

## What Is It to Preach the Gospel

By Henry Mahan

*"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" —1 Cor. 9:16*

What is it to preach the gospel? First, to preach the gospel is to tell the TRUTH ABOUT GOD. He is the God of *eternal existence*. The Scripture says, "In the beginning God." When Moses came to the burning bush, God said, "Go down and deliver my people out of Egypt" Moses said, "Whom shall I say sent me?" God replied, "I AM." Not, I was; not, I shall be; but, I AM—the eternal I AM—the everlasting I AM—I AM THAT I AM!

He is the *God of creation*. "All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made." In him we live, we move and we have our being. God created all things.

He is the *God of sovereign mercy*. The Scripture says, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The Bible says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." We preach the God of mercy, yes, but sovereign mercy; the God of grace, yes, but sovereign grace. God will be gracious to whom he will be gracious. He owes no man anything; if he bestows grace, it is sovereignly bestowed. He is an immutable Sovereign, an unchanging Sovereign.

He is the *God of righteousness*. Our Lord said, "I will in no wise clear the guilty. The soul that sinneth it shall die. Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." God is a righteous God, a holy God. Christ Jesus came into the world that God might be just and justify the ungodly. God cannot show his love at the expense of his holiness. God cannot show mercy at the expense of his truth. Only at Calvary can mercy and truth meet together; only there can righteousness and peace kiss one another. He is the God of righteousness.

He is the *God of unchanging grace*. "I am the Lord," he said, "I change not; therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed." Why is there no fear of a god before the eyes of this generation? They have heard preached a false god, a weak god, a failing god, a disappointed god, a god whose hands are tied. They have heard preached a god who says, "I have no eyes but your eyes; I have no feet but your feet; I have no hands but your hands." That's a lie. The God of the Bible is totally and completely independent of his creatures as far as his strength, his wisdom, his power, his beauty are concerned. We do not add to his glory; we receive and share in his glory. To preach the gospel is to preach the truth about God.

Secondly, what is it to preach the gospel? It's to preach the TRUTH ABOUT MAN. Men do not want to hear the truth about God; and they do not want to hear the truth about themselves. But gospel preachers preach the truth, not only about God, but the truth about the sinner; and they leave that sinner empty, broken and destroyed with all his foundations of flesh swept out from under him, with all his self-righteous rags stripped off, leaving him naked and guilty before the searchlight of God's holiness.

What does the Bible say about man? "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom 3:10,11). What are men seeking? their own pleasure, their own comfort, their own glory, their own wills, their own satisfaction. Everybody seeks his own; they're not seeking God. "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (v12). Christ said, "You have not the love of God in you." Somebody says, "Well, I love people." No, you don't. Just consider who you love. You love yourself. Think about it. Is there anybody in this world you really love? Well, you say, "I love my wife." That's yourself. That's *your* wife. Well, "I love my mother and father." That's still loving yourself; you love them because they are your mother and father. "Well, I love my son or daughter"— your son and daughter. Do you love anybody else's son or daughter? "I love my brothers and sisters" — that's yourself. "Well, I love my Saviour; my own personal Saviour." That's loving yourself. If he were not your Saviour, you would not love him. Everything you love is connected with your own sinful, selfish nature. Your whole world revolves around yourself— your own pleasures, your own delights, your own passions, your own seeking.

There is none good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of snakes is under their lips: their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness [murmuring, complaining, fault-finding, gossip, back-biting]; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: the way of peace they have not known; there is no fear of God before their eyes" (vs12-18). There's no genuine, honest, sincere fear of God before them. They neither fear God, nor tremble at his presence. Even religious worshippers today don't fear God. If they feared God, they would be silent in the presence of God; they would choose their words carefully; their worship would be marked, not by shouting, but by awesome reverence and fear. Job said, "When I saw the Lord, I said, I have spoken once, yea, twice, but I'll never speak again." John said, "When I saw the Lord, I fell at his feet as a dead man." Isaiah said, "When I saw the Lord, I cried, Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips" —when I saw the Lord I saw my guilt! The average person goes to church and he comes away feeling good. If the preacher had preached the truth about man, they would have come away from that place crying, "O, God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

Thirdly, what is it to preach the gospel? It's to preach the TRUTH ABOUT JESUS CHRIST. My friends, Jesus is not a weak, frustrated reformer; Jesus Christ of Nazareth is very God of very God. He is the Messiah. He did not die as a martyr. He did not die as an example. He came down here and died on the cross as the victorious, conquering, successful Savior of his people. He died as the covenant Redeemer for the covenant people. He died to accomplish a task given him by the Father before the world's creation. When he completed his suffering on Calvary, he said, "It is finished." He cannot fail! Christ is not a frustrated Redeemer. He's not a disappointed nor defeated Saviour. He's not a poor, weak, reformer up there in heaven, crying his eyes out because people won't let him have his way. He is a mighty Victor seated at the right hand of the Father, expecting until his enemies become his footstool! He is the Lord of the living and the dead.

A preacher said to his congregation, "Won't you make Jesus your Lord?" I emphatically declare to this congregation that you cannot make Jesus your lord; the Father has already beat you to it! He is your Lord! He is your Lord if you are saved; he is your Lord if you are lost! He is your Lord if you are on the right hand with his sheep; he is your Lord if you are on the left hand with the goats! He is your Lord! Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess in heaven, earth and hell that he is Lord. You don't make him Lord—you recognize him as Lord. The Father has delivered all things to the Son. God made him Lord. He purchased that right through his death on Calvary. Christ is not a fire escape from hell; he is the Lord. He is not a doormat named Jesus; He is Lord. If any man shall confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in his heart that God raised him from the dead, he shall be saved. His life is a perfect righteousness; his death a perfect sacrifice.

Fourthly, what is it to preach the gospel? It's to preach the TRUTH ABOUT SALVATION. We use the word "salvation" rather loosely in this day. Salvation from sin is not by the deeds of the law. Even those who are supposed to know something about salvation by grace have to remind themselves again and again that salvation is not by the works of the flesh, not at all, in any way! Salvation is not by reformation; salvation does not come by decision; salvation does not come through church ordinances; salvation is not ours by church membership; salvation is in Christ alone. That's where salvation is—not in man's purpose, not in man's plan, it's in a Person. It's not in a proposition, it's not in walking an aisle, it's not in baptism, it's in Christ! It's not in a law; it's not in anything we can do; salvation is in Christ.

A man does not have salvation until he comes by the power of God's Spirit through faith to a living, personal, vital, intimate union with Christ as Lord and Savior. A man is not a Christian until he is inseparably and personally joined to Jesus Christ. A man is not a Christian unless you can cut into his heart and find love for Christ; cut into his mind and find thoughts of Christ; and cut into his soul and find a panting after Christ. Christ in you, that's the hope of glory. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, empties a sinner, and brings a man to faith in the Son of God. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new. Most people's so-called Christianity can be taken off with their Sunday clothes; but a man who is genuinely saved has Christ living in him as an everlasting life. He's been born again; he's been resurrected from the grave; he has the very image of the Son of God stamped on his heart, and it cannot be moved. To preach the gospel is to preach the truth about God, about man, about Jesus Christ, and about salvation.

Now, Paul says in the text, "For though I preach the gospel, *"I have nothing to glory of."* Why is it that those who preach the gospel have nothing to glory of? First, we are conscious of our guilt. Any man who is not *conscious of his own guilt* can't preach the gospel, because he doesn't know the gospel. And you can't tell what you don't know any more than you can come back from where you haven't been. A man who preaches the gospel is conscious of his own guilt. The man who was led of the Spirit to write this Scripture said of himself, "I am not worthy to be an apostle,"—I see no worthiness in myself. Then he said, "I am less than the least of all the saints." Later on, he confessed, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I wonder if I asked this morning, "Will the chief of sinners please stand?"—would anybody really stand? No, we wouldn't stand.

But the apostle Paul said that the man who really knows God feels that way. When somebody asked Paul, "Who is the chief of sinners?"—he replied, "I am."

"Suffer a sinner whose heart overflows,  
Loving his Saviour to tell what he knows;  
Once more to tell it would I embrace,  
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

A man who really knows God never graduates above that statement right there — "I'm only a sinner saved by grace." He may grow in grace, grow in talent, grow in gifts and grow in knowledge, but he's still *only a sinner saved by grace*.

We have nothing to glory of because we're just *using borrowed gifts*. "Who maketh thee to differ?" (1 Cor 4:7). Are you able to preach? Who gave you the power? Do you have a little more than somebody else? Who gave it to you? Do you have more talents than the next fellow? Who made you to differ? "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if you received it, why dost thou glory?" Why do you glory in your beauty? God gave it to you. Why do you glory in your strength? Without God you would not have it. Why do you glory in your wealth? It came from God. Why do you glory in your talent, in your singing ability? Why do you glory in your ability to play an instrument? You couldn't play the radio without God's grace; you'd be a simple-minded imbecile. Who made you to differ? What do you have that God didn't give you? If you are walking around with something somebody gave you, why are you bragging as if you have it of your own natural ability? Why do you think that you are better than anybody else? Only God's grace enables you to be anything but a stuttering, stammering moron. Who made you to differ? What do you have that you have not received? Salvation is the gift of God! Faith is the gift of God! Though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of—nothing! I can't break the heart; the Holy Spirit must do that. I can't convict men of sin; God has to do that. I can't give repentance and faith; that comes from God. I can't reveal Christ; this too, is the Spirit's work. If my voice is the only voice you hear, you'll just have to perish. You've got to hear him speak from heaven.

The apostle also said, "*Necessity is laid upon me*." Why is it necessary for me to preach the gospel? Preacher, why are you so compelled; why is it that every time you speak it's always the gospel: Christ and him crucified? I'll tell you why—because of the truth and the beauty of the gospel. I see in the gospel a beauty beyond all things. Only Christ can meet the perfect law, satisfy the justice of God, and open the way for us into the holiest of all, into the presence of the Father. Only Christ can supply the need of the bankrupt sinner, and only Christ can keep me from falling. "Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and who is able to present you faultless before the throne and the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to him be glory both now and forever." That's why it's necessary for me to preach the gospel: the beauty of it, the truth of it. I could tell you that salvation is in the church, but it wouldn't be true. I could tell you to come to the front and shake my hand and God would take you to heaven, but it would be a lie. I could tell you to be baptized and you will go to heaven, but it wouldn't be so. I could tell you that if you live a good life, pray, go to church art Sunday and give a little offering, God will take you to heaven when you die, but it is not so. I could tell you to quit drinking, quit going to the

picture show, and live a good moral life and you will go to heaven when you die, but that would be a lie. But when I tell you that Christ died for our sins; that Christ is a sufficient Saviour; that Christ is an perfect Substitute who came down here and gave us a righteousness which we didn't have and couldn't produce, went to the cross, bore our sins, paid our debt, satisfied the justice of God, that he is our living Advocate at the right hand of the Father, and that if you come to a living, vital union with him, you'll be saved — *that's the truth*, and the *only* truth that will make you free.

Our text closes with this, "*Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel*" I can't think of a crime more terrible than to be entrusted with the immortal souls of eternity-bound boys and girls, young people, men and women (like every preacher is entrusted every Sunday), and then stand up here and waste this precious time talking about myself, about my problems, my church, my denomination, or talk about my ideas of what is right and what is wrong. I cannot think of a greater crime than to be entrusted with the souls of men and women who are sitting before us (some of whom may be in hell before next Sunday), and take that time singing a bunch of ditties, carrying on with foolishness, and making a mockery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I can't think of a more awful crime against society than to deceive people who are given to us to instruct in the things of the Lord.

I've got to preach the gospel; woe is unto me if I don't. God have mercy, and he won't, if I don't! Woe unto the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; woe unto the Christ-crucifiers of Jerusalem; but double woe on the preachers, shepherds, and pastors who for advantage, filthy lucre, or praise of men deceive souls. God help them, but he won't. Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel; and there's not another one —it's the gospel of Christ. If an angel from heaven preach unto you any other gospel, Paul said, "Let him be accursed."

I say this in closing, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel," but, woe is unto *you* if I preach it and *you do not believe it*. You may not understand it. It may not fit in with your tradition, with your denominational pattern. And I'm sure if it's the gospel it won't, because Christ didn't fit the denominational pattern when he came down here either. He didn't fit into their religious theology, their tradition, or their mold; and they crucified him! My message may not fit what your mother taught you, but she wasn't sent of God to preach the gospel —I am. If I didn't believe that, I'd quit. Do you see what I'm saying? I'm saying, "Woe is unto you, and woe is unto everybody under the sound of my voice, if I preach the gospel and you don't believe it. I'm willing to take my medicine, if I don't preach the gospel; but you get ready to take yours, if I do and you don't receive it. Is that fair?"

Paul said: I preach the gospel! I don't have anything to glory of. I'm just a sinner saved by grace. Necessity is laid upon me. I've got to preach the gospel, for woe is unto me if I don't preach it. Now, will you say this? — I believe the gospel; but if I believe the gospel, I don't have anything to glory of. Will you say that? God gave me the knowledge; God gave me the faith. For necessity is laid upon me. I've got to believe the gospel, because there's no beauty anywhere else, no refuge anywhere else, necessity is laid upon me. Can you say that? And will you go on and finish it? — *Woe is unto me if I don't believe the gospel!* That's all I've got to say. Now it's between you and God.