

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

The Gospel Which We Preach

2 Timothy 1:9-10 (584)

October 28, 2001

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 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 granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Last Monday evening David, Julia, and I drove up to the University of North Texas to hear four theologians debate the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Two liberal theologians, Marcus Borg and Daryl Schmidt, faced off against two conservative theologians, Darrell Bock and William Lane Craig. At one point in the exchange, Marcus Borg said, "I have two or three definitions of a Christian but this is the one I like to use the best." In the same way there are many versions of the gospel out there. My purpose this morning is to explore the gospel which we believe is revealed in Scripture, which we believe Paul and the apostles preached, and which we preach from this pulpit.

"This Gospel ... is a message which tells of One who turns rebels into worshippers; [it is] 'a proclamation of divine sovereignty in mercy and judgement,

[it is] a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good ... ' The Gospel tells of the glorious triumph of God's life-giving free GRACE that saves, over the will of man that leads to his condemnation and death; this grace is that free and unmerited favour of God toward sinners, by which God the Father loved us and had mercy upon us; by which the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to die for our sins; and by which the Holy Spirit called us and drew us out of darkness into God's marvelous light. This is indeed good news; it is the very kernel of the 'whole counsel of God' which Paul and the rest of the apostles did not shrink from declaring, proclaiming to the world the great work of the three persons of the Trinity in saving sinners" (*The Grace of God in the Gospel*, pp.18-19).

And so we say, **first**, the gospel we preach is about **God**. It is *the gospel according to the power of God (8b)*. "The Gospel begins where the Bible begins, and where all true religion begins – with God Himself. The Gospel is God's Gospel; it is his power; it tells of his righteousness, his grace and his truth. [*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, Rom. 1:16-17*]. In short, the Gospel is about God. Whenever superficiality, glibness, frivolity, stereotyped evangelism, and suchlike, abound, while reverence, depth, personal desire for holiness, and overflowing love for the Lord Jesus are not very obvious, we may be certain that the root cause of the trouble is that the gospel that is preached is not the God-centered Biblical Gospel, but a new, man-made,

man-centered substitute ... The Gospel we find in the Bible is concerned with God; it seeks to glorify him, and him alone. This Gospel causes men to fear God, [to] love God, and [to] glorify God; and any gospel which does not do these things is not the Gospel which the apostles preached" (*The Grace of God in the Gospel*, p.19).

Second, the gospel we preach is about the *God who has saved us (9a)*. The question naturally arises, **From what are we saved?** The testimony of the New Testament is this: **Romans 5:9**, *we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him [Jesus]; I Thessalonians 1:10* speaks of *Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come*. God, in Christ, saves us from His own wrath; wrath being the settled opposition of God's holiness to evil. This wrath, being a function of the perfect justice of God, is aroused and provoked only by man's sin. We know this very well.

Wrath is revealed in the **conscience** of man. **Romans 1:32**, *they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death*. Men carry in themselves a load of guilt and terror of punishment because of their sin. Wrath is revealed in the witness of **Scripture**. **Romans 2:5**, *But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. The explicit warnings in the Bible are in themselves a revelation of anger. Wrath is revealed in the **condition** of mankind. **Romans 1: 24, 26, 28**, *God gave them over to*

impurity ... God gave them over to degrading passions ... God gave them over to a depraved mind. Judicial hardening and withdrawal of restraints is a manifestation of the wrath of God. God displays His wrath in letting us continue in the downward spiral of sin. The proliferation of crime. The legalization of murder under the guise of abortion. The increase and acceptance of homosexuality and the diseases which attend such immorality. The pornography industry and the sexual molestation of children. The breakdown of the family. The kinky, distasteful, and godless exhibition of the human condition portrayed on TV talk shows and sitcoms. Wars. The attempted extermination of entire ethnic groups. Terrorism. This is the wrath of God.

“Now if there is such a divine hostility to evil it is obvious that something must be done about it if man, sinner as he is, is ever to be accepted before God” (Morris, p. 210). So the next question is **how is wrath averted?** In the Old Testament God’s punishment could be averted by men purging the sin which occasioned the anger of God (**Deut. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14**). Men could avert the anger of God by humbling themselves in repentance (**II Chron. 12:7**). In **Psalm 106:23** we learn that the intercession of Moses averted the wrath of God from coming upon the people. But the eternal wrath of God against sin is averted in but one way - the divine hostility itself must be **removed**. This work of God is called propitiation.

God cannot be bought or bribed. Religious performance does not move Him. Ordinances, gifts, sacrifices, morality, good intentions and good works; none can

placate the wrath of God ... Wrath can be removed only in the divinely appointed way. This principle is taught plainly and early in the Old Testament. **Leviticus 17:11**, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.”* God, and God alone, provides the way in which the consequences of sin may be averted. **I John 2:2**, *and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins;* **Romans 3:25** speaks of Jesus *whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.* Jesus Christ is the gift of God whose shed blood propitiates the wrath of God.

The wrath of God is reality. But the Bible reveals to us a God of infinite mercy. Wrath is not the last word. The occasion for wrath will not always endure. Sin will be put away. The evil one defeated. Judgment rendered. God’s desire is mercy. **Micah 7:18** says, *He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.* You must avail yourselves of God’s provision in Jesus Christ. The ultimate issue, according to Leon Morris is this: Either He dies or we die. Jesus is the sinner’s only hope. **John 3:36**, *He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.* My friend, the gracious invitation of God is *“believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household”* (**Acts 16:31**).

Third, the gospel we preach is about the God who *called us with a holy calling* (9b). There is “the universal call of the gospel. The overtures of grace in the gospel addressed to all men without distinction are very real and we must maintain that doctrine with all its implications for God’s grace, on the one hand, and for man’s responsibility and privilege on the other ... But it is very striking that in the New Testament the terms for calling, when used specifically with reference to salvation, are almost uniformly applied, not to the universal call of the gospel, but to the [effectual] call that ushers men into a state of salvation ... There is scarcely an instance where the terms are used to designate the indiscriminate overture of grace in the gospel of Christ. Hence the all but uniform meaning is that which is fixed by such well-known passages as **Romans 8:30** NASB : *Whom He predestinated, these He also called*, **I Corinthians 1:9** NASB : *God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son ...* Calling is an act of God and of God alone. This fact should make us keenly aware how dependent we are upon the sovereign grace of God in the application of redemption ... If we are to understand the strength of this word, as used in this connection, we must use the word ‘summons.’ The action by which God makes his people the partakers of redemption is that of summons ... A summons issued by a court does not of itself empower us to appear in court. It gives us warrant to appear and it requires us to appear but it does not actually bring us into court. That depends upon our strength and will ... It is wholly otherwise with God’s summons. The summons is invested with the efficacy by which we are delivered to the destination intended – we are effectively ushered into the fellowship of

Christ. There is something determinate about God's call; by his sovereign power and grace it cannot fail [to accomplish His purpose]" (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp.88-91).

Fourth, the gospel we preach is about the God who calls *not according to our works* (9c). "The teaching of Scripture is clear and unequivocal. Man is *totally depraved*; that is to say, the fall of Adam, in which all men participate (**I Cor. 15:21-22; Rom. 5:12-21**), extends to all man's faculties (**Is. 1:5-6**): his *heart* (which in Scripture denotes the very center of man's being – the seat of his affections and personality) (**Matt. 15:19; Jer. 17:9**), his *mind* (**Eph. 4:17-18; Rom. 1:28**), his *will* (**John 5:40**), his *conscience* (**Titus 1:15**), and every other part of him. Sin is described as being a *state* of enmity against God, and of transgression of his commandments (**Dan. 9:9-11; Rom. 1:29-32**), and, forasmuch as fallen men have no power of themselves to think, speak or will anything that may please God, until they be regenerate and renewed by the Spirit of the Lord, all works done before justification have the nature of sin ... There is therefore *not a single thing that a man can do* that will please God, if he has not been born again. Every man, woman and child born into this world, with the exception of our Lord, is a slave to sin (**Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:9-20; John 8:34**), is dead in sin (**Eph. 2:1**), sins in all things (**Ezek. 21:24**), and cannot cease from sin until God in his mercy delivers him or her from it" (*The Grace of God in the Gospel*, pp.33-34).

Why must this be the case? Because if you are to gain eternal life by your works God's requirement is perfection. Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 5:48**, "*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" But this is impossible. "The sinfulness of man does not consist solely of the voluntary sins which he commits; for these are the fruits of his corrupt nature (**James 1:14; Eph. 2:2-3**). Empirically, we observe daily that sin abounds; but the Scriptures reveal to us that the situation is infinitely more desperate than we could ever have realized. Man's sin is not only what he does – which we can see – but what he *is*, which we cannot see as God sees it" (*The Grace of God in the Gospel*, p.34).

And so we rejoice that, **fifth**, the gospel we preach is about the God who saves ***according to His own purpose and grace (9d)***. "The God revealed to us in the Scriptures is *sovereign*. The first thing that the Bible tells us is: *In the beginning, God created ...* He is declared to be the sovereign Creator of all things, and this fact is made plain before any of his other attributes – justice, holiness, mercy, love – are revealed. By 'sovereign' is meant 'supreme', and God is sovereign because *He works all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11)*, not out of necessity, but freely, for his own glory. Creation was a sovereign act ... its cause was solely the good pleasure of God. God's word is : *My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure (Is. 46:10 NASB)*, and to that perfect will, all things, and all men, are subject. *I will work, and who shall hinder (Is.43:13)? (The Grace of God in the Gospel, pp.19-20)*.

“Scripture proclaims the sovereignty of the Lord [in salvation]. [Jesus said], ‘*The Son also gives life to whom He wishes*’ (**John 5:21** NASB); ‘*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing*’ (**John 6:63** NASB). So, then, as men are unable, by reason of their sin, to come to Christ; as it is the Holy Spirit who effects the new birth in the heart of a man; as the purpose of God in saving sinners is always accomplished; and as all men are not saved; it is God, and not man, who decides who shall be saved: *and [Jesus] said, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father*’ (**John 6:37,64-65** NASB) ... We, who are saved, are debtors to mercy alone, and the God who has saved us is the One who *hath mercy on whom he will* (**Romans 9:15**) ... God set us apart for himself at the very beginning, not according to his foresight of anything in us meriting our election (such as faith, or perseverance) which would ... entail salvation by our own works, but it was according to his love and mercy that he chose us for salvation ... *And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed* (**Acts 13:48**) ... *So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy* (**Romans 9:16** NASB) ... The most humbling thing that a Christian can know, and the truth that brings him to his knees before his Lord, is that his salvation is all of grace, that his election was solely of God’s will and pleasure” (*The Grace of God in the Gospel*, pp.52-56).

10 *but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

What you have heard this morning is Calvinistic soteriology. I want to close with a quotation from J.I. Packer which touches upon this :

“There is really only one point to be made in the field of soteriology: the point that *God saves sinners*. **God** – the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father’s will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. **Saves** – does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. **Sinners** – men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God’s will or better their spiritual lot. **God saves sinners** – and the force of this confession may not be weakened by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity, or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man and making the decisive part man’s own, or by soft-pedaling the sinner’s inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Saviour. This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the ‘five points’ are concerned to establish and Arminianism in all its forms to deny: namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen” (As quoted in Steele and Thomas, pp.22-23).

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