

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 2026 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

*Now I would remind you,
brothers, of the gospel I
preached to you, which you
received, in which you stand,
and by which you are being
saved, if you hold fast to the
word I preached to you—
unless you believed in vain.*

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

GOSPEL CULTURE

Clear gospel proclamation promotes a gospel culture that produces a full salvation that restores both humans and creation to Divine design.

The gospel is the most powerful truth ever proclaimed. It carries the power of heaven and accomplishes the will of God wherever it is received. But variant versions of the gospel create their own cultures as well. That is why it is of utmost importance to clarify and correctly define the New Testament gospel. In previous studies we have entertained the question of relevance. Does it matter what we identify as gospel

as long as we Christians believe we are going to heaven? We concluded that it does—supremely. Now we will address the question of gospel fruit. What kind of culture is created when the message we identify as gospel is preached?

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in

vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8, CSB

It seems very clear that Paul sees the gospel that he proclaims as the narrative that completes the Old Testament story. He recounts Jesus' life as fulfillment of the Scriptures. He refuses to short-change the gospel by ignoring the important connection with the fulfillment of God's promises. It is a story that Jesus completed. It is not a theological concept or a religious precept. It is not an explanation, but a narrative depicting

what God has done in all of history. The story has many characters. God promised Adam and Eve a final victory over the Serpent. God promised Noah a new start for civilization. God promised Abraham a Seed that would bless the world. He promised Moses and Israel that He would be faithful to the covenant He made with Israel. Jesus fulfilled all that. Any gospel divorced from the story of the Old Testament will produce a deviant culture.

Scott Mcknight in his book *The King Jesus Gospel* examines the trail that has led to the present state of "salvation culture." His conclusion is best stated in the words of Dallas Willard whom he quoted referring to the reduction of salvation to personal forgiveness and calls it "the gospel of sin management." He says, "What must be emphasized in all of this is the difference between trusting Christ, the real person Jesus, with all that that naturally involves, versus trusting some arrangement for sin-remission set up through him---trusting only his role as guilt remover...gospels of sin management presume a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming humankind...(and)

they foster 'vampire Christians' who only want a little blood for their sins but nothing more to do with Jesus until heaven." The issue in salvation culture is how to be saved from eternal damnation. How do we get to heaven? Who's in and who's out? The gospel is reduced to a plan like the 4 spiritual laws, or the Roman road, or gospel tracts. This culture affects all of church life. Willard continues: "Your system is perfectly designed to yield the result you are getting." What have we gotten? Individualism exalted by promoting a "Jesus and me alone" experience... Evangelism that has slipped into the art of persuasion to get people to quickly act on the plan... Discipleship that has become peripheral to the main point of getting the plan completed - an add-on for those more desirous of deeper spirituality... Social flourishing that is neglected since the societies of the world are wicked and the whole thing is kindling for final fire... Accountability that is ignored because life is all about the individual and his or her personal ethic derived from his or her own personal experience with God... The main thing is going to heaven, not living in the triumph of Jesus' kingship.

Church leaders are worn thin trying to appease immature consumers complaining that their preferences are not being considered. While thousands of people are trafficked by unscrupulous perverts and hoards are addicted to enslaving drugs, gambling, and pornography, faithful church attenders are squabbling over personal comforts and preferential treatment. But we are going to heaven based on following the plan that was presented to us. That is what matters in this culture. Charismatic evangelicals have acknowledged the Holy Spirit, but often focus on personal experiences and arguing about naming them correctly. Was a baptism in the Spirit, a filling by the Spirit, or an anointing of the Holy Spirit? A charismatic experience can add adventure and excitement while waiting to go to heaven, but if that is all we trust Him to do, we are missing the very intimacy He came to bring. Salvation culture shapes the doctrines that we emphasize and determines the perspective we have toward the church's mission. If going to heaven when we die is the issue, the very vision of blessing the whole world with the gospel is unrealistic.

In stark contrast, the New Testament gospel as described by Paul is the narrative of the Old Testament being made complete in Jesus the Messiah. Messiah means Israel's King. He saves by ruling over all the enemies of His people. He didn't come to give us a plan, but to rule over what has ruled over us. He rules over sin and reconciles sinful people to a Holy God. He rules over Satan, stripping him of his authority and power on earth. He is left around pushing his lie so we would run to the truth - Jesus the King. Jesus rules over us by including us in His crucifixion. We are not left to the changing desires of our fleshy self-will. He rules over our slavery by taking the slave master captive. The gospel of the finished work of Jesus offers a hope that embraces Him as Lord and King.

True gospel culture is created when the gospel of the completed story is proclaimed and people receive it, stand on it, and continue in it. The finished work of Jesus as the climax of the story of the Bible and the completion of Israel's purpose becomes the living truth that changes our perspective, and thus our goals. We are grateful for a salvation that

lasts forever beyond physical death and that empowers us to be fully human, in partnership with God as we claim everything that Jesus's blood redeemed. However, we are not fixated on a plan. We are enamored with the person of Jesus who leads us in glorious triumph over all that Hell can concoct. Our glory is wrapped up in His. We are in Him, and His inheritance is ours. Believing that causes us to worship at all times, live in submissive love with all those in the community of faith, and confidently move out towards the fields yet clouded with the darkness of Satan's deception. Heaven awaits, but the kingdom of our King is operating now.

How do we foster a gospel culture? Proclaim the New Testament gospel. Tell the biblical narrative with Jesus alone as the point.

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