

The Gospel, the Church, and the Bible

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TIME FOR REEXAMINATION OF THE WORD *GOSPEL, CHURCH, AND THE BIBLE*

It is time that we, as believers, reexamine what the *Gospel*, the *Church*, and the *Bible* really mean to us in our daily spiritual walk with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. **Has the Gospel of God, His Church, and His written Revelation made a difference in the way we react to the Good News of God's grace?** If we wish to understand the true meaning of the word *Gospel* and the role that the Church plays in our lives, we must go to the ultimate authority—the Bible. Are our lives under the control of God's Gospel? If so, then our lives are lives of peace and joy in believing all that the Law and the Prophets have written concerning Jesus and His kingdom. **How often do we study the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms?** The believer is one who lives for God and carries within his or her bosom a consciousness of God. **Paul's final words to Timothy** is his first epistle should alert all believers concerning a certain kind of commitment and external activities. We should listen and weigh his admonition:

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and **pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.** ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. **Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.** ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:11-16)¹

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE UNDER THE GOSPEL?

What does it mean for us to bring our lives under the Gospel? **It means that our days are no longer under God's wrath of condemnation** (see Romans 5-8). On the other hand, for us to live our lives apart from God's Way of salvation "in" and "through" Jesus is to remain

¹ All citations are from the *New International Version* 1984 edition.

under God's wrath of judgment, that is to say, eternal separation from God. In the Book of Romans, Paul dealt with both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is God's answer to redemption, not the Law. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. In order to redeem us, God the Father had to send Jesus as an Atonement/Propitiation/Mercy Seat for our sins. **How do we react to God's Good News of salvation by grace in Christ?** Do we receive God's way of redemption or restoration with enthusiasm? How do we feel about God's fellowship of believers? **What does the Bible mean to us?** How often do we read and reflect upon His Holy Word? **Is the church important in our lives?** Are we conscious that in **our gathering** together as saints of the Most High that **it is a time to encourage and strengthen one another?** Is Jesus our example about the weekly gathering with God's people? Sunday is one day out of the week that many Christians take advantage of the public gathering of God's people. **Have we adopted the example of Jesus as reported by Luke?** Listen to Luke as he gives us an insight into Jesus' view of the Sabbath:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ **He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.** He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:14-19)

Do we participate, when possible, in Bible studies during the week? Even if we cannot conduct or visit a Bible study during the week, we can share Jesus with others? Are we taking advantage of the Bible studies conducted by various individuals for further instructions in God's Holy Word on Sundays? **In my seventy years of ministry, I have witnessed hundreds of individuals who have ceased to meet with the people of God.** The Church has had little influence in their lives. Are we conscious that the church was purchased by the blood of Christ on Calvary?² Yet, God's love is a love that is undaunted by our ingratitude, our disobedience, and our unresponsive love. He is still calling us to repentance. In spite of our rebellion, God is still calling individuals to turn to Him for salvation.

We still witness the unwearied and loving kindness of God as He continues to reach out to us who have left our first love (see Revelation 2:1-7). God gets in touch with individuals through His saints as they proclaim the message of salvation. **Paul**, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, referred to himself as an ambassador of the Gospel. His words should ring as a clarion call to all God's people to spread the Word of God. The following words should resonate within us in our daily walk with God:

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, **so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.** ¹³ If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ **For Christ's love compels us,**

² See Acts 20:28.

because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!** ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has **committed to us the message of reconciliation**. ²⁰ We are therefore **Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.** ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)

Has not God also committed to us the "ministry of reconciliation? Has Christ's love placed a burden upon our hearts to share the Good News of God's way of reconciling us unto Himself? Are we "Christ's ambassadors"? Do we live just for ourselves or are we trying to persuade others to accept Jesus? **For those of us who have known and tasted that God is gracious and loving, we are aware that there can be no final peace or joy apart from Him** (Hebrews 6:4-6). Are we endeavoring to carry out our daily activities apart from Christ? Are we seeking to live our lives apart from God's fellowship of believers? God makes His claim upon us who have accepted Jesus as the Savior of the world. **If men and women outside of Christ are not under God's wrath, the Gospel of grace is deprived of its meaning.**

If we are slack and loose in our service to God, God is still loving and patient. **He wants us to repent and serve Him with zeal, passion, dedication, eagerness, enthusiasm, and fervor.** In the Book of Revelation, God issues His final appeal to faithfulness in order to receive the "free gift of the water of life." **John gives God's invitation this way:** "The Spirit and the bride [the Christian community] say, "Come!" And let the one who **hears** say, "Come!" Let the one who is **thirsty** come; and let the one who **wishes** take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17). As we reflect upon the "bride" of Christ, we need to remember that the **church is not** an ecclesiastical organization. The **church is** the unity of God's people—both Jews and Gentile. The **church is** the messenger of God's redeeming mercy to the lost world of humanity. The **church (bride of Christ) represents** the community of those who live by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary.

THE CROSS OF JESUS SETS FORTH THE TRUE DEGRADATION OF SIN

We can only know the true degradation of sin "in" and "through" the person of Christ Jesus our Savior. The Cross of Christ sets forth the heinousness of sin in all of its ugliness. As Christians, we are to commit our lives to Christ. **The power of sin can only be defeated when Christ is enthroned in the life we live.** It is only "in Christ" that the power of sin can be defeated. Are we seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? **Have we forgotten** that we have been bought with a price and that we are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)? **Is God first or is He second in our lives or is He totally absent from our thinking?** Have we recently reflected upon Paul's words to the Christians in Philippi as he discusses the scandalous death of Christ upon the Cross and His humility? If not, the following account given my Paul

should awaken within us the power and importance of the scandalous death of Christ on the Cross in order to redeem us:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!** ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:1-11)

Do we look to His kingdom now as well as to the final blessed hope with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit when we leave one room (earthly abode) and pass into another room (eternal abode)? **Death is not the end of life; it is the beginning of life.** As followers of Jesus **the** Christ (God's Anointed One), we look beyond God's kingdom on earth and know that the dissolution of **physical death** is not the final end, but rather the gateway to the glory of the eternal God (John 11:24-25). **While in this life, do we bear fruit to God's glory?** Have we recently read the words of Jesus to His disciples about bearing fruit? If not, we should take time to reflect upon his words as found in John's Gospel (John 15:1-17). Are we **insulting** the Spirit of grace by our lifestyles (Hebrews 10:29)? The author of the book of Hebrews cautions Christians about insulting the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10). Are we guilty? The following words of the author of the Book of Hebrews should be memorized, which words should resonate within our own daily spiritual walk. We should listen and weigh his remarks carefully: "How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has **trampled** the Son of God underfoot, who has **treated** as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has **insulted** the Spirit of grace?" (10:29)

HAVE WE DEDICATED OUR LIVES TO THE POWER OF CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE ACT

Once more, what does life under the Gospel mean to us? Have we dedicated our lives to the power of Christ's redemptive act? **Are we conscious that living our lives under the Gospel of Christ is the same as the opening up of our hearts to Christ Jesus?** This submitting of our lives to Christ will enable us to bring forth spiritual fruit that will glorify Him. **God uses us as His channel to reach out to the lost.** Are we conscious of this truth? Remember, God's Gospel allows us to be channels through which the kingdom of God is made known. What does the Christian community mean to us? Many Christians, so it seems, have abandoned the assembling of themselves together with other believers. **As Christians, we**

assemble to encourage and to strengthen one another by sharing with one another through singing, praying, and reading of the Holy Scriptures. Shortly before the announcement of the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16: from February AD 67 to August AD 70), which battle would result in the total destruction of apostate Israel (42 months—see Revelation 11:1-2; Daniel 12:7), **the author still encouraged the disciples to come together and not to abandon this gathering.** In spite of the persecution that they were enduring, he (possibly Paul), he still told them to join the gathering of the saints. We should pay attention to his exhortation:

Let us hold **unswervingly** to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ **not** giving up **meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging** one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (AD 70, Hebrews 10:23-25)

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE UNDER THE GOSPEL?

A life under the Gospel is a life that is active in the community of God. Our life in the Church acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord; **this acceptance of Christ involves our sharing “the faith” with others.** To be a Christian means to be incorporated into the Body of Christ. The Church is the “fellowship of the committed” whereby the Gospel of God continues to be proclaimed throughout the world. **Every individual is nourished and strengthened through participation in God’s new community of believers.** Also, our Christian baptism and our participation in the Lord’s Supper should constantly remind us of our life under the Gospel. **Life in the Church is not a life of isolation.** In other words, we do not live our day-to-day lives in separation from God’s community of saints.

DOES THE CHURCH HAVE A PLACE IN OUR LIVES?

What place does the Church have in our lives? Have we discarded the need for the Church in our way of life? The function of the internal life of the Church is to enable Christians to grow together in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and in a greater understanding of His kingdom. **Jesus purchased the Church with His blood.** The ultimate authority for the Church is found in the wisdom of God, which wisdom is disclosed in His written Revelation (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). It is the function and mission of the Church in our society to proclaim the God’s wisdom as God’s Way of salvation. His wisdom constitutes God’s Good News of how He can justify sinful humanity. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus about God’s intent for the church:

His **intent** was that now, **through the church**, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² **In him and through faith in him** we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Ephesians 3:10-13)

As Christians, we *proclaim* God's kingdom (His rule) and *prove* from the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus is God's Messiah for the redemption of lost humanity. In our study of the Law and the Prophets, we see God's announcement of the kingdom as foretold by the prophets (Daniel 2, Isaiah 2, and Joel 2) about the coming of Jesus. We can say that the Gospel brought the community of the Resurrected One into being and the Gospel still continues to keep God's family in obedience to the ethical teachings of Jesus as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). As members of this new community, we are a people who possess the life of God's kingdom, and, at the same time, communicate the message of grace for the furtherance of His kingdom, that is to say, His rule. Do we remember what Matthew recorded concerning the ministry of Jesus? If not, we should read the following account that Matthew preserved in his Gospel:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues, **proclaiming** the good news of the kingdom and **healing** every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.** (Matthew 9:35-37)

PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

If we, the Church, wish to be witnesses to the world, we need to recapture our first love for God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We need to bring back our desire to meet with the people of God in order to be filled, as it were, with high octane, so that we can go back into the world with the message of redemption. As Christians, we must again and again search the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in order to defend the faith. Are we familiar with those Scriptures that testify about Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah? **Is the Christian community unimportant in our daily walk with God? Has the church lost its pull on us? Why did God found the church? Is the local gathering of God's people inconsequential in God's scheme of redemption?** If so, we wonder why the Holy Spirit, through Luke, wrote: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). The following citation from Frank Viola (high school Psychology and Philosophy teacher) is informative concerning the purpose of God's kingdom and His church:

The NT contains a saga ['sä-gə, story, history]. That saga is the unfolding drama of God's ultimate intention. And that intention is centered on the Kingdom of God coming to earth. **The Kingdom of God is nothing other than the rule of God.** And it rests on the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of God produces the church. The church, in turn, submits to the sway or rule of the Kingdom. As it does, **the church expresses, represents, and advances God's Kingdom on the earth.**

Properly conceived, the church is the community of believers who joyfully enthrone Jesus Christ, express His sovereign rule in the world, and as a result, enjoy the blessing of the future age here-and-now.

According to the NT, the church is not a building. Neither is it a denomination, a religious service, nor a non-denominational organization. **The church is simply this: A community of people who possess the life of God's Kingdom and who express it together.**³ (Emphasis mine--bold)

³Frank Viola, *From Nazareth to Patmos: The Saga of the New Testament Church* (USA: Present Testimony Ministry, 2004), 17-18. **Frank Viola** is a frequent conference speaker and author of numerous books on the deeper Christian life and church restoration, including *Jesus Manifesto*, coauthored with Leonard Sweet. He is a nationally recognized expert on emerging trends for the church, and he is actively engaged in planting New Testament-style churches.