

IV. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia—Seven Distinctives
“#2: Gospel-Driven and Christ Exalting Ministry”
Romans 1:16, 17
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October 1, 2017 • Evening Sermon

We will be looking at a couple of passages in this study. This is our fourth study in a short series that is embedded in our over theme for this year on revival. Our desire is for a Gospel awakening that would move throughout our nation and from our nation to all the nations but the Gospel awakening comes through the Lord's church. The Lord's church is in need of revival in our particular area. In our nation there is very clearly spiritual lethargy, Biblical ignorance, Biblical illiteracy, a lack of power and passion and we need the revival presence of the Lord. If revival comes to a church I believe that there are seven marks of the church of Christ whenever the Spirit of God is at work in the midst of God's people and Christ is exalted and the glory of the Father becomes a passion.

All of this is built upon a basic premise. The basic premise is that there is something called church. There are two words that the Bible uses for church in the Greek. One is "*kuriakos*" or kirk in which we get the word 'church' from and the other is the word Ekklesia which are those who have been called out or called together in Christ in order to serve the Lord. The church is called the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of God, building of God, the household of God, the army of the Lord and there are multiple word pictures for the church because of its multi-faceted ministry.

The one distinct thing the Lord tells us is 'I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' In that very simple statement it becomes obvious that the church is a militant church. The church is under attack but it's on the move. Christ will build His church and our first task as believers in general, and pastors in particular, is to understand what Christ's church is. The Lord doesn't say to pray for architects when He says He will build His church. He said to pray for workers. We have an Architect and His name is Jesus. We are to go to the Word of God which is sufficient for all of life and in its sufficiency Christ has outlined for us the salient features of His church.

In the last study we looked at the first one and they come in couplets. The first distinctive, mark or feature of the Lord's church through which Gospel awakenings go to nations is Biblical fidelity and confessional integrity. Biblical fidelity is when the church is faithful to God and as the church is faithful to the Word of God it will embrace confessional integrity. The confession is what we tell people we believe the Bible is teaching. The Word of God is inspired, inerrant and infallible but our confessions are not. Our confessions are distillations that we're led by the Spirit of God to try to make clear to one another and to a watching world the 'things most surely believed among us.' Some of these confessions are found in the Bible. There is one from Titus 2:11–14 and I Timothy 3:14–16.

Why is confessional integrity important? Our confessions are a statement that we believe the Bible is the Word of God. If we believe that then we're going to try to confess what the Bible teaches. A confession serves as a center, circumference and the substance of ministry. A confession that is built from the Word of God is constantly being matured from the Word of God and they are in the church of Jesus Christ. The early church, the apostolic church had confessions and at least pieces of them are recorded in the Bible. Its number one confession was the one that

cost them their life which was 'Jesus is Lord.' Rome was more than happy for you to have your religion as long as it surrendered to Caesar as lord. When they said they would honor Caesar and be good citizens but would not say Caesar was their lord and say 'Jesus is Lord' that was a confession.

The apostolic church gave way to the early church those confessions and it was the loss of those confessions that became a liability for the church to plunge into superstition and ritualism for 800 years. Then came the Reformation and with the Reformation came revival. With revival came a confessing church again. There was the Belgian confession, the Westminster Confession, the Old London Confession, the Philadelphia Confession and there came confession after confession with what we believe the Bible teaches. The authority of God's Word is what stood paramount during the Reformation. From that came the Scripture alone is our only rule of faith and practice. Counsels, preachers, popes and teachers do err but God's Word never errs. God's Word stands supreme in its integrity, clarity, perspicuity and its sufficiency and then from that Word we make our confession before the watching world.

So as we take this next step it's crucial to remember that the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets with Christ as the Cornerstone. The church is built on the Word of God that is declared and revealed in the Scriptures. Secondly, the church is built to be buttress (foundation) and the pillar of the Word of God. Why do you think Satan loves to get into seminaries? If Satan can get the leadership, particular the preaching ministry, distracted, distrusting and diluted in its commitment to the Word then he has the church. Once any church leaves the authority of the Word of God, built upon God's Word, it's done and it doesn't matter how sweet sounding their motivations may be, it will be done. Sound lives must come from sound doctrine. Sound doctrine must come from sound words and sound words are found in the Word of God.

So we see when the church is the buttress but when it is the pillar it lifts something up. So it is not only built on the truth but it is built to defend the truth and to lift up the truth. One of the ways it does this is to make a common confession, a truth of what we believe the Word of God is saying. Therefore the confession becomes the center. We hold to the center the things most surely believed.

It also becomes the circumference. Recently a man said he didn't think he could become a part of the Presbyterian Church of America because he thought the confessions didn't give people much freedom. I told him 'I have a lot of freedom because I have a center to hold to and I have a circumference that I don't want to get outside of.'

Maybe I can illustrate this better by taking you to my house. If you come to my house you'll notice we live on top of a mountain. Our backyard is about 25 yards and we now have ten grandchildren. I have a wife who was made to be a grandmother and she will say 'go out to the backyard and play.' At the end of our backyard is about a 1500 foot drop. How much of that 25 yards do you think my grandchildren get the opportunity to play in? Maybe three but if I got industrious and put a fence at the edge then they would have freedom. That's what a confession does. It gives you the center and the circumference while it defines the substance of life and ministry in a church.

It is crucial that we have a confession and hold to it with integrity, not idolatry. The confession is not inerrant and not to be worshipped. It is to be used with integrity. That is the leaders, elders, deacons and pastors don't take oaths to the confession. You don't have to take an oath to the confession to become a member of Briarwood. If you have a credible confession of faith that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior then come on in. I'll work on you with the

confession but not so with the leaders. Leaders do take a vow and that vow can't be with crossed fingers or technical word games. It has to be with integrity for confidence in the life of the church and I believe, for the blessing of the Lord.

Why is that important? When Satan attacked Adam and Eve in the Garden he attacked with bold lies, deceit and an interrogative – ‘has God said’ and that is the attack of Satan every single day. I was so blessed to get to study under Dr. Francis Schaeffer and one of the things that drew me to him was his book He (God) is There and He is not Silent. God has finally spoken in His Son. Our confessions are our Spirit-surrendered attempts to make a declaration to one another and to the world that God has spoken. This is His Word and it is true. God has spoken, He is not silent and He doesn't stutter. He speaks plainly. There are some things that are hard to understand but all that I need to understand even when it's hard is there in the Scripture because Scripture interprets Scripture and God never contradicts Himself. So our confession is the way we are to tell the world what we believe God is saying.

What is fundamentally crucial at the center of this confession? This brings us to the second distinctive and that is the church is Gospel-driven and Christ-centered. To understand how the church is Gospel-driven there are two texts we will look at and then there are two themes that I will give you. The first text is in I Corinthians 15:1–9 which says *[1] Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, [2] and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. [8] Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

From this text we learn five things about this Gospel. One is that the Gospel is the primary doctrine of the Scriptures for the salvation of sinners. Is church government important? I'm a Presbyterian by conviction. I studied the Bible and looked at different denominations and this one was the only one that made sense in terms of what I was studying in the Scriptures. It's okay if you don't agree with me for even the confession doesn't demand that you agree with me on this. You don't have to be a Presbyterian to get to heaven because that is not primary. The Apostle Paul here says he came to preach the Gospel not to baptize yet Paul is not putting down baptism for he has enough sense to know that baptism is in the Great Commission. Paul also knows if you get the Gospel wrong then baptism is meaningless. I'll use a little pun here – baptism is downstream from the Gospel and it doesn't have to be a deep stream.

If you get the Gospel wrong it doesn't matter if you get church government right, or baptism right or your eschatology tied down right. It is crucial to get the Gospel right because if you don't then you are believing in vain. It is the Gospel through which we are being saved. Paul says in this text that the Gospel is of first importance! That means there are a lot of doctrines in the Bible that are important but they are not of first importance yet still important. These other doctrines are of secondary importance and that means you have to get the first things first right and the first of the first is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the Gospel is Biblical. In this text we see Christ died *according to the Scriptures*. He was raised *according to the Scriptures*.

Thirdly, the Gospel is historical. Jesus died and rose again according to the Scriptures and here are the witnesses to the risen Christ, also listed in the text. Paul doesn't list all the witnesses but some of them and therefore the affirmation of the Gospel stands glorious.

Fourthly, is that the Gospel is essential.

Fifthly, is the Gospel (truth) is verifiable. This isn't a wish thing. For instance, what is one of the key factors of the Gospel here in this text? It is the resurrection. Paul says in this same chapter that if Jesus isn't raised then we ought to be pitied (I Corinthians 15:19). But he says Christ is raised and if He is raised then we're raised because He is the firstfruits and that means the rest are going to come. There was probably no doctrine preached in the first century in the Greco-Roman empire that would have been more distasteful to a secular, religious pagan in that era than the resurrection. They were utterly permeated with a great philosophy, the concepts of Plato and that the spiritual was good and the physical was bad. The last thing you wanted was to get your body back and that's why they burned them when they died.

So they would say that believers invented the resurrection just to draw people in or to their beliefs. You can go read in Acts 17 how they ridiculed and mocked Paul when he preached the resurrection to them in Athens but what they are doing is preaching what the Bible says the Gospel is, that it is historical, verifiable, essential and primary. Now let's look at the second text in Romans 1. I love this passage.

Romans 1:16–17 says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Gentile).* [17] *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* Now I'm going to give you five more things about the Gospel.

The first one is the Gospel is definitive. It does not say 'a' Gospel but 'the' Gospel. It is not the Presbyterian gospel, the Baptist gospel or Briarwood's gospel. I am not ashamed of *the* Gospel. It is the one that is Biblical, historical and verifiable. When you have a definite article it means whatever it modifies can be defined.

Secondly, the Gospel is the power of God. The 'it' in Romans 1:16 refers to the Gospel. The power of God is how we are saved, born again and how we are kept. It is the power of God working through our faith and strengthening our faith, but not dependent on our faith. This power is important because every person you meet that is not a Christian is spiritually dead and we need the power of God to raise them from that condition. We can't raise them. We can certainly be some of the most persuasive salesman of the Gospel but we can't give them eyes to see and ears to hear. I can open the Bible but I can't open minds, eyes or ears. We need the power of God and the power of God comes through the Gospel and with the Gospel.

Thirdly, the Gospel is the righteousness of God. Romans 1:17a says [17] *For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed...* Why is this important? It is because the Gospel says my sins have been washed away by the blood but that doesn't get me to heaven. You don't get to heaven because you are forgiven. You get out of hell because you're forgiven. You get to heaven because you are righteous, but my righteousness is like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6, Romans 10:3). I not only need to be forgive but I need to be accepted. How can I be accepted? I have a Good News message. Not only does the power of God bring you from death unto life but the Gospel tells you the righteousness of God clothes you so that when God looks at you He sees the perfections of His Son and His righteousness. I am accepted in the beloved.

Number four, is the Gospel is inclusive. Everyone who believes will be saved. One might think 'don't you believe in election?' I sure do. The elect are going to come to Jesus. How will they come? They will come by faith. I am not privy to the list of the elect and the eternal

counsels of God but what I am privy to the observation of the elect coming to Christ by faith. So all who come by faith to Christ, in Christ by the power of God for the righteousness of God in Christ are saved.

Fifthly is the exclusivity of the Gospel. It is only those who believe that are saved. "To everyone who believes..." but if you say 'no' then you are storing up for yourself the wrath of God that is poured out at the judgment. The Gospel warns you of the wrath to come that you might come to the Savior who alone can give life and give life forever, eternally. There are many other texts we could have looked at here but those were the two I wanted to share.

Don't you think it's interesting how Romans 1:16 starts off...[16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel...* I have heard preachers wax eloquently on that but I haven't been quite satisfied so I'd like to give you this. When I am telling you that the church has to hold to the Gospel, I am also telling you that the world will try to make you ashamed of the Gospel. So you will have to make a decision, are you ashamed or not? I know some think that if I'm not ashamed of the Gospel I love the Gospel but I love my wife Cindy but I don't go around saying 'I'm not ashamed of my wife Cindy.' If I ever said that there is a good chance I won't wake up tomorrow morning. That is not the way I would go around letting people know that I love my wife by saying 'I'm not ashamed of my wife.'

When you go to the end of Romans 1 where we see the death spiral of a culture that says 'no' to the Gospel, its power and the work of grace, where it goes from sexual promiscuity to sexual perversion to social approval, doing those things suppressing the truth in unrighteousness as they shamelessly do them, we shamelessly bring the Gospel in truth and love to that culture and to sinners. That is what we are called to do.

So what do we need to say about a church that is Gospel-driven? The Gospel is the glorious message that God has, is, and will deliver His people from their sins to Himself. Here is an illustration of a man who stopped me on the street and asked me 'are you saved?' I said 'I have been saved, I am being saved and I will be saved.' He gave me a puzzled look but most of you know that kind of language is in the Bible. Then he said to me 'Are you a preacher?'

So here is your other theme. The Gospel saves you from the persuasion of sin, the power of sin, the penalty of sin, and the position of sin, it is saving you from the practice of sin and it will save you from the presence of sin. This is through the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. You are saved from the persuasion of sin when God gives you eyes to see, ears to hear and calls you through effectual calling. You are saved from the power of sin in regeneration when you are born again and God gives you a new heart. You are saved from the penalty of sin through justification. Romans 8:1 says [1] *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* There is the declaration of innocent through justification because of the righteousness of Christ. You are then adopted into the family of God and through adoption you are no longer in the old position where Satan was your father but now God is your Father.

I am being saved from the practice of sin in sanctification and that is a progress/process but the others are done. Nothing that happens to me in sanctification effects the other. I don't get more born again the more I grow as a Christian or more right with God the more I grow as a Christian. I am right with God but if I have been saved from the persuasion, power, penalty, and position of sin there will be the evidence of me being saved from the practice of sin. We grow, not for grace, but in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Then one day, future grace, I will be saved from the presence of sin, when I am with the Lord and brought to perfection with a new body in a new heavens and a new earth. In the meantime, I have a new perspective, a new heart, a new record, a new family and I am growing in a new life. And one day I'll be in a new body in

a new heavens and a new earth. That is the glorious Gospel message and provision in Christ that is applied by the Holy Spirit in our life.

In the next study I will talk about why you are Christ-centered. To be Gospel-driven always ends up in being Christ-centered. So in the next study we'll talk about what it is and what it is not of being Christ-centered. I am just trying to build on this step by step.

Do you see the uniqueness of this message? Talk to someone is Islam or Hinduism or a secularist or an atheist or an agnostic. Every religion or –ism all have this in common; they all tell you what you have to do, pay, give to be right with God maybe. The Bible says it is not what you do or give. What you do or give honestly are part of the problem for they are not the solution. But there is a God and it's what He did and it's who He gave, His Son, Jesus. God, who didn't need you, wanted you. You who didn't want God but need Him, He saved you. He gave you a new perspective, a new heart, a new record, a new family and He is giving you a new life and a new home.

You would think the world would beat down the door to have that, don't you? But it won't because that Gospel message to the world, unless the Holy Spirit intervenes, is a scandal. It is absolutely hated. Why is it hated? There are three reasons. One is that nobody wants to be told they are a sinner and in need of salvation, but they are glad they have religion. Two, they don't want to be told they can't save themselves and their religion cannot save them. Thirdly, they despise the claims of Christ of the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone.

So what you will see in a dying church is being ashamed of the Gospel to get a hearing from those who hate it. But when the Spirit of God comes and God's people are alive, they are not only not ashamed of the Gospel but they are passionately driven and empowered by the Gospel. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for these people who love You, in whom You first loved. God, continue to teach us from Your Word. I thank You for Your patience with me trying to put this together in a timely fashion but I also thank You God, that we can keep building step upon step. So I pray that You would be at work in our lives in these first two marks of Biblical fidelity and confessional integrity, leading to being Gospel-driven and Christ-exalting and that You would build that into the very fabric of the life of our church which is Christ's church. And that we will see the prevailing power of God sweep through a nation with the Gospel of saving grace in Christ, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.