

# The Means of Grace

## The Preaching of the Word of God

<sup>5</sup> For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them (Lev 18:5).

<sup>6</sup> But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down)

<sup>7</sup> “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

<sup>8</sup> But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); (Deut 30:12-14)

<sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

<sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

<sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says,

“Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” (Isa 28:16)

<sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

<sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Joel 2:32)

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

<sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Isa 52:7; Nah 1:15)

<sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says,

“Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” (Isa 53:1)

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for

“Their voice has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world.” (Ps 19:4)

<sup>19</sup> But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

“I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;  
with a foolish nation I will make you angry.” (Deut 32:21)

<sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

“I have been found by those who did not seek me;  
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” (Isa 65:1)

# The Word is A Great Power

*The Word.* It's a concept that has a long track record as a topic of discussion. The Greek [philosophers](#) Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle all discuss it using their word *logos*. With many different nuances, it was essentially the [universal logic that made the world rational and structured and accessible](#) to human inquiry. The Jew Philo of Alexandria said that the Logos was an [intermediary divine being](#) called the firstborn of God and the second-God. In more recent days, Carl Jung contrasted it with the emotional, non-rational *eros*, a word we translate as love or lust. [Jordan Peterson](#) points out that all of Western civilization is built upon the logos and even goes so far as to say that the West will die without the rebirth of the Logos. Because the West is that.

It is unquestionable from any or all of these sources that the logos or word is somehow [powerful in and of itself](#). And think about it. In Genesis 1, as the Spirit of God is hovering over the *tohu vabohu* (the formless void chaos), suddenly out of the darkness God spoke. “[And God said](#)” appears [ten times](#), in each instances speaking something into existence that did not exist before or gives

purpose to that which now does exist. This is innate power at the most fundamental level of reality—the Mouth of God himself.

In my experience, the way Christians have often dealt with the word is one of **two opposite** extremes. On one hand, there are those who have not really thought much at all about the word, what it can do, what its nature is, or anything like that. And our current culture has become obsessed with something that in many ways is its opposite: **the eye**—pictures, movies, social media, television, anything that comes to us through the experience of our eye-gate. In churches especially, the word has been fundamentally dethroned and relegated to the basement of our thinking and practice. Why? Because it is fundamentally powerless, especially compared to other things.

On the other hand, you have an entire movement that still goes strong, ironically coming to most people through the moving picture called television, but to many others through the mega-church movement called **Word of Faith**. For example, Joyce Meyer once said, “**Words are containers for power. They carry creative or destructive power, positive or negative power. And so we need to be**

speaking right things over our lives and about our futures if we expect to have good things happen. Because what you say today is what you'll probably end up having tomorrow.”<sup>1</sup> And Joel Osteen says, “Our words are vital in bringing our dreams to pass. It’s not enough to simply see it by faith or in your imagination. You have to begin speaking words of faith over your life. Your words have enormous creative power. The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it. This is a spiritual principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad, positive or negative.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, let’s not move back over to the other extreme and deny that words contain inherent power. What you say matters. The mouth is like a rudder that steers the whole ship. The tongue is like a fire that sets a whole forest ablaze (**James 3:4-5**). What you think in your mind about yourself you use words for. And many people often use terrible words in their own heads and hearts about themselves, thereby creating terrible negative emotions

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<sup>1</sup> **Joyce Meyer**, Joyce Meyer Ministries broadcast, *Trinity Broadcasting Network*, 16 July 2002. Elsewhere, in a chapter titled “Watch Your Mouth,” Meyer writes, “Words are containers for power. They carry either creative power or destructive power” (Joyce Meyer, *Eight Ways to Keep the Devil Under Your Feet* [New York: Warner Faith, 2002], 87–88).

<sup>2</sup> **Joel Osteen**, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: Warner Faith, 2004), 129. Both cited in **Hank Hanegraaff**, *Christianity in Crisis 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

and feelings from those self-condemning words. And others use boastful words about themselves to prop themselves up creating pride. Yes, it is true, words are containers of great power. But this Word of Faith movement takes the inherent power of the word and turns it into a magical force to be manipulated and used by the “believer” through the magical act of faith—something defined quite differently from what you find in the Bible. This is more than just right thinking, it is manipulation of others to “name it and claim it.”

Today, I want to look at the means of grace which the Bible calls the word of God. Specifically, I want us to see what specific word is “the power of God to the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). We will look at where this word comes from, what is its meaning, and what is its content. Then we will turn our attention to the different forms this word takes that God has approved of and commanded us to use in the Holy Scripture.

## The Means of Grace

But first, we need understand what it means that the word is a “means of grace.” Berkhof says,

The Church may be represented as the great means of grace which Christ, working through the Holy Spirit, uses for the gathering of the elect, the edification of the saints, and the building up of His spiritual body. He qualifies her for this great task by endowing her with all kinds of spiritual gifts, and by the institution of the offices for the administration of the Word and the sacraments, which are all means to lead the elect to their eternal destiny.<sup>3</sup>

You can hear in this how the means of grace involves the salvation, sanctification, and eventual glorification of God's elect. This of necessity means that there is great power in the means of grace. Like a seed that goes into the ground and is watered only to grow into a giant tree, the idea is that the means of grace produces new life and great blessings in the heart of a believer.

The *Orthodox Catechism* of Hercules Collins asks, “Q. 64. Seeing then that only faith makes us partakers of Christ and his benefits, from where does it proceed? A. From the Holy Ghost, who kindles it in our hearts by the

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 604.

preaching of the gospel, and other ordinances, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments” [spelling updated].<sup>4</sup> Here, the catechism distinguishes between the *kindling* of faith in our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel and other ordinances, and the *confirming* of faith through the sacraments. To kindle a fire is to start a fire. To confirm a fire is to keep it going. Today we will deal with the first of these—the kindling of faith through the word—especially the preached word. This is the chief means of grace that God has given to his people that they might know every comfort in life and in death.

## The Word That Is “The Power of God”

**Romans 1:16** tells us one of the most important facts in all the Bible. It is in my opinion **Paul’s thesis statement** for the book of Romans. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for *it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,*” and the next verse continues, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘*The righteous shall live by faith* [**Hab 2:4**].” Here

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<sup>4</sup> **Hercules Collins**, *An Orthodox Catechism* (London: 1680): Q 64. This is essentially Q. 63 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

then we learn that “the gospel” is this great power of God for salvation. **So what is the gospel?**

Sadly, this is a question that surveys tell us most Christians do not even know the answer to. Some think it is “**Love your neighbor as yourself.**” That’s not the Gospel. That is the definition of **the law**. One of Jesus’ opponents asked him, “**Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law**” (**Matt 22:36**). Commandments are laws; they tell you what you must do. He answered, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself**” (**37, 39**). The law is not the Gospel. “**The Law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**” (**John 1:17**).

Some think it is “**Pull yourself up by your bootstraps**” or “**God helps those who help themselves.**” **These aren’t even in the Bible!** The former originated in the 1800s as a way of telling you to do the impossible. The other, though often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, actually has roots in the Greeks who taught, “**The gods help those who help themselves.**” So that one is actually a form of **paganism**.



The word “gospel” is really quite interesting. Our English word comes from the Old English *godspel* which means “Glad tidings announced by Jesus.” It comes from *god* (sometimes *gōd*) which curious means “good” and *spel* which means “story, message.” Usually, when you think of “spell,” you think of a set of words with supposed magical or occult powers, like an incantation or a charm or ... Word of Faith teachers. But that sense of spell is not found in Middle English. Instead, the Middle and Old English is a “story, saying, or tale that comes as history, narrative, or fable.” To cast a spel would be to tell a story. This means that the word gospel is literally God’s story to us, and when understood properly, it is captivating. It is God’s power, it is God’s spell to us! For that is what “gospel” literally means in English.

The Greek is just as fascinating. The word is *evangélion*. We get the word “Evangelical” from it. By definition, an Evangelical is someone who is supposed to proclaim and know *the gospel*! The word is a compound of two Greek words, *eu-* meaning “good” and *angelos* meaning “messenger.” This is curious because we translation *angelos* as “angel,” and we normally think of angels as *heavenly* messengers. Yes, there are earthly “angels” or messengers,

but we normally think of them as heavenly, such as when the angel Gabriel came to the shepherds and said, “I bring you good tidings [*euangelizomai*] of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10). In this way, the gospel has a heavenly origin both in its content and its reception. It comes from heaven! It is an otherworldly power.

It is also good to learn a little of what the content of the Gospel was in the Greek language, since it is a Greek word. When we think of Gospel, I think most who understand the term realize that it does have something to do with our personal salvation. But among the Greeks, the term is used for the proclamation of news of victory. It is at its core a military term. That news could come via the field of battle by ship, by horse, or by swift runner. They bring the message to an anxiously awaiting city of the victory of the army and death or capture of the enemy. Often, that news was sent via a letter.<sup>5</sup> So gospel to the Greeks was a word that announced a great military victory over an impending doom. But that’s a very objective way of thinking about it, such that your *salvation* as a citizen is really only secondary. The death of the

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<sup>5</sup> See Gerhard Friedrich, “Εὐαγγελίζομαι, Εὐαγγέλιον, Προεὐαγγελίζομαι, Εὐαγγελιστής,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 710.

enemy and ascent of the winner to victor is the primary news. It becomes good news to you because you the recipient will now not die at the hands of the enemy.

On May 8, 1945, President Truman went to the radio and announced,

This is a solemn but glorious hour. General Eisenhower informs me that the forces of Germany have surrendered to the United Nations. The flags of freedom fly all over Europe ... For this victory, we join in offering our thanks to the Providence which has guided and sustained us through the dark days of adversity. Our rejoicing is sobered and subdued by a supreme consciousness of the terrible price we have paid to rid the world of Hitler and his evil band. Let us not forget, my fellow Americans, the sorrow and the heartache which today abide in the homes of so many of our neighbors--neighbors whose most priceless possession has been rendered as a sacrifice to redeem our liberty.

We can repay the debt which we owe to our God, to our dead, and to our children, only by work, by ceaseless devotion to the responsibilities which lie ahead of us. If I could give you a single watchword for the coming months, that word is work, work, and more work. We

must work to finish the war. Our victory is only half over [Japan had not yet surrendered].<sup>6</sup>

This is the embodiment of good news. Therefore, the gospel announcement of Jesus Christ is **much more** than just that he offers you personal salvation or even that you are saved by faith alone. It is the announcement to the world that comes to you that God has entered into a great battle with our enemies: **sin, death, and the devil** and in Christ he has conquered them all. And now, the risen Christ who had died on the cross for our sins and been raised to life for our justification, has ascended to heaven where **he sits enthroned** as Lord of heaven and earth—King of kings, God of gods, Lord of lords. Only after this, through faith alone and by no works of your own so that you may not boast or be constantly self-defeated, you are invited to participate in the eternal blessings that this victory offers you. God does not help those who help themselves. No. **While we were still his enemies, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:8-10).** *Hell today is vanquished, heaven is won today!*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Harry S. Truman, “[The President’s News Conference on V-E Day](#),” The American Presidency Project (May 8, 1945).

<sup>7</sup> Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus (530 – 609), “Welcome Happy Morning!” Trinity Hymnal: Baptist Edition #199.

Can you see the power in this? Jesus has **taken on sin** and through his perfect obedience to the Father, has **fulfilled the covenant** of works, thereby putting an end to the punishment that sin deserves. He has **obeyed and won** the right as a man to eternal life. He has **died and been raised** from the dead thereby conquering death, which along with hell itself he now **has the keys** to, for he has also **plundered the strongman**, defeated the enemy—Satan, our adversary who seeks to destroy all of humanity due to his hatred of our race. Simply by believing his message, God brings you into union with Christ and all his benefits. This is a power unimaginable, because it brings freedom from your own sin and its consequences, eternal life where you live forever with God rather than be justly punished for your sin, and freedom from sin and Satan which held you prisoner to do the will of the Evil One. Jesus has conquered these things, quite apart from you, 2000 years ago as the God-man sent to do this work so that goodness might triumph, truth might prevail, and love might be displayed to all this dark fallen world.

# Preaching: The Chief Means of the Word's Power

So **how does this news get to us?** We saw that in Greece, it could come through a courier, a dispatched messenger, or even a letter. In the Bible, all of these are also true. The point is, this is not a knowledge that any of us is born with. Someone in a POW camp after May 8, 1945, did not yet know that the war was over. Only when the camp was liberated did they find out. And they found out because someone came in and freed them, telling them the good news at the same time.

In the Bible, there is also a very **peculiar means of transmitting this news** that is chief of all the means of receiving it. This is something called **preaching**. The main word the NT uses for this is *kēryssō*. The preacher (*kēryx*) originally referred to the position of the herald in the king's court. Every prince had a herald, and sometimes several. And herald was himself a freeman and was highly regarded. Chief among his duties was to deliver his message as it is given to him and the essential point about his report is that it does not originate with him. **“Behind it stands a higher power. The herald does not express his own views. He is the spokesman for his master.”**<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> **Gerhard Friedrich**, “Κήρυξ (ἱεροκήρυξ), Κηρύσσω, Κήρυγμα, Προκηρύσσω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 688.

Therefore, he does not have the right to change its message. A special herald was a messenger of the gods, someone like Hermes, whom interestingly the Apostle Paul is likened to by the Greeks ([Acts 14:12](#)).

Some people make a big deal of the [difference between teaching and preaching](#), and sometimes it sounds like they are saying you should not teach anyone in a sermon, only preach. By “preaching,” they often mean yelling or hollering or scolding. In my view, [all preaching necessitates some teaching](#), but [most teaching does not necessitate any preaching](#). Why? Because preaching is by definition a word received by someone from someone else and then given to others. Most teachers aren’t doing that. Much more, most teaching has nothing to do with the content of the Gospel. You can teach on science, art, math, English, writing, literature, music and none of those is the gospel. Biblical preaching necessitates that the content of the Gospel be present.

In Greece, the herald was himself often praised, just as Hermes was worshiped. In the NT, [it is not the messenger that is praised](#), except for Jesus—who is the true messenger of the gospel. Rather, what we find is that it is [the preaching itself that is important](#), for this foolish

means of communication is nothing compared to great oratory or philosophical discourse. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. Preaching seems like it shouldn't really do anything. Just telling someone this news is a power? No, we think it needs lots of our help.

Perhaps **the greatest OT example** of this is with the prophet Ezekiel. The Lord brings him out to the middle of a **valley full of bones** (**Ezek 37:1**). He leads him around and sees that they are old and dry (**2**). So God asks, “**Can these bones live?**” Wisely, the prophet says, “**O Lord God, you know.**” So God tells him to “**Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD**” (**4**). As the prophet does this, behold, breath enters them and sinews come upon them and flesh covers them with skin (**5-9**). What just happened here is impossible. You can't go into a graveyard and preach to bones and have them come to life. Yet, this is exactly what happened here. Michael Horton is right when he says, This is an “**excellent illustration of what happens when we share the gospel with people. We ‘prophecy,’ that is, preach the message, and God causes the individual**



to respond.”<sup>9</sup> This is the power of preaching the gospel given to you through an illustration.

The NT has a lengthy passage in Romans 10 that we need to look at. The Apostle Paul begins talking about a “righteousness that is based on the law” (Rom 10:5), and having especially the Jews in mind he tells them that this righteousness comes through perfect obedience. Citing Lev 18:5 he says, “The person who does the commandments shall live by them.” This is a hurdle so tall that no one save Jesus himself has been able to jump over.

But God, knowing from the beginning that this was the case, had in mind giving righteousness to people through a very different mechanism. It is “the righteousness based on faith” (6). This time, righteousness does not come by saying in one’s heart, “I will ascend into heaven and bring Christ down” or “I will descend into the abyss to bring Christ up from the dead” (6-7). Horton again tells us, “Certain methods just go with certain messages ... The spirit of works-righteousness says, ‘How can I climb up to God and bring Christ down to me, where I am, in my own experience?’ ... The logic of works-righteousness conceives of salvation by personal

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace: Embracing the Heart of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 239.

conquest.”<sup>10</sup> So it makes sense that the method of obtaining a works-based righteousness would be our own power and works.

But the method of receiving faith-based righteousness must be different. It cannot come about through works. Rather, it must come through hearing. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (10). “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (17).

There is a chain of logic here. People call upon the name of the LORD when they believe. He had just told them, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (9). For with your heart you believed and are justified, and with the mouth you confess and are saved (10). And God’s promise in the Isaiah is that “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame” (11; cf. Isa 28:16). And again, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (13; cf. Joel 2:32).

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<sup>10</sup> Michael S. Horton, “The Word Proclaimed,” *Modern Reformation* (Nov-Dec 1999), posted online July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

It does not matter who you are or what you have done. It does not matter your station in life or your age or your sex or your level of intelligence. It doesn't matter what you have previously believed or practiced. No sinner is beyond saving. And God does not see someone as worthless, but rather the whole point was to **die for those who are unworthy**. So being worthless and hopeless and desperate and empty is the whole point. Some of you have such a bad self-image that it keeps you from believing the gospel. Have you not yet understood that this is *good news*? **Christ died for you**. His death absolutely satisfied God's wrath and justice against sin. You need to be reconciled to him by hearing this message and trusting that he would do this for you. Some of you get stuck in the doctrine of election and wonder if you are elect. Stop looking to election, and look to Christ. Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

But there's something else here. Something that many miss in Paul's argument. When Paul speaks of *the Name of the Lord*, he is saying a couple of very important things. First, he uses the title "**Lord**" (Kurios). Lord is a title of royalty. He is the King. To believe in the Lord is to

confess that Jesus is the **military victor**, he King who has gone out to battle and won. The war waged by sin, death, and the devil is over. They do not have the victory. Christ has conquered on his white stallion with his great sword.

Second, the Name of the Lord is OT parlance is in fact **the Lord Jesus**. Listen to the personal pronouns of this “Name” in Isaiah. “Behold, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with *his* anger, and in thick rising smoke; *his* lips are full of fury, and *his* tongue is like a devouring fire” (**Isa 30:27**). The Name is a “him.” What was his fury against? Sin. “Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me” (**Isa 63:2-3**). This was predicted long before to Judah, “The scepter will not depart from Judah ... until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes” (**Gen 49:10-11**). The former refers to his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The latter to his death just a few days later. As Gregory the Great once put it, “**He has trodden the winepress alone in which he was**

himself pressed, for with his own strength he patiently overcame suffering.” All of this is why Jesus prays to his Father, “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me ... Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me” (John 17:6, 11). Jesus is the Name of the Lord.

This then becomes the power of his sword. “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war ... He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is *The Word* of God ... From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (Rev 19:11, 13, 15). This is what our Lord has already done, even if there is a “not-yet” aspect to his glorious Second Coming. And it is good news, for he is the Word of God.

Again, what does Hebrews tell us? “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). See how the Word of

God is able to cut to the quick? See how it divides you in two, bringing you to the end of yourself and through repentance causing you to turn to Christ? And see how the Word is itself alive? And living being? As the next verse tells us, “And no creature is hidden from *his* sight” (13). The Word is a *him*. Jesus. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). This is why the Word is so powerful. It is God himself. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). That should make different sense now, as Jesus is the Word. It isn’t just his words (plural); it is that he is the Word.

By the way, the never verse should now be very striking. “But I ask, have they not all heard?” Heard what? “The word of Christ” (previous clause). Not just “things about God” generically. But Christ himself. And he answers by going to Psalm 19, “This voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (Rom 10:18). That part of the Psalm is actually talking about the heavens themselves, the stars, telling us about

Christ, the strongman running his course, and so on. It's a very interesting proof-text, but one we can't go more into today.

All of this is why our gospel is about Jesus. Jesus is the Word we speak. And this is why the Word we speak is actually his Word, for it comes from him, and we are but messengers delivering the announcement of glad tidings and peace with God. This is the message that we preach.

This is why the Second Helvetic Confession says with perhaps just a touch of **metonymy**, “**The preached Word of God is the Word of God**” (2HC, ch. 1: Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God). The point here is that God is so delighted with the announcement of Christ, that when it is proclaimed, it comes in the very power of God himself. Because somehow the word we preach and the person are one. So, **God infuses it with power which creates life**. As the Confession later teaches, **the Word of God when it is preached comes not in bare words only, but at the same time the things signified or announced in words are truly offered by God** (2HC, ch. 19: Of the Sacraments of the Church of Christ). This is a great power that attends to this primary of all means of grace that God has given to his church.

## Other Forms of the Word as Means of Grace

I think it is important that we understand that preaching is only one of the ways that God has ordained the word come to us—though it is the primary way it comes to convert sinners. We also have **the word read**. Evangelicals love to make this individualistic—“my personal Bible reading time.” And that’s good and important. But the apostle commanded the Thessalonians to “**have this letter read to all the brothers**” (1Th 5:27). Similarly, he assumed it with the Colossians, “**And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea**” (Col 4:16). Remember, often times even in Greek culture, the gospel came to the people in the form **of letters**. The Scripture is God’s Great Letter to his people and it should be read as a means of grace, for it is the very word of God. “**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness**” (2Tim 3:16). These four things are at the core of what the means of grace do to people. These are the things we need to grow in our sanctification.



Secondly, we have **the word sung**. Paul commanded the Ephesians to address “one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (**Eph 5:19-20**). This is a corporate, church activity. Some have argued that psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are divisions of psalms within the Psalter itself. However, it seems to me—given that the NT seems to often put core **poetic teachings** about the Gospel in the letters (cf. **Php 2:5-11**; **1Tim 3:16**; etc.), that the Christians were themselves writing songs about the gospel as early as we can go back. The point here is that we are not singing songs about ourselves or our love lives or how drunk we got last night or tales of going to this place or doing that thing. Rather, these songs are **putting the Scripture to verse**. We are singing the word of God, and that is why Paul says, “**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God**” (**Col 3:16**). Obviously, church music is a form of worship, but if it is God’s *word*, then it is also **a means of grace**, for it is the

word of God, living and active and powerful to save and to sanctify people through the Gospel.

Finally, we have **the word prayed**. People often think about prayer as their words to God. But a very important way of praying is to **pray God's words back to him** with your heart. This is the function of the Lord's prayer. In Luke's version of the prayer Jesus says, "**When you pray, say...**" (**Luke 11:2**). Praying the Lord's prayer is praying the word of God and as such it is a means of grace when it is prayed with the mind and by faith. When someone recites the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm at a funeral or reads the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm on Passover Week, they are technically praying God's word. We should make it a custom to pray God's word, for it is a means of grace because it is powerful to help us through the Gospel.

**A word about the church** is in order here. "**Church**" is **the place** God has designated that these means of grace primarily be deployed. It isn't that people telling others about Christ in their private lives or preachers going around in tent crusades or you memorizing Scripture or praying it during the week or anything like that is bad. But the point of the church is that God gives us to one another. We are a body, and the body is localized in a

physical world in such a way that we come together around the means of grace to be fed and equipped by God together. This gives us a mutual experience we can then return to to help one another in fellowship and other things.

This is why the Reformation placed such a high demand on **the centrality of the word preached** as opposed to Rome which had relegated it to a handful of minutes in the much longer Mass, and even then it had often corrupted the word so that it was not really the Gospel that was being given to the people—for Rome had lost to a large degree the very meaning of the Gospel in the first place. But **the recovery of the word changed the world**. It made illiterate people literate, it turned uneducated serfs into educated Christians, it created the potential in the people through the power of God to free them through the Gospel to then go out into the world to transform it on earth as it is in heaven. **When the church is not transforming the world, you can bet it is being transformed by it**, and this is because the word's centrality and powerful message is being eclipsed by other things. Where the word of God is not present, the means of grace are not present, it's as simple as that, for the means of

grace is chiefly and primarily God's word given to the people in these various ways for their salvation and growth in godliness with one another.

## Conclusion

As I was thinking up an introduction to this sermon, I went in search of an old [Jordan Peterson](#) interview I had seen him do on the Logos. I couldn't find that interview. But I did come across an interesting montage<sup>11</sup> related to it that I think makes a great way to end this sermon.

It begins with [Jordan](#) telling us that Christianity makes the assumption that the Logos which pulls order out of chaos at the beginning of time is the Christ. They're the same thing. And this Logos thing is very much associated with articulated truth. It then cuts away to [a Ted Talk](#) by Allison Graham who tells us about a Gallop poll taken in 2001 where every American said that they had ten really close friends. By just 2014, that number was down to two. We are then deftly taken to [Elon Musk](#) talking about social media. He said, social media is presenting us with a lie. People post pictures of

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<sup>11</sup> [Cinemacrest Studios](#), "[Jordan Peterson – The Logos And The Death of The West](#)," *Youtube* (Feb 17, 2021).

themselves when they are really happy, touching them up to make themselves look better, selecting the best pictures, best angle, making themselves seem way happier than they really are. This creates a false narrative that deeply affects those who are not like that in their own life. [Still another video](#) comes on talking about how social media is a slot machine. Every time I check it, I'm pulling the lever to see what I get. As a friend of mine put it, "Another day in the land of mass hypnosis via dopamine slavery." "Likes" literally trigger a dopamine surge in our brains, creating a powerful fix that creates an addiction and in a way forces us into ever more social media.

Finally, we cut back to Jordan saying,

The west will die without the rebirth of the logos. Because the West is that. We've seen what comes in its place: fascism, communism, and the mess that is the new age.

You don't have to scratch very far below the surface to discover that everyone has something really tragic in their lives. No that you whine about it, but your mother has Alzheimer, your best friend committed suicide, you have a close relative with cancer, you have a sick child, or there's something deeply wrong with you. Most people aren't running around telling everyone how great they are. Most people are acutely aware of their faults, they don't feel that

they are what they should be, they don't meet other people's expectations, and they know they are going to die. That's a lot of weight on them.

You read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and ask him, "Why did the Soviet Union become the absolute hell hole that it was?" He said it's because everyone lied. So then you think about Freud and you think, "What's the major cause of mental illness?" *Repression*. Well, that's a lie ... a lie of omission rather than commission, but still a lie. Jung says the same thing. Wouldn't it be interesting if the fundamental root of psycho-pathology and political pathology is The Lie? What if that's what's demolishing your life? People think, especially when they become narcissistic and they become destructive, that the universe is an unfair and arbitrary place, it's basically bent on their random destruction while they suffer. Yeah, right! So what do you do under those circumstances? That's the question.

Since Jordan is not yet a Christian, I'll give you my answer. I would tweak what he says about the Logos being the fundamental *principle* of reality just slightly to say that the Logos is the fundamental *Person* or reality, along with the Father and Spirit.

The Logos is not something I become through enlightenment. Rather, it is a Person outside of me who created me. At his heart, the Logos is truth. He is beauty.

He is love. A culture caked in lies is a culture that is doomed to die. The only way out of the psychopathy of our present age, out of the mass formation psychosis, out of the omnipresent loneliness, out of the narcissism and self-indulgence that is killing us is **the truth**.

And the Truth is the Word of God. Jesus said, “**You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice**” (**John 18:37**). Do not say in your heart like Pilate, “**What is truth?**” (**38**). Rather, hear the word and come to life, be set free from yourself. Be set free from your sins. Be set free from the inevitable death that is coming your way. Be set free from the principalities and powers, the dominions and demons that haunt you and keep you in slavery.

**Jesus is the truth, and the truth sets you free.** Only truth can do this, and it comes through the word. Free to see **the beauty** of God, of his creation, of his people, of his word. Free to know **the love** of God in your heart, in your family, in your day to day comings and goings. Free to know what it is to have **peace** with God. That’s what the means of grace is all about. It’s a main reason we come together. For that is the Word of God, and it is the power of God to everyone who believes.

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