

Cutting Through the Noise

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Introduction

Cutting through the Noise: Blindfold game, \$20 bill, listen to “the voice” to get their. Everyone else is screaming competing directions. Noise and chaos.

- Corinth, like our world today, was full of **competing voices**. Without **diligent attention** and **clearly knowing the voice of God**, his instructions can get drowned out.
 - We live in the **information age** (television, streaming services, movies, YouTube, social media, advertising). The onslaught of information has the tragic effect of causing us to overlook the few things that really matter. We have information but lack wisdom.

Mountaintop Argument: Paul has saved the best for last. In the midst of all the clatter and confusion of the Corinthian church (PG-13 book; sleeping with MIL; prostitution; drunkenness; idol meat; speaking in tongues), he comes to the **high point** of the letter, the peak of the mountaintop.

- The moral failures of the Corinthians may in fact be surface symptoms of their underlying misunderstanding of the heart of the gospel (the death and resurrection of Jesus). If he hasn't risen from the dead and if we won't rise from the dead, then what does it matter how I live now?
- Until you settle the weightiest matter (what happens when I die?) then you'll never settle the daily matters (how I live?).

Macro and Micro Gospel: Gospel is the “peak” of the mountain (and the whole climb). Gospel is a summary of the story of God from creation to redemption to consummation, but the peak is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Until the gospel captures your heart you'll always be chasing the temporary things of the world.

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. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On

the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.¹

1. The Foundation of the Gospel (vv. 1-2)

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.

Remind: ¹ Now I would remind you, brothers (*siblings; cf. mankind and humans) Parenting is so much bending over and so much repeating yourself. I remind my kids the same things over-and-over (e.g., don't lick, don't spit, flush, say you're sorry, your socks don't go there, etc.). Paul is reminding us of our foundation (i.e., the gospel) because we are **forgetful** (e.g., forget God provided in the past; no need to worry).

- Unfortunately, we are also forgetful about the gospel.

The Gospel: of the gospel I preached to you We are a **gospel** community on mission. You can't get rid of *any* of them, but it is important to recognize that we start with the gospel.

- The foundation of our faith is **the gospel**. “The gospel, which I gospelled to you” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν).

Not a gospel but *the* gospel. We are entrusted with *the* gospel (1 Thess 2:4). We contend for the faith “once-for-all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). There is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5).

- There is a true gospel and there are false gospels: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-9).

DIY Christianity: “Once upon a time being a Christian meant adhering to the teaching of Scripture and life in the Spirit. One would, and could, apply the term to those who did their best to live lives of devotion and fidelity to the God revealed in Scripture. Now it seems to mean something like ‘loosely holding to the bits of Christianity with which I agree and abandoning those bits with which I disagree.’ Christians these days are too often not those who are servants of Christ; they are people who like to imagine themselves participants in some loosely defined

¹ ¹ Γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν, ὃ καὶ παρελάβετε, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐστήκατε, ² δι' οὗ καὶ σώζεσθε, τίνι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν εἰ κατέχετε, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ εἰκὴ ἐπιστεύσατε. ³ παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς ⁴ καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς ⁵ καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἴτα τοῖς δώδεκα· ⁶ ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπ' ἀνὼ πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν· ⁷ ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβῳ εἴτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν· ⁸ ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡς περὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη κάμοι. ⁹ Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων ὃς οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανὸς καλεῖσθαι ἀπόστολος, διότι ἐδίωξα τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ· ¹⁰ χάριτι δὲ θεοῦ εἰμι ὃ εἰμι, καὶ ἡ χάρις αὐτοῦ ἡ εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ κενὴ ἐγενήθη, ἀλλὰ περισσότερον αὐτῶν πάντων ἐκοπίασα, οὐκ ἐγὼ δὲ ἀλλὰ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ [ἡ] σὺν ἐμοί.
¹¹ εἴτε οὖν ἐγὼ εἴτε ἐκεῖνοι, οὕτως κηρύσσομεν καὶ οὕτως ἐπιστεύσατε.

confederation of potentially like-minded, somewhat part-time believers in some nebulous something-or-other” (Jim West, *adapted*).

- Americans idolize freedom and have bought into the myth that freedom means *doing whatever you want*, it has no constraints or boundaries. And this has resulted in chaos.
- “To refer to Catholic monks and fundamentalist lobbyists, Origen and Joel Osteen, Augustine and John MacArthur, Dante and Creflo Dollar, Francis of Assisi and Jerry Falwell Jr, Martin Luther and Jimmy Swaggart, John Calvin and George W. Bush, all as ‘Christian’ stretches the word thin to the point of breaking. The term ‘carbon-based life-form’ is basically as informative” (Duncan, *adapted*, *God Laughs and Plays*, 49).
- The gospel reminds us that our salvation comes from **outside** of us and is not discovered within. If we are going to live in the **power** of the gospel then we have to submit to the **truth** of the gospel, we can’t just **pick and choose**. The gospel is an announcement that must be believed. Being gospel-centered means being word-centered because the gospel is news, a message.

What is the gospel?: “Gospel” = “good news” (εὐαγγέλιον) So what is this good news? The gospel is not everything, and everything is not the gospel, but the gospel is something (and not other things).

- It is the news or the story of salvation in Jesus Christ. “The gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy” (John Piper).
- The word gospel existed before it was incorporated into Christian theology. For example, “After being invaded and enslaved by Persia, Greece won two decisive battles at Marathon and Solis. The Greeks sent out heralds, also called evangelists (“gospelers”), to proclaim good news (“gospel”) to the cities. We have fought for you. We have won. And now, you are no longer slaves but free. Enter Jesus, fully God, fully man. Bringing news that would change our lives forever. His news was this: ‘I am [God] come to you to do what you could not do for yourself. I will take what you deserve so you can have what I deserve... This is my gospel that you have been saved by grace and you are slaves no more’” (Stevens).

“The more deeply I study theology, I realize we’re just answering the questions, ‘Who is God and what is his gospel?’” (Christy Thornton).

- What are the implications of the gospel? Why is it so good? “Here’s the good news (i.e., gospel): you’re more sinful than you ever dared believe; you’re more loved than you ever dared hope” (Keller).

1. Don’t Lose the Gospel: which you received,

Novelty: Novelty is the great myth of humanity. Something new (invention, idea, ideology) is going to fix everything. Sin is the problem, and the gospel is the answer. We have improved our technology and increased our information and, yet, we have the same problems.

- We might need a new **application**, but we don’t need a new **foundation** (e.g., fundamentals in sports, Michael Pereira flips, spins, jumps off the cage and loses to the

smaller, fundamentally sound Tristan Connelly -or- football team that is defense heavy and has a running attack doesn't need to throw the ball 40 times). Interesting, because, no matter how good you get, you don't move on from the fundamentals.

- The thing that got you there is the thing that will carry you through. Don't deviate from the gospel.

Assumed: Unfortunately, in vaguely Christian cultures the gospel is often assumed. What happens is we assume the gospel and devote our energy to other pet projects (e.g., marriages, prosperity, secularization, etc.). One generation **believes** the gospel, the next generation **assumes** the gospel, and the third generation **loses** the gospel.

- It's like we think that people will just absorb the message of the gospel by rubbing shoulders with us. Or, in the realm of the church, our kids will just know the gospel by being around Christians and Christian activities. We have to make sure we take opportunities to clearly **articulate** the gospel. **If we're not careful, we can lose the gospel.** Are you guilty of assuming someone knows the gospel?

2. Don't Drift from the Gospel: in which you stand,

Distracted from the Gospel: The more relevant danger for us is much like the danger for the Corinthians. Most of us would not willfully deny or corrupt the gospel, but we forget it, it loses its place of importance, we begin with the gospel and turn to other things for our attempts at Christian growth.

Drift: "You never, never, never outgrow your need for [the gospel]. Don't ever think of the gospel as, 'That's the way you get saved, and then you get strong by leaving it and doing something else.' No! We are strengthened by God through the gospel every day... You never outgrow the need to preach to yourself the gospel" (John Piper). "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him." (Col 2:6).

- **"Have you drifted?"** (e.g., canoeing, no one drifts upstream). The apostles reminded the early church not only to receive the grace of God but to "continue in the grace of God" (e.g., Acts 13:43). Our tendency is to view the gospel as the means of entrance into the Christian faith but not the means to maturity. We slowly drift into other things. We find other causes (many of which are good) on which we take our stand (e.g., social causes, political causes, preferences). "To accept the sufficiency of the gospel is not merely to assume it is "enough" to go to heaven — it is the thing we need for all of life" (McKinion).
- Because the gospel tells the story of God it applies to every area of our life. It impacts our money, parenting, marriages, jobs, politics, and more. The gospel is more than (not less than) a way to get to heaven. Because the gospel tells us about the life that is really life (1 Tim 6:19), it makes sense of every aspect of our purpose, joy, and hope.
- "It's amazing to me how the gospel calms even our most practical problems" (Bryan Barley).

3. Don't Stifle the Gospel: ² and by which you are being saved,

Sanctified: The gospel is how we were saved, and it's how we're being sanctified.

- "It's the diving board and the pool."
- "It's the ocean that touches the beach and extends to depths unseen."

Ongoing Testimony: How many of us give a testimony that only exists in the past? As if once we got saved God stopped working? The gospel not only demonstrates the first step(s) (i.e., ABCs) of becoming a Christian but the *only* way of relating to God in every area of your life (i.e., A-Z).

- Being "gospel-centered" is a life-long endeavor, not a slogan. It is the commitment to continually turn away from defining yourself with anything other than the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Hold On: if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. The grace that saved you is the grace that sustained you: don't let go now. The trials that God brought you through, the miracles you experienced, would be for nothing if you gave up now. It's not just how you start but how you finish.

- At the end of the day, it's not some special program, strategy, or technique. Everything flows from the gospel. The means of salvation and the means of maturity are found in the same place.
- "How do we receive Christ Jesus? By hearing the truth and believing it. How do we grow in him? Through exposure to truth and continually setting our minds on truth" (Farley).

2. The Priority of the Gospel (vv. 3-5)

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.

First Place: ³ For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received. Get the right thing right (1^o off at the beginning is going to be way off at the end).

- "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27a).
- The thing that is central to everything they do — the gospel. It is the foundation on which everything else is built.
 - The gospel is the one thing that can handle being the one thing. It is the one thing strong enough to build your life on.
- Jesus' death and resurrection are not some incidental, optional, or speculative thing that can be set aside, it is the center of our hope.
 - If you get this wrong, none of the rest of it matters and none of the rest of it works.
- My fear is that we will spend too much time trying to be **relevant** that we fail to be **significant**. We can be so faddish that we miss the only thing that matters. We need more than a temporary strategy, we need a lasting foundation that will produce fruit for generations (long haul vs. short sprint).

In My Place: that Christ died for our sins for our sins

- Substitute (PSA). **Jesus in our place.** He takes the punishment we deserve. He substitutes his life for ours. He dies so we can live. **Jesus didn't just die for you but he died in your place.**
 - "The concept of substitution is at the heart of both sin and salvation. The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, but the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone; God accepts penalties that belong to man alone" (Stott, adapted).
- "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). **The great exchange.** He was betrayed, abandoned, accused, and punished for us, so that we could have forgiveness, righteousness, and new life in him.
 - "The heart of the gospel proclamation is the good news that the transfer of guilt was made on the cross of Jesus the Christ. The Bridegroom gave himself up for the bride, the Head for the body, the King for his people, the Shepherd for his sheep, the Master for his disciples and friends, our Lord for us" (Blocher).

Resurrection: ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day

- He didn't simply die, a sacrifice for us to remember, but he was raised from the dead, defeating death and making a way for us to have life.
- "The great hope of the Christian faith is that this seemingly insurmountable enemy, Death, has already been defeated... Death no longer has dominion over those in [Jesus'] kingdom" (Emerson).
- "Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow of death and came out victoriously on the other side. As the God-man, he defeated death and hell."

Promises Kept: in accordance with the Scriptures, This was God's plan, promised and prophesied.

- And this isn't just some **spiritual myth** for personal edification **historically true** and **physically real**. Jesus' doesn't just live in our hearts, he is actually alive, and if he isn't, all of this is a sham.
- Literal resurrection
- If Jesus' didn't *actually* rise from the dead, then neither will you. And without his resurrection power, all we have is empty, sentimental hope that changes nothing and has no power to free us from anything.

3. The Impact of the Gospel (vv. 6-11)

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. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace

of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Historical: Paul is reminding them that this is not made up. The witnesses to the resurrection were still alive for the Corinthians to investigate.

- The **empty tomb** and these hundreds of **witnesses** are powerful evidence for the reality of the resurrection. These are crucial. With only the empty tomb, the body could have been stolen. With only eyewitnesses, folks could argue that this is delusion, hallucination, or hysteria. But together, they are convincing evidence.
- “The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live” (Pannenburg).
- It may be unusual (miraculous), but that doesn't mean it didn't happen.
 - It **changed** Paul's life, and it can change yours.

Personal Testimony: ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

- When Paul encountered the resurrected Lord, it changed him from persecutor to apostle.
- God's grace was not wasted on Paul, it transformed him.

Life Change: Many people have gone to church a long time and can speak the vocabulary of salvation and the gospel, but their hearts have never been changed.

- “Beware of presuming that you are saved” (Spurgeon)
- “I fear that one of the results of misunderstanding the Bible's teaching on [salvation] may well be that [churches] are full of people who have made sincere commitments at some point in their lives but who have not experienced any change” (Mark Dever).
- “I don't ask people if they're saved anymore. Who isn't saved? — from the White House to the jail-house. I look a person in the eye and say, “does Christ live in you?” (Ravenhill).
- “Many people want Jesus to change their lives but don't want to change how they live” (Capps).

Conversion: The gospel is an event *and* it's a power. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16a).

- Every person who has lived or ever will live must come to grips with the gospel. They must decide if this is a message of power and truth or if they will try to look elsewhere.
- Many people have latched onto the benefits of Christianity without ever agreeing to its truth. Many have fashioned Jesus into their own likeness rather than conforming their life the person of Jesus. Jesus has become a mirror rather than a Savior (a source of affirmation rather than transformation).

- It is precisely because the gospel transforms that it can't be limited to just the "religious" aspects of our lives. Every decision we make and priority we set flows from it (e.g., how you work, who you date, calendar, bank account).

Gospel Change:

- Plants our roots in another garden. Changes our allegiances from this world to the KoG. Reorients our loves, values, and priorities.
- The gospel makes you a totally new creation, it takes you from death to life. The gospel is the only message that can cure what it diagnoses. "The gospel does not just show us how to live but gives us life."
- "The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is not a well-orchestrated pageant on Easter Sunday but a group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community that there can be no explanation other than that something decisive has happened in history" (Willimon).

Conclusion

Believe: Has your life been transformed by the gospel of Jesus?

- Do you understand it, have you believed it? Have you surrendered to the God of the gospel and received his new life? Have you participated in the great exchange whereby he takes your sin, and you get his righteousness?

Return: Have you drifted from the priority of the gospel in your life? How does the gospel inform every part of your life? What areas of your life have been off-limits to God but he is calling you to surrender (e.g., dating, money, etc.)?