When Vanity Fair is listed with approval on the itinerary of most pilgrims. When there are more church members promoting the world in the church than promoting the gospel in the world. It's about time we rediscovered that the friend of the world is the enemy of God and if any man loved the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

There was a day when a Spurgeon was not afraid to say many would unite church and stage, cards and prayer, dancing and sacraments. If we are powerless to stem this torrent, we can at least warn men of its existence and entreat them to stay out of it. But that approach is now smilingly dismissed as unwise.

We don't hear such warnings today, but then we don't have any Spurgeons either. When peace was made, Augustine said between the emperors and the church the Gentiles who wanted to join the church in great numbers wanted some kind of compromise and he said it seemed good then to our leaders to favor this part of their weakness and for those festivals which they had relinquished to substitute others in honor of the holy martyrs which they might celebrate with similar luxury, though not with the same impiety. That's when it got started.

But separation alone is not enough. The Pharisees wouldn't even eat an egg that had been laid on the Sabbath. But the publicans and harlots went into the kingdom of God before them.

I offer you a more excellent way. It's about time we had an old-fashioned spirit-filled mourner's bench revival that would raise the spiritual temperature high enough to kill all the germs, whether the germs of false doctrine on one side or of worldliness on the other or any other malignancy. But there's a price to pay and we will not pay the price.

We want a cheap tune-up job instead of a costly overhauling. Almost nothing is being said or written today about the need for a spiritual shake-up from top to bottom in the present membership of our churches. It's the blind spot in our eye.

The epistles of Paul say very little about soul winning. They were aimed at developing the kind of Christians who would naturally go after the lost, the kind of people with whom the word Christian is an adjective as well as a noun. The seven letters in Revelation call the churches to repentance and our Lord's last word to the church is not the Great Commission but a call to conversion and confession and cleansing and commitment within the church.

And while we go after prospects on the outside, we had better pay some attention to the prospects we have on the inside who are already members, but prospects, some of them for salvation, some for dedication, some for stewardship, some for deeper Christian living. We've been long on membership and short on discipleship. Everybody knows that the majority of our church members today show no evidence of ever having been born again.

Nothing is easier to get into and harder to get out of than the average church. It would be shocking to know, for instance, how many people who join by letter have ever been saved. If we ask them, they would be offended.

The assumption is that they're born again and nowadays that is a dubious assumption. When we make it easy, when we ask less than the New Testament asks, we aid and abet in their deception and we bring the judgment of God on ourselves as well as on them. The tragedy of this hour is that the situation is desperate, but the saints are not.

We are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Our greatest peril is prosperity. We've never had it so good.

We're like a cat drowning in cream. No great religious body has ever been able to survive its own success. If we do, we'll be the first crowd who ever did.

Years ago I heard a dear brother pray before the evening service, God give us tonight what makes the difference. I grew up in an old country church where we used to sing, Brethren, we have met the worship and adore the Lord our God. Won't you pray with all your power while we try to preach the word? All is vain unless the spirit of the Holy One come down.

Brethren, pray in a holy manner. We'll be showered all around. It's about time for that.

Dr. Gambrill said, I'm tired of these experts figuring how long it'll take to convert the world, parceling out the millennium, how many dollars it takes to convert a soul, fitting up nice harness for everybody to work in. It makes me tired. Before we know it, we'll be snared by human wisdom and human devices.

There is something deeper, life and spirit. There is a great controlling divine element without which there will be no conversions. After a while we are going to wake up and find out that we are weaving very fine theories that will enslave us and wear us out.

Dr. Gambrill was merely talking about what makes the difference. When D.L. Moody spoke in Fifth Avenue Church in New York on a Sunday, he looked like anything but an impressive pulpit personality. His trousers were baggy, his countenance was shaggy.

He called Gideon Gideon and Daniel Daniel and pronounced Jerusalem in two syllables. And although that fastidious, cultured congregation was a little nervous for a few minutes, before ten minutes had passed, they were on the edges of the seats listening to a man preach in the power of the Holy Spirit. This

doesn't mean that education is unimportant.

It doesn't mean that a good pulpit appearance doesn't matter. But it does mean that D.L. Moody had what makes the difference. Today we have programs and personnel and pep and paraphernalia and propaganda.

Do we have what makes the difference? Not by might nor power, but by my Spirit, said the Lord of Hosts. And without that, theological correctness and ethical strictness and religious busyness will only be so much dust on a windy street. All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.

Beloved, this is the secret of unity, too. We're having all kinds of ecumenical movements afoot now trying to produce artificially what only the Holy Spirit can create. When the spirits or tides are low, every little shrimp has a puddle of his own.

But when revival comes in like a flood, all the Saints are caught up in what William James used to call the water spouts of God. Unanimity is impossible. Unification is undesirable.

Unity we have in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We've tried all kinds of ways to get the Saints together. They've been tied together in organization, bound together in creeds, rested together in tradition, frozen together in formalism.

But when they started out at Pentecost, they were melted together by the Holy Spirit. It's such an old illustration that I hesitate to use it, but I've never found one that says it better. Some of you have read how when Cromwell was reigning, he sent some of his men out to find some silver to melt and put into circulation for currency.

Two of them came back and said, the only silver we can find is in the statues of the Saints standing around in the corners of the cathedral. He said, good, we'll melt down the Saints and put them in circulation. I don't know of anything today that's needed more than that.

It's about time to melt down the Saints and put them in circulation if we are to arouse a sleeping Church to give the simple gospel to a sinful world.

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