

Unveiling the Gospel



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by Dale Rumble

Introduction

There are many evidences today of significant and wonderful changes taking place in the church. We are witnessing a great work by the Lord to not only prepare us for His glorious return, but also for the spiritual warfare that will inevitably mark a great final harvest of souls at the end of this age.

The Lord's goal is not simply revival; it is for restoration back to the principles and truths of the original church.

Despite the great number of believers today, and the vast technological resources that are available to spread the gospel, something is missing! The church in America has a divorce rate equal to that of the world. She does not have the same power and united witness of a righteous lifestyle that was exhibited by the first Christians. Restoration is needed; but where?

To properly appreciate what is taking place today, and what is yet to take place, it is important to first understand how the first church fell away, the depth of this fall into the Dark Ages, and the work of restoration that has taken place since the reformation.

FLOODS UPON THE DRY GROUND¹ is recommended to readers as an accurate and well written overview of these aspects of church history.

1 Charles P. Schmitt, FLOODS UPON THE DRY GROUND, P.O. Box 310, Shippensburg, PA; Destiny Image, 1998.

The last half of the past century has witnessed a growing interest and demonstrated increase in spiritual gifts. Need for the fivefold ministries of Ephesians 4:11 is being recognized; in particular, for the ministries of apostles and prophets. The traditional emphasis of a single, strong minister to lead local churches is being challenged by team ministries and biblical elderships in a growing number of assemblies.

In concert with this, and as an integral part of such restoration, more and more believers are leaving the authority structure of institutional churches to gather in “open” meetings held in homes of believers. This trend to house churches will certainly accelerate in the future since it offers a spiritually organic basis for developing the relationship and spontaneity of body-life that marked the original church. After all, the early church was built in homes!

However, church restoration will only be complete when Christ has regained His rightful place in the personal and corporate lives of His people. To that end, we need to continually ask ourselves where we still fall short.

This tract has been written to examine the gospel, as it was proclaimed and taught by the first apostles, to see if this is an area where restoration in power, content, or emphasis is needed today.

What is the Gospel?

A good place to begin is seeking an answer to the following two part question, “What is the gospel, and how does one appropriate its promises?”

Scripture is very clear in answering the first part of this question. The gospel contains three fundamental truths:

- Christ died for our sins
- He was buried
- He rose from the dead on the third day through the power of the Holy Spirit

*Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel which I preached to you**, which also you received, **in which also you stand, by which also you are saved**, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was **buried**, and that He was **raised** on the third day according to the scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)*

Christ died an agonizing death on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for all the sins of mankind; the proof of God's acceptance of His sacrifice was His resurrection from the dead on the third day.

Scripture is also quite clear in answering the second part of our question, "How does one appropriate the promises of the gospel?" All promises of the gospel begin with the promise of eternal life. This becomes ours through faith in the grace of God when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that He died in our place on the cross. By faith, the Holy Spirit comes to abide in our hearts. This can **never** be earned by any good work on our part; it is by grace through faith (Romans 3:20-31). All subsequent promises are centered in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20; 2 Peter 1:3-4). All that we will ever need for a life of victory has been provided for us in Christ's death on the cross, His burial and His resurrection from the dead. We are responsible to believe, to have faith in all that God declares about our needs and His provision for them. Let us see how grace and faith are woven together in His provisions for us.

The Death of Christ

Proclamation of the gospel confronts unsaved men with the knowledge of their lost state before God, and of the judgment awaiting them. It also proclaims the good news that He loves us and that there is hope for us in His mercy. He has sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Everything begins with the love of God!

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

How we respond to the good news is important. We must believe that we are indeed lost because of sin, and in faith, repent. Repentance is more than being sorry; it is a decision to change. The word repent means “to change one’s mind or purpose.” It is a change that cannot take place apart from faith in the gospel message. Implicit in true repentance is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. No one can come to the Lord unless the Spirit draws him (John 6:44). True faith will produce a true repentance that leads to life. This is referred to in scripture as being justified (Romans 5:9-17). For those who have been involved in the occult, or other satanic activities, repentance must include renouncing Satan and all such practices.

Sins can only be forgiven through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, the blood of animal sacrifices atoned for the sins of the people. The reason for blood is given in the following verse of scripture:

*The life of the flesh is in the blood and I (God) 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.** (Leviticus 17:11)*

These animal sacrifices were required as often as the people sinned. However, there always remained an inner consciousness of sins, for although their sins were covered, men’s consciences were not cleansed; their sins and failures were never forgotten.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. After birth, He lived a completely sinless life. The blood in His veins was the blood of a perfect Sacrifice. He was the unblemished Lamb of God, the sacrifice for sins, whose blood not only covered sins, but also totally forgave them so that they are never remembered again by God (Hebrews 10:1-18). Thus, believers need not bear a continual consciousness of past sins; their consciences have been cleansed

by the blood of Christ and they can always draw near to God in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 9:14).

The word “justify” is translated from the Greek word “DIKAI00” which means “to declare righteous.” To pass from death into life is only possible when one has faith in the shed blood of Christ to forgive all of his sins. This truth is expressed in the following scriptures.

- *Therefore having been **justified by faith** we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....Much more then, having been **justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Romans 5:1, 9)*
- *Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things...but with **the precious blood** as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, **the blood of Christ**. (1 Peter 1:18-19)*
- *In Him we have **redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace. (Ephesians 1:7)*
- *That if you **confess** with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and **believe** in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, **you shall be saved**; for with the heart man believes, **resulting in righteousness**, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)*
- *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.... These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:1, 13)*

Prior to His death, Jesus was cruelly scourged and chastised. Blood issued forth from many parts of His body. First of all, He apparently sweat drops of blood when the sin of the world was laid upon Him in Gethsemane. The crown of thorns on His head drew blood. The whip plowed His back and tore His face. In the crucifixion, nails pierced His hand and His feet. The wounds and scourging that He endured in His perfect body was the price that He willingly paid for the healing of our bodies (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:4-5).

The death of Christ is the primary truth of the gospel message. It expresses God's love for us. We are saved by His mercy, justified by His grace, and made alive by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to become heirs of eternal life in the family of God. Our responsibility is simply to repent, to believe, and to confess, all by faith, in what Christ has done for us.

The Burial of Christ

New converts often ask the question, "Why do I still practice sin after my conversion; how can I be victorious and cease the practice of sin?"

The answer lies in appropriating **through faith all** that Christ provided for us in His death on the cross. First, His blood was shed to forgive us for our sins and to justify us before God. Second, He died on the cross as a **man, the last Adam, to deal once and for all with the Adamic nature** which makes us prone to sin. He took our corrupt, carnal nature (our old-self) to the cross where it was crucified with Him!

What is dead, cannot sin! If I truly believe that my "old nature" is dead indeed to sin, **then by faith** I can live the new life which all true believers receive in Christ through the new birth! Salvation is truly living an exchanged life; I have died and Christ now lives in me. Paul expressed it this way:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Just as it requires faith to believe that the shed blood of Christ forgives our sins, it also requires faith to believe the Scriptures concerning our old nature (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Even so, consider (reckon, fully believe) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. (Romans 6:11)

The reality of this truth in one's walk has absolutely nothing to do with how one feels, how difficult personal cir-

cumstances may be, or whether we failed God yesterday. It is a moment-by-moment reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin according to the word of God!

*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. **For you have died** and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:2-3)*

How is this important truth proclaimed in the gospel, and how do new converts appropriate it by faith?

The answer is found in the **waters of baptism!** The first step by which a new believer expresses his faith in this truth is to personally participate in the Lord's **burial by being baptized in water.** In doing so, he is testifying, "I believe that my old-self was crucified with Jesus on the cross, and I now bury it in the waters of baptism, where the Holy Spirit will cut it away by circumcision so that I may rise out of the water to walk in newness of life."

The waters into which one is immersed do nothing; what takes place is a work of the Holy Spirit.

The following Scriptures, which proclaim this truth concerning the burial of Christ, are where our faith is to be fixed.

*Therefore **we have been buried with Him through baptism into death**, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **so we too might walk in newness of life.** For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, **knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.** (Romans 6:4-6)*

Notice that the promise is neither regeneration by baptism nor sinless perfection, but of victory over habitual sin. Sin is **not** to be our master. We can walk in victory!

*In Him also you were **circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, but in a (spiritual) circumcision (performed by) Christ by stripping off the body***

of the flesh (the whole, corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts). Thus you were circumcised when you were buried with Him in your baptism....(Colossians 2:11-12; AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

When we examine the New Testament record of the early church, we discover that water baptism ***always*** accompanied preaching of the gospel; it was never presented as an option, or as something to be done later at a more convenient time. The following are some examples from Scripture that reveal how the first apostles ministered water baptism.

- Our Lord's commission to preach the gospel and make disciples included water baptism (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; John 4:1-2).
- *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. (Acts 8:12)*
- *And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:4-5)*
- *Surely, no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he? And he (Peter) **ordered** them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.... (Acts 10:47-48)*
- *...Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house...and **immediately** he was baptized, he and all his household. (Acts 16:30-33)*
- A wonderful example of the importance of water baptism in the gospel can be found in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. This particular individual had gone to Jerusalem to worship. He was now returning home with a hunger in his heart to know God. The Lord directed Philip to leave Samaria and go to a desert road

leading from Jerusalem to Gaza, where he encountered the eunuch in his chariot. The eunuch was reading Isaiah, chapter 53, and he asked Philip to help him understand the text. Philip preached Jesus to him beginning with this Scripture. It might appear that there was no reason to mention water baptism, for there is no record of baptism in Isaiah 53 nor was there any expectancy of finding water in the desert. Nevertheless as Philip preached, the eunuch interrupted him and said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Upon the eunuch’s confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Philip baptized him. Although Philip’s message centered on the vicarious death of Jesus, he did not neglect teaching on water baptism, even though it was not in the “chosen text” and he had no knowledge of water being in the vicinity (Acts 8:26-38). Are we as faithful as Philip when we lead someone to Christ?

- The first apostles did not go around preaching water baptism; they proclaimed the whole gospel, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:17). They moved in the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ when they preached the gospel, cast out devils, or baptized believers. They obeyed the following Scripture:

*And whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)*

All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). In fulfilling their commission to preach the gospel, the apostles were acting under His authority. They never used His name as a magic formula to accomplish things. They used His name to point to the One whose authority would validate their words and deeds.

Since both Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 have been given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they **cannot** be contradictions. To be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, means exactly that; we are to be baptized into one name that

represents all of the Godhead. “Father” is a title, not a name; the same is true for “Son” and for “Holy Spirit.” That is why the Father chose the name for His only begotten Son. “Jesus,” which is Joshua in Hebrew, literally means “Jehovah saves.” Thus, Jesus possessed the name of His Father.

...Holy Father, keep them in the Thy name, the name which Thou has given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. (John 17:11)

As the Christ of God, Jesus was the only visible bodily manifestation of the Holy Spirit. All the fullness of Deity dwells in Him in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

Thus “the Lord Jesus Christ” is the one name that embraces the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is why all early church proclamations and deeds, including water baptism, were done in His name.

We recognize the wonderful promise of victory there is for converts in the death and burial of Christ! For everyone, but in particular, for those who are in the depths of sin, such as homosexuals or addicts to drugs, pornography, perversions, alcohol, tobacco, etc. The gospel contains not only the promise of forgiveness of sins, but also the cutting away of such addictive bondages in our carnal nature by the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. All by repentance and faith! The gospel is truly sufficient for all of our needs; we can live in victory over sin!

The Resurrection of Christ

The death and burial of Jesus in the gospel involved His humanity; His resurrection revealed His deity.

Having been spiritually born into God’s family, the gospel promise of His resurrection is the promise of power in the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord and to spiritually grow into His likeness. We identify with His resurrection by being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:38; 10:44-48; 19:1-6). It is a valid expectation to see believers filled with the Holy Spirit when they come up out of the waters of baptism.

There would be no results in evangelism if the Holy Spirit did not endorse the gospel message in power to validate the grace, mercy and love of God. Power is necessary to confront and overcome the deception and power of Satan's forces of darkness. God confirmed the gospel preached by the early church through signs and miracles (Mark 16:17-20).

Jesus was not only the last Adam, He was also the first-born from the dead; the first of a new race of beings of which He is the Head. Scripture speak of this people as "the body of Christ" or the church. It is the collective spiritual relationship of all those in union with Christ; this is where each believer finds his identity and place of service. All fruit, all gifts, and all ministry come from the Holy Spirit. There is a unique deposit of His spiritual life within each one of us that determines our call in His body. He is to be center focus in **all** things! This organism of spiritual life is not based on religious organization. It is simply the life union that each believer has with Christ, and thereby with one another, to become a living body under His headship. The resurrection of Jesus is an open door into **all** the promises of our future spiritual life in Christ!

Shadows of the Gospel

The Old Testament contains shadows of the New Testament gospel. Abraham was declared to be righteous by God solely on the basis of his faith. By this he became the father of all who would subsequently have righteousness reckoned to them on the basis of faith alone. However, Abraham was required to take upon himself the sign of physical circumcision as a seal of his righteousness (Romans 4:3-11). This spoke of physical cleanliness. It was a shadow of the New Testament, where spiritual circumcision replaced physical circumcision as the seal, or sign, of those who have righteousness reckoned to them by faith. This seal is not simply the act of baptism, but the life of spiritual cleanliness that follows those who have believed and been baptized.

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit**....(Romans 2:28-29)*

The goal of the gospel is to bring the righteousness of God into the lives of those whose sins have been forgiven!

The three parts of the Lord's sacrifice, represented by blood, water, and Spirit, reflect God's witness of His Son.

*For there are three that bear witness, the **Spirit** and the **water** and the **blood**; and the three are in agreement. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. (1 John 5:8-9)*

The foretype of this witness is seen in the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt. The **blood** of the Passover lamb was placed over the door posts of their houses to keep the people from destruction by the Lord when the death angel passed over Egypt in judgment (Exodus 12:21-29). The Egyptians who pursued the Israelites as they fled, were swallowed up in the **waters** of the Red Sea. Water destroyed their tormentors, just as blood had preserved their lives. When they passed through the waters, the angel of God in a pillar of cloud and fire went before them to lead them toward the promised land. This was a work of the **Spirit** of God (Exodus 14:19-31). Blood, water, and Spirit!

Conclusion

The gospel is the **power** of God!

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, **for it is the power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes....(Romans 1:16)*

*For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**. (1 Corinthians 1:18)*

The greatest power in the universe is the love of God, which means that the gospel must be presented through

words and deeds that express the love, mercy, and compassion of God. He confirms His gospel of salvation through miracles of healing and deliverance as captives are set free from Satan's power.

The gospel is also God's light of truth that exposes the darkness of sin. This means that it is more than rational words of persuasion; it also carries the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to expose sin for what it is. The evidence of salvation is more than decisions being made for Christ; it is seen when the power of the Holy Spirit sets captives free from the bondage and depths of sin into the glorious freedom of God's righteousness! Our contemporary national atmosphere of religious tolerance has weakened our conviction of righteous absolutes; as a nation, we have begun to call darkness light, and light darkness. The gospel will expose such heresy!

The primary emphasis of the gospel is Jesus, Himself; who He is and what He has done. The gospel is called "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). When He is exalted and lifted up, men will be drawn to Him! Scripture makes it clear that the gospel is one composite message of three fundamental truths concerning the Lord Jesus: His death, His burial, and His resurrection. To remove, or to minimize, any of these truths is to weaken the power of the gospel. The following are examples where this is often true in Christian circles today.

- The gospel can be preached without a burden of compassion or mercy for the lost. It becomes an impersonal message where one's mind, but not his heart, is involved. This can lead to a "watered down," user-friendly gospel of "just believe in Jesus." Repentance and a call to change is not emphasized. As a result, little change may be seen in the lives of some who make decisions under such conditions, suggesting the possibility of "false conversions."
- When individuals come to Christ with great personal bondages from depraved lifestyles, too often they are presented with counseling in Christian psychology instead of the delivering power of the gospel of Christ. They need to hear the promise of victory over sin that

can become theirs through faith in the work of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. This particular truth is greatly needed today because of the depths of depravity that is in the world.

- The truths of water baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit are often not presented immediately following the truth of forgiveness of sins. As a result, many converts begin their new lives without all of the provisions that Christ died to give them.

These are areas where restoration in the ministry of the gospel is needed today. However, the greatest need is more than understanding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, it is to proclaim these truths from hearts filled with love and mercy for the lost. I, personally, have had to repent more than once in this area, and to seek God for a greater burden of compassion for those to whom I preach. No matter how deep in sin men may be, the purpose of God in His gospel is to bring them into a relationship with Himself where they walk in total victory over sin. That is the good news.

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