
WE ARE THE CHURCH

Marks of a Healthy Church

GOSPEL CLARITY

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on January 21, 2018

INTRODUCTION

“Gospel” is a word frequently used in our day. Someone might speak of “gospel truth” or sing “gospel music,” and many Evangelical churches are placing a heavy emphasis on “gospel-centered” or “gospel-focused” ministries. However, it is clear that all of this talk about the “gospel” has not done much to proclaim or illuminate the actual content or implications of the Gospel. However, Gospel clarity is an essential mark of a healthy local church. In this message, we shall articulate what the Gospel is, and we shall consider several diagnostic questions to assess whether we (both as individuals and as a church family) are clear on the Gospel.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

“I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand...” (1 Corinthians 15:1).

“Gospel” is a word frequently used in our day. Someone might speak of “gospel truth” or sing “gospel music,” and many Evangelical churches are placing a heavy emphasis on “gospel-centered” or “gospel-focused” ministries. However, it is clear that all of this talk about the “gospel” has not done much to proclaim or illuminate the actual content or implications of the Gospel.

Furthermore, even in local churches where the Gospel is still the genuine focus, there is often a misunderstanding about the application of this message. Christians are aware that Christ’s person and work has saved them from God’s ultimate judgment, but they are regularly unaware of the implications this reality has for their homes and families, their church memberships, and their engagement with the world around them.

Healthy churches are marked by Gospel clarity. This means the Christians who comprise a healthy church have heard and received the Gospel; they are turning from disbelief and disobedience toward a Christ-exalting trust and practice. And it also means that these Christians are continually standing in this Gospel of grace and being conformed to righteousness, after the example and by the power of Christ Himself.

Simply put, healthy churches are chock-full of healthy Christians who are thoroughly learning and thoughtfully embracing the Gospel.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8 (ESV)

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.

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Healthy Churches are marked by Gospel Clarity, from which everything flows.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) THE GOSPEL IS NOT

(2) THE GOSPEL IS

(3) EVERYTHING FLOWS FROM GOSPEL CLARITY

(4) APPLICATION: 4 DIAGNOSTICS FOR GOSPEL CLARITY

(1) THE GOSPEL IS NOT

- The Gospel is NOT **your testimony / story**.
 - Your story is valuable and important, and it may provide a great platform for presenting the Gospel.

- The Gospel is NOT “***Jesus loves you...***”
 - This statement may well be true, but the Gospel is presented when we explain such a statement.
 - Who is Jesus?... Who are you?... How is divine love expressed?

- The Gospel is NOT “***God has a wonderful plan for your life.***”
 - You and I have no idea what plans God has for anyone!
 - Sometimes becoming a Christian will make life incredibly hard.
 - Becoming a Christian will always make life in this world hard.
 - Luke 9:23 – “***If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.***”
 - 2 Timothy 3:12 – “***Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...***”

- The Gospel is NOT **merely the call to respond**
 - None of these phrases are the Gospel
 - “*Trust in Jesus*”
 - “*Give your life to Christ*”
 - “*Make a decision for Christ*”
 - These phrases may lean into what we are asking a someone to do in response to the Gospel, but these are not the Gospel.

- The Gospel is NOT anything Christians do for others
 - “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words.”
 - Such a statement is nonsense.

Summary: The Gospel is not about you, your experience, or your aspirations...

(Segue) ***The Gospel is the message about Jesus Christ!***

(2) THE GOSPEL IS 4 THINGS & (2B) 3 THINGS TO DO WITH IT

1. The Gospel is the message about Jesus Christ (v3-5)

- “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.”
 - ***Christ*** – the whole import of ***OT Messiah/Christ*** content
 - ***Died for our sins*** – substitutionary ***sacrifice***
 - Why was death necessary?
 - To whom was the death-debt paid?
 - Who is the “our” here?
 - ***He was buried*** – death and the ***full*** import of the ***curse*** (Gn. 3)
 - ***He was raised*** – immortality and the ***reversal*** of ***death / curse***
 - ***He appeared*** – the ***intimate*** and ***material*** features
 - Jesus ***Christ is the content*** of His own message
 - Jesus is a ***real historical*** man
 - Jesus’ death & resurrection are ***essential*** to ***Christianity***

- Friends, have you been ***thinking and speaking*** about ***this Gospel?***
- Do you see the person and work of Christ as ***the reason why you are a Christian?***
- When you think about God, do you think about Him ***through the lenses of the Gospel?***
 - **In other words**, do you see God as the sovereign king who has been at work in the world since the beginning for His glory?
 - And, do you see God as ***the triune God***: the Father sending & preparing, the Son coming & dying & rising again, and the Spirit applying this marvelous Gospel & effectively working in all who believe?

2. The Gospel is **central / fundamental to Christianity** (v3)

- “I **delivered** to you as of **first importance...**”
 - Of all that the Apostle Paul taught... this is ***of first importance***
 - This is true of the ***individual***
 - This is true of every ***local church***
 - Friends, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ of ***first importance to you?***
 - How would you know?
 - Are you interested to ***know it better?*** To ***study it more deeply?***
 - Do you ***think*** on the ***content*** of the ***Gospel*** and ***consider*** how to ***apply it more pervasively*** throughout your life?

3. The Gospel is **intrinsically tied to the Bible** (v3, 4)

- "...Christ died for our sins **in accordance with the Scriptures...** he was buried... he was raised on the third day **in accordance with the Scriptures...**"
 - This is not merely a Christian experience. The Gospel did not begin when you heard it.
 - The Gospel did not begin when Jesus was born in a manger.
 - Christ is the fulfillment of what God promised in Gen. 3:15!
 - **Christ in the Gospel** is the "**climax**" of **God's story** and the human story...
 - all that happens now is "**falling action**"
 - and we now await the "**resolution**"

4. The Gospel is **historical and Apostolic** (v3-8)

- "3 For I **delivered** to you as of **first importance** what I also **received...** he [Christ] **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."
- If we found the **bones of Jesus**, or if we could somehow prove that there was **no Jesus of Nazareth**, Christianity would be over.
- There is a necessary **connection between** the **Gospel** and those whom Christ first appointed to proclaim it – **Apostles**.
 - Friends, have you been thinking of the Gospel as more of an **experience** or **personal feeling**?
 - How is **Christianity different** from **other religious options** in the world?
 - Does your Gospel come with **divine authority, biblical grounding, and historical evidence**? If not, why not?

(2B) 3 THINGS TO DO WITH IT (THE GOSPEL)

1. The Gospel is to be **delivered / preached** (v1, 2, 3)

- “1 Now I would remind you, brothers, **of the gospel** [or “**the word**” v2] I **preached**... 3 I **delivered** to you...”
 - **Preached** – This is especially referring to preaching (i.e. monologue proclamation).
 - This method most effectively portrays what the Gospel is.
 - The Gospel is a message from the King of the universe to earth’s inhabitants.
 - It is not a negotiation, a mere word of wisdom, or offer of guidance
 - Friends, do you **expect to hear** the **content** of the Gospel **preached with regularity**?
 - **Should you belong to a church family** who **did not see** the content of the **Gospel** as a **central focus** of the **preaching** ministry?
 - When you think about **the kinds of features** you really want in your local church, does **Gospel clarity** in the **preaching rank very high**? If not, then why not?
 - **Delivered** – The Gospel may also be **delivered via conversations**...
 - It may **become clearer over time**...
 - And it may even **necessitate sensible exchanges** with some **skeptical** persons or groups.
 - Friends, do you see **your friendships** with others as **God-given opportunities** to share the Gospel?
 - Do you **feel pressure** to **persuade someone** “**make a decision**” for Christ immediately?
 - Are you **preparing yourself** to be a **more effective witness** for Christ in the world?

2. The Gospel is to be **received / believed** (v1, 2)

- “1 **the gospel I preached** to you... you **received**... you [must not] **believe in vain**”
 - **Receive/Believe** – The hearers of the Gospel are responsible for their response to the message.
 - To receive the Gospel is to **accept the claims as true**, the **commands as binding**, and the **promises as sure**.
 - **Believe in vain** – Vain belief is that belief which **does not last**
 - Vain belief is **not true belief**.

3. The Gospel is to be **enduringly held** (v1, 2)

- “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**”
 - The **REMINDER** is of the message of the Gospel **FOR** the **believers** to **remember HOW** they **STAND**.
 - Paul admonishes the believers to “**hold fast**” to the word/Gospel, or else **their belief will prove** to have been “**vain**” or “**without cause**” or “**foolish**”
 - Friends, **how do you stand before God?**
 - Do you stand as one **blessed** or one **cursed**?
 - Do you stand **righteous** or **condemned**?
 - Do you know that the **same Jesus** who **washed sinners** clean... **keeps** them clean... and **preserves** them to the **end**?
 - **Are you holding fast** to this Gospel... and so **being saved** by it?
 - Or **are you believing in vain**?

Summary: The Gospel is the message about the historical Jesus who was promised by God to invade earth with the purpose of forming a people for His own glory from among the mass of sinful humanity.

(Segue) *Those who believe the Gospel endure in their belief, and this Gospel is the fundamental origin and motive for all of Christian living.*

(3) EVERYTHING FLOWS FROM GOSPEL CLARITY

- Healthy Churches are marked by Gospel Clarity (3 ways)

1. Healthy Churches Preach the Christ of the Gospel

- **The Better Adam represents!**
 - Romans 5:15-16 – “if **many died through one man’s trespass**, much more have the grace of God and **the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many**... the **judgment** following one trespass brought **condemnation**, but the **free gift** following many trespasses brought **justification**.”
- **The Lamb has died!**
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21 – “**For our sake** he [God] **made him to be sin** who knew no sin, **so that in him** [Christ] we might become **the righteousness of God**.”
- **The King rules!**
 - Colossians 3:15-17 – “And let **the peace of Christ rule in your hearts**... And **whatever you do**, in word or deed, do **everything in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
- **The Shepherd gathers sheep!**
 - John 10:14-16 – Jesus says, “**I am the good shepherd**. I know my own and my own know me... **I must bring in [all of my sheep]**, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be **one flock, one shepherd**.”

▪ ***The Vinedresser prunes!***

- John 15:4-8 – “***Abide in me, and I in you.*** As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ***I am the vine; you are the branches.*** Whoever abides in me and I in him, ***he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*** If anyone does not abide in me he is ***thrown away*** like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, ***thrown into the fire***, and burned.... ***By this my Father is glorified***, that you bear much fruit and so ***prove to be my disciples.***”

2. Healthy Churches Receive the assurances of the Gospel

▪ ***Christians are assured by the promises in the Gospel.***

- Romans 8:31-39 – “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ***He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*** Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? ***Christ Jesus is the one who died—***more than that, who ***was raised—***who is ***at the right hand of God***, who indeed is ***interceding*** for us. ***Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*** Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*** For ***I am sure*** that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

3. Healthy Churches Stand in the promises and hope of the Gospel

- ***Christians remain hopeful, despite the pain of life.***
 - Philippians 1:27 – “Only let ***your manner of life*** be ***worthy*** of the ***gospel*** of Christ... so ***that you are standing firm*** in one spirit, with one mind ***striving side by side*** for the faith of the gospel...”

(4) APPLICATION: 4 DIAGNOSTICS FOR GOSPEL CLARITY

2 PERSONAL DIAGNOSTICS

- **Do you find yourself seeking satisfaction in anything or anyone other than Christ?**
 - Are you **most assured** of God's love for you when you are **busily serving** Him in some ministry program or activity?
 - Do you feel **more righteous**, or **acceptable** before God, when you are more diligently **practicing spiritual disciplines**?
 - Are you often **worried** about what **others might think** of you?
 - When you set **life goals**, are they mostly comprised of "**American Dream**" aspirations?
 - Does **this message** today sound like "**a bunch of stuff I already know**" or "**stuff other people need to hear and believe**"?
- **Would you describe your care for the souls of others as "weak" or "indifferent"?**
 - Has it been **more than a few months since** you **talked** with someone **other than a fellow church member** about the **Gospel** and the **need to believe** and **follow Christ**?
 - When you think about and talk with your friends or family, **do you look for reasons not to bring up Christ and the Gospel**?
 - *We already talked about it... They already said they believed...*
 - Has it been **more than a few weeks since** you **prayed** for someone you know is not a believer... specifically **asking God to save** them?
 - In general, are you **more heart-broken** about the **circumstances of life** for your kids, your neighbors, your coworkers, and your friends than **the state of their soul**?
 - Has it been a while since you **invited someone** to come along with you to a church service and **talked with them after** about what they heard in the preached message?

2 CHURCH FAMILY DIAGNOSTICS

- **Do we generally expect that guests will be attracted by something other than the Gospel?**
 - Do we *think* of this *church* as *movie-goers* might think of a *theater*?
 - Do we generally expect that our *church experience* should *fit our preferences*?
 - When we think about *guests* of FBC Diana, do we hope they will be *attracted* to our *music style*, our *personalities*, our *facilities*, or some other *consumeristic feature*?
 - Do we get *frustrated* that our *non-Christian friends* and *family* don't thoroughly *enjoy* our *Gospel-rich* worship *services*?
 - Do we think *they might really like Christianity* / our *church* if we just had something to *meet* their *practical needs*?
 - “*If we just had a better set of programs... or resources...*”
- **Do we generally expect that our church members will be revitalized or that we will be truly united by something other than the Gospel?**
 - Do we mostly *build* and *maintain relationships* with each other based on our Gospel bond or *something else*?
 - Are our *groups of friends* among this church family *mainly* people with the *same preferences* and *life-status* as us?
 - Do we *avoid sitting* by, *talking* to, or *interacting* with church members *we don't know* very well?
 - *Look across the room...* Would anyone get the sense that this is a *church for a certain kind of people or group*? *Social* status? *Financial* capability? *Family* experience? *Ethnicity*?

- Are we hoping and looking for something other than the Gospel to ***bring our church family new life?***
 - Do our ***conversations*** with fellow church members commonly sound like ***lobbyists*** on ***Capitol Hill***... discussing ***what we want to get*** out of others or ***what others are failing to give*** us?
 - Is it ***odd*** or ***abnormal*** for us ***to talk with each*** other about ***personal*** spiritual ***growth*** or ***challenges*** or ***interests?***
 - Do ***those among us*** who are ***trapped*** by ***sin*** feel as though this is a ***safe place*** to be ***honest*** about their ***struggles?***
 - ***Which breaks our heart more?***
 - That our ***numerical size*** isn't what it used to be?
 - Or, that ***many of the people*** in this ***room*** are nearly entirely ***isolated*** from one another and ***closed off*** from any ***hope of experiencing*** real ***Gospel-centered fellowship*** with other Christians?

Major Point: Healthy Churches are marked by Gospel Clarity, from which everything flows.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/about/>

What is the Gospel? by R.C. Sproul

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-is-the-gospel/>

A 'Gospeled' Church by Jared Wilson

<https://ftc.co/resource-library/1/636>

The Primacy of the Gospel by Lee Irons

<http://www.upper-register.com/blog/?p=210>

The Gospel of Jesus Christ by D.A. Carson

http://www.thespurgeonfellowship.org/journal/feature_Sp08.pdf

Moving a Church Toward Gospel-Centeredness by Jeff Louie

http://www.thespurgeonfellowship.org/journal/feature_Sp09.pdf