

What Is it to Preach the Gospel?

A sermon 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 Corinthians 9:16

The greatest man of apostolic times was the apostle Paul — no question about that. Paul was the greatest man in everything he did and if you go back to the time when his life was not lived in Christ, through Christ and for Christ, he was even great in what he did then. Someone said Paul was great in everything he did whether it was good or whether it was bad because he did nothing half way. If you consider him as a sinner, he was exceeding sinful — that's what he said, "exceeding sinful." If you consider him as a persecutor, he was mad against Christians — he persecuted them even in strange cities. He was not content to persecute those at home — he had to travel even to Damascus with letters giving him permission to destroy the people of Christ. If you consider the apostle as a convert, his conversion was remarkable; he met Christ in a real and personal way on the road to Damascus, blinded by the light, falling into the dust, looking up into that light, crying, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" If you consider this man as a preacher of the gospel, he stands out as the prince of preachers, the greatest of them all, crying, "I am ready to preach the gospel to them that are at Rome also; I am determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." "God forbid," he said, "that I should glory save in the cross of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." Whatever Paul did, he did with all his heart; he did nothing halfway. if he was rebelling, he was rebelling; if he was bowing, he was bowing; if he was worshipping, he was worshipping; if he was preaching the gospel, he was preaching the gospel. There was no nonsense in anything he did when it came to speaking about God. When he wrote this text, "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," he writes it with an unshaking hand; he writes it with a firmness, with a dedication and with a determination! "I preach the gospel. Yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." No nonsense in anything connected with the praise of God, with the worship of God, with the glory of God, or with the gospel of God. Now we need to learn this.

I want you to turn to Psalm 89, verse 7. The Scripture says, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." In the Old

Testament when one spoke of a genuine believer; when one spoke of a man who worshipped God and walked with God, do you know how he was described? "One that feared the Lord." Do you know how the rebels of our day are described? Do you know how men are described, women, boys and girls who do not know God, who are not children of God? They are said to be those who have "no fear of God before their eyes." Now what I'm saying is, the apostle Paul, whatever he did, he did it one hundred percent; whatever he did, it was no half-way measure. And particularly when it came to the gospel; when it came to worship; when it came to preaching Christ; when it came to the praise of God, there was no nonsense about this man. Ecclesiastes 5:1 — "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Turn to the book of Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 20, and listen to this: "but the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him." Now the words of our text are applicable to every minister of the gospel and to every church where the gospel is to be preached. In our text, 1 Corinthians 9:16, Paul says seriously, sincerely, in simplicity, in boldness, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, "though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of."

What is it to preach the gospel? Is everybody preaching the gospel? No! Is everybody who claims to preach the gospel preaching the gospel? No! What is it to preach the gospel?

To Preach the Gospel is . . .

To Tell the Truth About God

First, to preach the gospel is to preach the *truth about God*. 1. We preach 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 hath sent me?" and 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! 2. We preach the *God of creation*. "All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made." In him we move, we live and we have our being. God created all things. 3. We preach the *God of sovereign mercy*. The Scripture says "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The Bible says, "I will have mercy upon 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, his mercy, it is sovereignly bestowed. He is an immutable sovereign, and unchanging sovereign. 4. We preach 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 Almighty is a righteous God — He is a holy God, therefore, Christ Jesus came into the world that God might be just and justify the ungodly. We preach a God that cannot show his love at the expense of his holiness. We preach a God that cannot show mercy at the expense of his truth ? and only at Calvary can mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss one another. The God we preach is the God of righteousness, and 5. He's the *God of unchanging grace*. "I am the Lord," he said, "I do not change; therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed "Why is there no fear of God before the eyes of this generation? They've heard preached a false god; they've heard preached a weak god;

they've heard preached a failing god; they've heard preached a disappointed god; they've heard preached a god whose hands are tied; they've 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 and his glory are concerned. We do not add to his glory — we receive and share in his glory. The God we preach is the God of eternal existence, the God of creation, the God of sovereign mercy, the God of righteousness, and the God of unchanging grace. He is the God upon whom we depend; the God to whom we look; and the God without whom we can't exist! All things that we have we receive of him — we return nothing but that which he gives us. What is it to preach the gospel? It is to preach the truth about God.

To Tell the Truth About Man

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 from under him, and all his self-righteous rags stripped from off him, leaving him naked and unclothed before the searchlight of God's holiness. What does the Bible say about man? It says in Romans 10:3, "there is none righteous, no not one, there is none that understandeth; there is none that seek after God." What are men seeking? Seeking their own pleasure; seeking their own comfort; seeking their own glory; seeking their own wills; seeking their own satisfaction — everybody seeks his own, they do not seek God. "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, for there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Christ said, "you have not the love of God in you." Somebody says, "Well, I love people." No you don't. You just consider who you love. You love yourself. You try to think this minute — 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 — that is not loving anybody — 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 weren't your Saviour, you would not love him. Everything you love is connected with your own sinful, selfish self? 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, 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 know nothing about it." There's no genuine, honest, sincere fear of God before their eyes — they don't fear God; they do not tremble at the presence of God; they don't fall at his feet as dead men — 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 — my eyes have seen the Lord." Isaiah said, "When I saw the Lord, I cried, woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among 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!"

To Tell The Truth About Christ

Thirdly: What is it to preach the gospel? It is to tell the truth about God and man, and it is *to tell the truth about Jesus Christ*. My friends Jesus of Nazareth 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 Redeemer of his people. He died as the covenant Redeemer. He died 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 is not a disappointed Saviour; he is not a defeated Saviour; he is not a poor, weak, reformer up there in heaven, crying his eyes out because people won't let him have his way. He is the conquering, victorious Messiah who is 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 a congregation one time, "won't you make Jesus your Lord?" I emphatically declare to this congregation that you cannot make Jesus Christ 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 damned! 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 confess in heaven, earth and hell that he is Lord. You don't make him Lord — you recognize him as Lord. God made him Lord. The Father has delivered all things to the Son; the Scripture says, he is the Lord. He purchased that right through his death on Calvary. Jesus Christ is not a fire escape from hell, he is the Lord; he is not a door-mat named Jesus, he is Lord. If any man shall confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in his heart that God has raised him from the dead, he shall be saved. His life is a perfect righteousness; his death a perfect sacrifice. We'd better start telling the truth about this man called Jesus. To preach the gospel is to tell the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm not here to pastor a church; I'm here to preach the gospel. I'm not here to see how many people I can baptize, I'm here to preach the gospel. And I did not come to preach it with wisdom of words lest I cover the cross of Christ so that man can't even recognize it because of my intellectuality or my vocabulary.

To Tell The Truth About Salvation

Fourthly: I am come to preach the gospel and tell the truth about God, about men, about Christ and to *tell the truth about salvation*. Now let me tell you something: this thing of salvation — we use that word 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 the Lord. 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 a church ordinance, it's in Christ! It's not in a law; it's not in the deeds of the flesh; 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 the Lord. A man is not a Christian until he has a vital union with Christ. A man is

not a Christian until he is inseparably joined — personally joined to Jesus Christ. A man is not a Christian until Christ becomes his life. 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 a man of sin; the Holy Spirit empties a sinner; the Holy Spirit brings a man to faith in the Son of God — faith in the living Lord. 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 fountain springing up into 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. What is it to preach the gospel? There are not many folks preaching the gospel because there are not many people telling the truth about God. Everybody has a god. But eternal life is to know the living God, What is it to preach the gospel? It's to tell the truth about man, and we are not going to like what we hear. It's to tell the truth about, Christ, and it's to tell the truth about salvation.

Nothing To Glory Of In Preaching

The next thing that Paul deals with here is "though I preach the gospel I have nothing to glory of. Why is it that we who preach the gospel have nothing to glory of? Well, firstly, 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, "I am not worthy to be an apostle, I see no worthiness in myself." Later on he said, "I am less than the least of all the saints" — pick out the least saint in God's house and I am less than the least saint. Then later on he said, "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." Dr James M. Gray wrote this: "suffer a sinner whose heart overflows, loving his Saviour to tell what he knows; once more to tell it would I embrace — what do you want to tell, Dr. Gray — "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, we're just using borrowed gifts. Turn to 1 Corinthians 4, and listen to verse 7 — "Who maketh thee to differ?" 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? God gave it to you. 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 simpleminded imbecile. Who made you to differ? What do you have that God didn't give you? If you are walking around with something, 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 merciful grace; God's gracious grace enables you to be anything but a stuttering, stammering moron.

Let me tell you a story. Charles Spurgeon wrote this in 1855, "Last week the quiet neighborhood of Newtown was disturbed by an occurrence which has thrown a gloom over the whole neighborhood. Something dreadful happened. A well-known teacher, a man who had been principal of the academy for young men for years, who was my own professor, has become mentally deranged, he has lost his mind. A warrant had to be issued for his arrest, and while waiting for the vehicle to carry him away to the institution for the mentally insane, this old white-haired man who had been principal stood on the porch of his home, where he had lived all his life before his friends and neighbors, handcuffed to two policemen. He was then led away. He was my teacher, he was the man from whom I learned whatever human learning I have acquired. He was a man of genius, a man of ability! How fallen, how fallen." How quickly can human nature sink below the level of the beast. 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 — God must do that; I can't reveal Christ — this, too, is the Spirit's work. If my words are the only voice you hear, you'll just have to perish — you've got to hear him speak from heaven.

Necessity Laid Upon Me To Preach

Read the next line of our text — "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 Christ and him crucified — the gospel? I'll tell you why — because of the truth and the beauty of the gospel. I see in the gospel of substitution a beauty beyond all things. I see in the gospel of Jesus Christ the good news of the Son of God, the truth of God. Only Christ can meet the perfect law. Only Christ can satisfy the justice of God. Only Christ can 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 glory 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 down here and shake my hand and God would take you to heaven, but it would be a lie. I could tell you, let me baptize you, and by obeying the baptismal commandment you will go to heaven, but it wouldn't be so. I could tell you that if you live a good life and pray and go to church on Sunday and give a little offering, God will take you to heaven when you die, but it wouldn't be 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 — it wouldn't be so. But when I tell you that Christ died for our sins; that Christ is a sufficient Saviour; that Christ is an effectual 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.

Woe Is Unto Me If I Preach Not

I wish I had the ear of every preacher in the world right now, not that I deserve to preach to preachers, but I know this is so — it doesn't matter if a little child says it, or an ignorant person says it, or who says it — Paul said it first, the Holy Spirit inspired him to say it, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." I'm in trouble, real trouble. I cannot think of any crime — I can't think of a crime more terrible than to be intrusted with the immortal souls of eternity-bound boys and girls, young people, men and women, like every preacher is in-trusted every Sunday, and then stand up here and waste this precious time talking about myself, about my problems or my so-called denomination or my church, or talk about my ideas of what is right and what is wrong. I cannot think of a more terrible crime than to be intrusted 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 upon the preachers and shepherds and pastors who for advantage, filthy lucre and praise of men deceive men's 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." Now if you want to play games, you play them, but you play them somewhere else — I'm going to preach the gospel here. If you want to play church, you play it, but you play it somewhere else. I'm preaching as a dying man to dying men; I'm preaching as one who may never preach again, and under God I'm going to tell you the truth. I say this in closing, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel; but I have something to tell you: woe is unto you if I preach it and you do not believe it. You may not understand it; and it may not fit in with your tradition; and it may not fit into 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; he didn't fit into their tradition; and he didn't fit into their mold; and they crucified him! My message may not fit what Mama taught you, but Mama 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, woe is unto the Tri-state area, and woe is everybody under the sound of my voice, if I preach the gospel and you do not 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 do not receive it — is that fair? I preach the gospel, Paul says! 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 repentance; God gave me the faith. For necessity is laid upon me — I've got to believe the gospel, because there's no truth anywhere else; there's no beauty anywhere else; there's no hope anywhere else; no refuge anywhere else — necessity is laid upon me — can you say that? And can you go on and finish — 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 — I leave it with you.