

# The Gospel For Our Time

There is a cry today, "Let the church be the church." It is equally important for us to let the Gospel be the Gospel. Reduced Christianity is the result of a modified Gospel.

Augustine said, "If you believe what you like in the Gospel and reject what you like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourselves."

The Gospel is the good news from heaven of what God has done for man in Jesus Christ. It is not what man has done or can do for God.

It is not the Gospel of the works of man but the Gospel of the grace of God. If any man or angel preach any other Gospel, "let him be accursed," says Paul.

MANY difficulties faced by Christians today are like the difficulties of other times. Nearly twenty centuries ago John declared, "The whole world lieth in wickedness" (I John 5:19). And Paul said, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The Gospel has never had it easy. During the early years of Christian history it was against the law of Rome not only to preach Christ, but simply to believe in Him. Yet "in spite of dungeon, fire and sword" the Christians evangelized with amazing success.

THE TIMES were no better after Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire. The evils of a corrupt church exceeded the evils of a corrupt government.

There were great Christians during the Dark Ages, but the influence of the State Church was not good. New Testament Christianity was opposed by political and ecclesiastical forces.

Nevertheless, the true Church persevered and the Gospel was proclaimed. The Reformation added impetus and glory to Gospel progress.

Then the age of enlightenment came, resulting in an emphasis on the empirical method in science. This new approach has caused many to wage a vicious attack on religion.

About a century ago Schopenhauer said: "Religions are like glowworms: before they can shine it must be dark. A certain degree of general ignorance is the condition of every religion and is the element in which alone it is able to

exist. While, as soon as astronomy, natural science, geology, history, knowledge of countries and nations have spread their light universally, and philosophy is allowed to speak, every faith which is based on miracle and revelation must perish, and then philosophy will take its place. Religion will depart from European humanity like a nurse whose care the child has outgrown."

A more recent expression of the same idea was made by Professor J. D. Bernal: "The history of scientific advance has shown us clearly that any appeal to Divine purpose or any supernatural agency, to explain any phenomenon, is

## SBC Preacher

The preacher of the sermon for the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention sessions in San Francisco was H. Franklin Paschall, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tenn.

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in fact only a concealed confession of ignorance and a bar to genuine research."

Undoubtedly, the Gospel is challenged today as never before. Presbyterian Bruce Morgan, professor of religion at Amherst College, says our age "is truly post-Christian; those who dismiss it as just one among many periods of history dominated by unbelievers fail to see the uniqueness of our time."

He doubts the contention of Harvard's Paul Tillich that ordinary men beneath their daily concerns are still haunted by the "ultimate questions" that lead to the Christian answer: God.

Morgan believes that modern man does not care about sin and death, heaven and hell. He is anxious, disquieted and often desperate; but his anxieties seem oriented around his professional and social status, his sexual relations and the dislocations of a revolutionary world.

There are many leaders in Christen-

dom, among whom is Samuel Miller of Harvard, who are saying, "Christianity may be at death's door. The critical point of no return may have been passed."

What shall we say to these things? Must we believe that Christianity has no future? God forbid. Man's spiritual needs are very real and very great.

Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever has promised to be with the faithful church always, even unto the end of the age. The everlasting Gospel is adequate for our time and the future belongs to Christ.

THE GOSPEL is a historic fact which is distinct from and greater than the facts of nature, philosophy, intuition or mystical experience. When God became man in Jesus Christ, He invaded earth and time and made the celestial and terrestrial one. He came down into the very midst of "the tumult and shouting" of this world.

Jesus walked the rocky road of earth, gave Himself in service to others, suffered before Pontius Pilate, endured the Cross and despised the shame.

The Gospel is at home in history and must never be divorced from it.

"What a travesty of truth it is when sentimental, irrelevant quietism, trailing clouds of traditional verbiage, becomes the mark of a religion professing allegiance to One who for love of man came down into the fearful pit of history and into the miry clay of the sins and miseries of all the world," declared James Stewart. The Gospel is at its best when the world is at its worst.

THE GOSPEL is a unique event. Other facts of history are cyclic, reappearing, non-unique; but the Christian message is unique, unrepeatable, absolute. The New Testament Greek word, *απαρ*, translated once for all, sets forth this idea.

Paul says, "In that He died, He died to sin once for all" (Romans 6:10). "Christ hath suffered for sins once for all, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God," writes Peter (I Peter 3:18).

The writer of Hebrews declares that Christ "needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's: for this He did once for all, when He offered Himself" (Hebrews 7:27).

Again, "But now once for all at the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). And again, "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

Jude speaks of "the faith which was for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). There can be but one Calvary. What Jesus Christ did at the Cross was sufficient for all ages and for all men, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." It is imperative that "we preach Christ crucified."

God must be sorely displeased with a generation of preachers who fail to see what He did in Christ at the cross.

The Gospel is good news of the living Christ. Paul met Him on the Damascus road.

Already the apostle knew Him historically and thought that He was dead. Imagine his surprise when the living Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Paul and others interpreted His cry, "It is finished," to mean that He was finished. But there He was as the Jesus of Nazareth raised from the dead, confronting the persecutor.

This Divine and human encounter enabled Paul to know Him personally. And on surrendering to Him saying, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" he knew Him experientially.

**THE BATTLE CRY** of the early church was "the hour cometh and now is." The ones hearing His voice lived. So is it today. This is the age of the living Christ.

Jesus Christ is not separated from us by a distance of 20 centuries. He is more than a character of history. He is our contemporary.

The living Christ walked the Damascus road and He walks the Indian road, the American road. I know He walks the Tennessee road for I met Him there and trusted Him as my Lord and Saviour. Now I know Christ lives.

How? The Bible declares it. But this is not enough. The church proclaims it. But that is not adequate.

My mother and dad told me He lives. But even this falls short. "You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart."

Specifically, how does the Gospel meet human needs today? There are six dark areas in the world of mankind that desperately need the light of the Gospel.

There is the dark area of uncertainty. The world is suffering from insecurity. Many are uncertain even of the Scriptures. Some scholars say the Bible is made up of fact and embellishment and that it is their responsibility to differentiate between the two.

I have profound respect for scholars, for by their labors much of the darkness of prejudice and ignorance has been dispelled. But they overtax my credulity

when they tell me what part of the Bible to accept and what part to reject.

I cannot believe their pronouncements as infallible any more than I can believe the unexamined concepts and dogmatic utterances of men who are not scholars.

The Scriptures do not need to be demythologized as Bultmann advocates, but studied and allowed to speak to us in the light of God's full revelation in Jesus Christ.

Archimedes said that he could move the earth with a long lever, and a fixed fulcrum. The Gospel is this fixed fulcrum. We have a sure word in prophecy and in a person.

There need not be any uncertainty about the reliability and authority of



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the Bible. It has been authenticated by Jesus Christ Himself who spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes.

Let the Bible be the Bible. Let God speak to us through every part of Scripture—prophecy, poetry, parable, philosophy, history, signs and symbols, types and shadows—until the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ who is the image of God shines unto us.

To be sure of the Gospel is to be sure of the Scriptures for Jesus says, "these are they that testify of Me." He died, was buried and rose again, according to the Scriptures.

There is the dark area of human lostness. To be a sinner is to be separated from God, and to be separated from God is to be lost.

But present evil conditions have compounded the problems of sin. If there are degrees of lostness, man is more lost today than ever before.

Man is a computer. Mathematical rationalists have concluded that the universe is a machine. Man produces a machine that can outperform him. The machine becomes all important and man's dignity and worth are lost.

René Descartes came up with a remarkable definition of the self, a definition which is both clearly true and utterly foolish: "I am a thing that thinks."

Man is a comfort seeker. He wants to be accepted by the group. He refrains from saying or doing anything that will express his individuality. He has neither courage nor conviction. He drifts. According to Paul he is "conformed to this world."

**MAN IS LOST** in the assembly line. He is more a number than a name. The big operation dwarfs him. A sense of terrible loneliness lays hold upon him. Who knows and loves him? Who appreciates him as a person?

Darwinism is the theory that man is an animal of a high class, but only an animal. Many have accepted the theory as a fact. A Gilbert and Sullivan opera commented, "Darwinian man, though well behaved, at best is only a monkey shaved."

The tragic result of this thinking is that man is degraded to the level of the beasts of the field. There is no purpose for his being or meaning in his existence. He is utterly lost and every perception and endeavor is destined to futility.

**THE GOSPEL** is an announcement to man that he is more than an animal, that he was made in the image of God, that he is above beast or bug, that he is capable of fulfilling God's purpose for him.

It further declares that everybody is somebody, more than a number, more than a machine, more than a drifter or conformist. God knows and loves everyone as a person.

He proved this love in sparing not His Son, but delivering Him up for us all. "God commends (proves) His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

God is seeking always to bring each man not only to realize what he is as a sinner but what he may become as a saint.

When man "comes to himself" and accepts the fact that he is one whom the Father loves, and for whom Christ died, and trusts the Lord Jesus Christ, he has promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. The sin problem is solved; the lost is saved.

There is the dark area of guilt. The

Freudian probe has unveiled "an abyss within man, full of new embarrassments and new terror."

The number of emotionally disturbed and mentally sick people is increasing at an alarming rate. A vast proportion of our population depends on sedatives and tranquilizers for "peace of mind." Sin is to blame for much of this wretchedness.

**BUT THE** Gospel gives assurance of complete forgiveness and leads into the land of beginning again. It furnishes a basis on which to work out life's problems and bestows a new dynamic for "the living of these days."

There is the dark area of unrighteousness. This is an age of low morals and high crime. Nietzsche said, "Unless the Christians show that they are redeemed, I will not believe in their Redeemer." Christians can and should do exactly that.

The Gospel was given "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

The pure, consistent, starry life of a Christian is the Bible's clearest interpretation, Christianity's unanswerable argument and the community's greatest asset.

Another dark area in the world today concerns human relations. Technology has so changed the world that human beings must somehow live in a new intimacy. Hatred between races, strife between capital and labor, oppres-

sion and injustice among nations cannot continue where the Gospel idea prevails.

Man's relationship to man is not like two dots on each end of a line. Rather it is like the base angles of a triangle with God at the apex. No human relationship is right without God as the third party.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11). The Gospel which we believe demands that we regard every man as a person with dignity and possibility.

And Jesus says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 19:19). He further declares, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).

**WE NOT** only should love others as much as we love ourselves, but we should love them more. Jesus loved us more than He loved Himself in that He laid down His life for us. His commandment to us is, "love one another as I have loved you."

Finally, there is the dark area of the "space probe." The whole world is afraid that man's new power to colonize the stars will turn demonic and destructive. Bomb and fallout shelters are being constructed everywhere.

Billions of dollars are spent annually not only to increase our retaliatory power in case of attack but also to develop an interception system to keep the enemy weapons from reaching us.

Now the Gospel is the power of

God. It is greater than the power of the modern rockets of all the nations combined.

If the Gospel were believed and received the world around; if the Gospel idea prevailed at the United Nations and among lawmakers everywhere; if the Gospel were to inspire the world's thinking and mobilize the world's power, a new day of peace with justice would dawn upon us and the new powers of science would become a blessing to all mankind. So with hope let us proclaim this glorious Gospel to every creature.

There has never been a time when Christians were in the majority. Baker James Cauthen tells us the world is less Christian today than it was a decade ago. One third of the world's population is under the heartless and criminal rule of Communism.

Terrible judgment is about to fall upon the world because of Christians' failure to bear a faithful witness and because of the gross wickedness of the people. We must intensify our mission effort at home and abroad.

While we hope, work, pray and wait for a brighter day, the Gospel banishes fear. Jesus said to John, "Fear not: I am He that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:17, 18).

Christians are not afraid to live, to think, to suffer, to die. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And One Day the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS:

# "Crisis Into A Conquest"

**SAN FRANCISCO**—The Southern Baptist Convention received from its president a challenge to turn its theological "crisis into a conquest" as it measured differences against the teachings of Christ.

Herschel H. Hobbs took cognizance of the controversy over *The Message of Genesis*, by Ralph H. Elliott of Midwestern seminary, and other seminary battles in his presidential address prepared for the convention's first day of business.

None of the controversies was specified in the address but there could be no doubt of his appeal for "unity in diversity" in the hope theological debate would not spoil the annual sessions.

Dr. Hobbs introduced his address

by pointing to a world of crisis and saying:

"Until this world system is confronted with the full stature and station of Christ, it will continue to stumble on its way toward darkness and oblivion. Only when the forces of Christ seize the crisis and transform it into a conquest shall Christ be permitted to come to grips with or close in conflict with the powers which defy Him and His right to reign in the hearts of men."

He followed with a review of theological trends in different periods of history to beg Southern Baptists:

"With the Bible alone as the center of our theology, recognizing that God is both transcendent and imminent in His universe, that man is a sinner lost

from God and unable by his own powers to comprehend or effect a reconciliation with God, let us go forth to proclaim that God in the person of Jesus Christ has invaded history in a manner clearly set forth in the New Testament to redeem both man and His universe to Himself."

He offered four suggestions to "resolve any problem within their own theological position:"

1. "Southern Baptists must reaffirm both in faith and practice their time-honored belief in the priesthood of all believers . . . The priesthood of all believers simply means that every believer has the right and responsibility to read and interpret the Bible as he is led of the Holy Spirit."

2. "Southern Baptists must recognize and practice the principle of unity in diversity . . . This principle of unity in diversity imposes upon every Southern Baptist a sacred trust . . . Liberty is no excuse for license."