

The Gospel: The Power of God (Rockport Baptist Church)

sermonaudio.com

*Student Conference*

By Paul Washer

**Bible Text:** Romans 1:16

**Preached on:** Tuesday, March 11, 2008

**Grace Community Church**

311 Hedges St.

San Antonio, TX 78203

**Website:** [www.gccsatx.com](http://www.gccsatx.com)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/gcc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/gcc)

Let's open our Bibles again to John 10. I just want to touch on this again as a way of summary. Some of the things that we looked at last night that are very, very important, I want to add to them a bit. In John 10, we'll go to verse 24,

“24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.'  
25 Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. 26 But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.’”

Again verse 27, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Now, we have two groups of people as I shared last night: we have the Jews, the unbelieving Jews led by leaders of Israel, Pharisees, teachers, scribes and others who are constantly needing more: more and more knowledge, more and more signs, more and more things to convince them that Jesus truly was the Christ, that they should walk in that way and endure in that way and follow him. Then you have another group of people who'd heard enough. I mean, almost from the very beginning, they heard his voice, they believed upon him and they followed him and they needed nothing more. What is the difference between the two groups? Doctrine of regeneration, what is commonly called in America being born-again.

Here is what has happened in Christianity today and I want you young people to understand this and you can understand this. If I was right now giving this sermon in a seminary class, in a preaching class, and it was a sermon supposedly directed towards youth, I would be severely reprimanded for using terminology and words too high for young people to understand. I don't believe it. If what I am saying right now, young Christian, is too hard for you to understand, then go to your pastor and learn these words, go to your ministers and learn these words, go to your parents, go to a dictionary. If they are the words of life and they're hard for you to understand, then it's worth casting aside every other goal just to learn what they mean. There's no need to dumb-down Christianity.

But here's the thing about Christianity that I want you to understand and this is the malady of the ages. I've come to a conclusion in my own heart as this is one of the great maladies of every age in the last 2,000 years. I want you to look at something: typical young person either in Vacation Bible School or church camp or a regular meeting at church and what happens? They walk down an aisle, they come with a friend or they walk up to somebody and say, "I want to get saved." Usually the counseling is very brief and superficial, "Do you want to go to heaven?" Yes, I want to go to heaven. "Would you like to have Jesus in your heart?" Yes, I would like to have Jesus in my heart. "Pray this prayer. Pray that prayer." Usually, isn't it true that we're talking about dealing with the salvation of a soul of a young person lasting somewhere between 5 and 20 minutes and then the thing is never touched on again? Do you realize that?

Alright, now you've gotten past that, let's go on to discipleship, and then for the whole lifetime of that individual, they are run through programs and plans and teaching seminars and Acquire the Fire Conferences and everything trying to get them to live like a Christian. What is the problem? This is the problem, let me give you an example: if you look in the time of John and Charles Wesley or the time of Whitefield and Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, what was going on? People were in the church building, they were in the religious organizations of the day, they were coming to church and they believed that they were saved because when they were infants they were baptized. They had gotten that done, you know, quick, "I'm baptized. I'm in the covenant. I'm part of the church. Okay, I'm here." We scoff at that, don't we? We say how absurd that someone could think that just because they were baptized as an infant that they were actually part of the church. Why scoff? We do the very same thing except it's not infant baptism, it is this: "I prayed that prayer. I got it done," and it is treated by the ministers at large, this thing is promoted. It's absolutely unbelievable.

So since we do not deal with what it means to truly be converted, since we do not preach a gospel that is strong, that is the power of God unto salvation, most people in the church are not converted. Then what do we do? We recognize that the people in the church by and large are ungodly but instead of going back to the root of the problem that they are unconverted and they don't know the Lord, we heap discipleship plan after discipleship plan upon them. But it's never enough to make them live like sheep because in their very nature, they're not sheep. Discipleship does not have the power, youth conferences do not have the power to make a goat live like a sheep. For a goat to live like a sheep, his very nature has to be changed into a sheep. He has to become a sheep and who can recreate? The only one who does create and that is God and how does he do it? Through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and when that happens – I'll grant you this, some true saints are more high maintenance than others. Some true Christians require more help than others but the fact of the matter is, if you get some of the people in the church truly saved, they're not as high maintenance. You don't have to call them up every Saturday morning to get them to come to church the next day. You don't have to constantly be carousing around in a car surveying where they're at. You don't have to keep looking for them all the time because God is the one who has taken them into his hand and under his wing and he will not let them go. He is a Father who loves them and

zealously guards them so that if the church drops the ball and doesn't even discipline them or teach them, God will do it.

He will not let them go and that is what we're seeing here. We're seeing a group of Pharisees and others who just need more and more and more but they never do come to the truth and then we see a group of basically uneducated fishermen who recognize that this is the Christ and they end up being theological scholars of the ages, knowing the truth. How many times have I seen supposed important men in Christendom and wondered if there was any true knowledge of God at all in their heart. And how many times have I seen poor beggarly mountain pastors in Peru who make their sandals out of discarded truck tires cut up, unshaven and unkempt, without so much as a first grade education and yet sit down and in the simplest way speak forth the great things of God. What is the difference? The power of God in regeneration. They were truly born-again and everyone that is born-again is taught of God.

Now, go now to Romans 1 for a minute and just do a brief summary of what we talked about last night in that text. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel." Remember what I said, Paul's flesh had every reason to be ashamed of the gospel because his gospel was so contrary, so contrary and so opposed to the society and the culture around him it would either cause when Paul went in to preach in a place, people would either be converted or they would hate him and stone him and chase him out of town or the worst-of-worst, they would ignore him and ridicule him as a fool because his gospel was contrary. Remember what I said: the gospel, although it brings peace between God and man, the gospel does not extend an olive leaf to other opinions nor to cultures. The gospel is a culture in itself. It creates a new culture, a new society, a new way of thinking, a new way of living that totally contradicts everything in the world and that's what's wrong with your young contemporary Christianity today. You think that in order to change the world you've got to be like it so you dress like it, look like it, smell like it, act like it, walk like it and talk like it. You think you're cool. You might be cool but you're not godly.

A while back, came in this young guy who was doing street work in this sort of small town. He was doing street work and, man, he looked like a modern day Serpico. You probably don't even know who that is but he had an earring and bracelets on and everything and I was talking to him and he was, "Well, you've got to understand, Mr. Washer, I'm there on the street." I go, "How many people are in this town?" "I've gotta..." I said, "Look, young man, I served for years in inner city Dallas/Fort Worth in places where the police wouldn't go. I had male prostitutes sleeping in the bunk bed beside me down at a missionary. I've been in places you'd be afraid to dream about and ministered to people who were on the street and guess what? Do you know what I looked like? A preacher. And you know what? They didn't care because they didn't need someone who looked them. They needed someone who would love them and tell them the truth." You're not relevant because you're like them, you're relevant because you're totally different from them and don't take Jesus and make him cool because he's not. You see, apart from the intervention of God regenerating a heart of a person, if you truly tell them about Jesus they're going to hate him.

Paul had every reason to be ashamed of the gospel; his flesh had every reason to be ashamed. The gospel we preach ought to be a shameful, stupid, horrid thing in the mind of an unconverted man but to those that God saves, it will be the very word of God. Here's what I want to tell you: people come to me all the time and they say, "Boy, I would love to see God do miracles and love to see God really do stuff." Well then, what you've got to do is cut yourself off from all these silly little supporting yourself in the flesh things, silly little things of thinking that through doing this or that or other things God's going to move. No, spare yourself. Cut yourself off from every hope in the flesh, trust only in God, do exactly what he says and you may be crucified on a tree but you will see God move and you will see a manifestation of his power. That's what's wrong with church. Turned it into nothing more than a Six Flags over Jesus where people are entertained and you have to do it because there's no power left and there's no power because the truth is not being preached and it's not being demonstrated. I love the statement made by Leonard Ravenhill years ago and he goes, "The world isn't looking for a new definition of Christianity, it's looking for a new demonstration of Christianity."

Now, Paul said he wasn't ashamed of the gospel, why? Because it was the power of God, the conversion of a person, a person being born-again. The way I see Scripture, the true conversion of a person is the greatest demonstration of the power of God that's ever been revealed in the history of time. You think creation is a miracle? What about recreation. The greatest demonstration of the power of God is to be the church of Jesus Christ. And I want you to know something: it is. Let me just say something that's very, very important: I am so tired – now listen to me, follow me on this – I am so tired of hearing people say there's just as much sensuality and wickedness and divorce and pornography in the church as outside of the church. Have you ever heard people say that? "Man, there's just as much just gross error and immorality and filth and things in the church as outside of the church." That is not true. The church of Jesus Christ in America is broken and humble and beautiful and although she has many failings, she is not wayward but she is following her husband, the Christ. The problem in this culture is what you're calling the church is not the church. People say, "There are so many churches in America, so many churches in the south." No, there's not. There's a lot of really pretty brick buildings on finely manicured lawns but there aren't many churches.

Every true believer is going to walk with God. The problem is like a dear friend of mine always says, people will say, "We're Christians. We should not be hating one another." If you're hating one another, you're not Christian. "We're Christians. We should act like it." If you're not acting like it, you're not a Christian. My goodness, listen to it: if you don't act like a human being, you're not a human being. If you don't act like a deer, you're not a deer. You may be a cow, a horse or a pumpkin but you're not a deer. I do not burn so much, I do burn for lost people but my burning is more a zeal for the Lord and his name and I can't stand it that because of the pathetic preaching and because of the way churches are supposedly grown you have a whole bunch of people professing the name of Christ who live like devils or even worse, moral people without any love for Christ. And the world looks on and because, like Paul the apostle says, "because of you the name of God is blasphemed among the unbelievers." They go, "Where's the power? I thought you said his gospel had power." Look how the devil in his wickedness...you know, we always

think the devil's after you. Let me tell you something, let me just set something forth: he's not so much after you as he is after God. You're small fry. He's not worried about you. His great desire is to malign God, to accuse God, to misrepresent God and one of the greatest instruments in his hands today to do that is evangelical preachers because they build churches by entertaining unconverted people.

My dear friend, he says that the gospel is the power of God. Now, let me ask you a question: is there any power of God revealed in your life? And I'm not talking about the power to heal or the power to do miracles or the power to call down fire from the sky. I'm talking about the power of a godly life. I am talking about the power of loving your brothers and sisters in Christ. I'm talking about the power of sacrificial generosity. I'm talking about the power of kindness. I'm talking about the power of covering over sensuality. Is there any power of God in your life or is Christianity just something you do? Is there anything? Can you point to the power of God changing you?

It is the power of God and now here is the word for the day: the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Not to some who believe but to everyone who believes the gospel there is the promise of salvation. You say, "Yes Brother Paul, that is true." Be careful because when I say salvation, I might be meaning something completely different than you. You see, in America today when someone says, "Yes, everyone who believes is saved," what is basically meant by that: everyone who believes is going to heaven and that's not what this text means. It does mean that but far more than that so that if you only say that, you haven't gotten the correct meaning. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation or deliverance.

Now, what type of salvation are we talking about? Salvation yes from the condemnation of the law, the wrath of God, death. Yes, that's what it means. Fellowship with God; a home in heaven; all those things that you hear about. It does mean that, but it doesn't just mean that. It's not just the power of God unto salvation from the condemnation and death and wrath of God but it is salvation and deliverance from the power of sin in your present life. Is God manifesting his power in your life so as to deliver you from the sins and the darkness and the fallenness of this age? Do you see as you walk year by year with the Christ, year by year in faith, year by year trusting in his work, do you see an ever increasing deliverance from the power of sin and temptation? Are you being conformed to the image of Christ? Are you being separated from the world?

You see, that's what it means. We have this idea that somehow it's almost like a deist view of God. Deists have this view of God: God created the world and then he just left it. We have that same view in salvation, "Well, God saved a man and then just leaves him." Man can run and live like the devil all the days of his life and then bam! he goes to glory. If you don't look like you're going to glory, you're not going to glory. If there is no glory here, there will be no glory there. If there is no power manifested in your life now, don't expect to find it in the resurrection. You see, it's a deliverance from sin and it's not a grudging thing. This thing, and I'm going to talk about this today, but this thing of, "Oh yeah, I'm a Christian, now I ought to do these things. Yeah, I know I need to do them because, well, they're the right thing to do." What you're really saying is, "Yeah, I know I

need to do all these things God commands even though I hate to do them in order to save my own skin on the final day.” My dear friend, if that's your attitude, you're lost. You're a goat trying to act like a sheep. The commandments of God are not burdensome. When the power of God has been revealed in a person's life in salvation, it's not a burden to fulfill the commands of God, it's a joy. It's a burden to sin. The burden starts when we sin as believers. The pain starts. The nausea starts. The burden on the back. The weight on the mind all start when we sin. The commandments of God bring us freedom if we've truly been converted, you see. So it's the power of God. The power of God to save from wrath. The power of God to save from the power of sin and sanctify people.

Now, here's something very, very important: it's the power of God to everyone. Here we go again. Just bowl down this idea that there are three groups of people in the church: there are the spiritual Christian; and the carnal Christian; and the lost people. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches there is the spiritual man and the carnal lost man. There is spirituality and carnality. There is life, there's death. There's righteousness and wickedness. You might be thinking, “Well, Brother Paul, are you saying Christians don't sin?” No, Christians sin. One of the greatest evidences that a person truly is a Christian is that when they sin, they're broken by their sin and brought to repentance and confession and that when they sin and if they cast off into that sin, the Father will come quickly and discipline them and bring them back. Christians do sin but Christians do not live in sin as a style of life practicing it as a joyful activity. But they are given victory over sin.

Now, let me ask you some questions. Is any of this a reality in your life? You know, one of the greatest problems about reformations when young people really start getting excited about truth, I hear so many young people today, I go to colleges and they're excited about truth, they're so excited about truth. It's not a question of whether you're excited about the things I'm saying, it's not a question of whether or not you agree with that, there's a far bigger question: is this a reality in your life? Can this be seen by the observant eye? Can someone see that you no longer belong to you? That you belong to God? Can someone see God working in your life? If there is no evidence of God working in your life at this moment, I cannot tell you that you are lost but I can tell you that you can have no assurance of being saved. It is God who works in the true believer. It is God who has made the true believer his workmanship, the very workmanship of God. It is God who says that the work that he begins he will perfect in every one of his children.

Now that work manifests itself in various ways. It manifests itself in various levels and degrees: some grow faster than others according to the grace and the purposes of God. We understand all that but the fact of the matter is: if you don't grow, you're dead. And if you're dead, you're lost. The fact of the matter is: there's no such thing as a fruitless Christian. And there is no such thing as a temporary fruitful Christian because Jesus says that the fruit they bear will remain and they will endure bearing fruit because, you see, a lot of people according to the Parable of the Sower, a lot of people will supposedly hear the word of God, spring up quickly and look like a fruitful vine only to wither away. Do you bear fruit? Do you bear the fruit of a Christian? Do you look like a Christian? Can people point to evidences? People outside of you that God is truly at work in your life?

Do you see how sacramental and credal we have become? Do you see how useless our words are? "I've accepted Jesus. I'm going to heaven." If you have trusted in Christ you are going to glory but the evidence that you have truly trusted will be the manifestation of the power of God in your life, a God who will not let you go.

I remember when the Lord had just solidified the call for me to preach and I remember just being so disturbed because I could remember even in my young years when I was 14 and 15, I would have dreams of me preaching and I would wake up crying and say, "God, I'll get saved if you promise me I don't have to do that." And I can remember finally 21 years old, coming back from the university, knowing that God had called me to preach and I remember going out in the garage where I had an old '66 Mustang sitting there. If I had that car today I'd be a millionaire. It was sitting there in that garage and I got in it and I just got behind the wheel and I just wanted to go as far away as I could from God and from all these ideas of preaching and everything and I just sat there and I grabbed the steering wheel and all of a sudden I just collapsed because I realized that no matter how far I drove that car, God would be there when I got there. That I was inescapably his. That I was now his prisoner. That I belonged to him. And when I gave in and stopped kicking against the goad, his decree and his plans for me became like sweetness. A man encompassed by God.

Young person, can you live like you want? Can you think like you want? What I mean by that is: can you go out there and live like people who really aren't believers? Well, that's because you're not a believer either. Can you just fill your head full of all kinds of things just like every unbeliever and it not bother you? Well, that's because you're an unbeliever. Young people, do you want to walk with righteous people? Or do you want to walk with jesters and fools and scoffers? Well, that's because you are one. I mean, why is it so hard? The power of Satan in deluding the mind. The power of the flesh is absolutely amazing because someone can actually be totally content believing they're saved even though every thought in their mind demonstrates they do not love God nor want God nor want to be with him nor do things in the will of God and yet still be convinced they're on the road to glory. Isn't that amazing? The power of the flesh, the power of the demonic is absolutely amazing and that is why only by the grace and the power of God does anyone ever get saved. That is why salvation must be more than simply a decision on the part of a man but it must be the manifestation and the result of the power of Almighty God working in a heart.

Now, where are you? As we bring this first lesson to a close, where are you? I don't have to point my finger at you. How much of your mind, how much of your thoughts are on the things of God? How much of your heart is given to the things of God and the person of God? What desires and passions do you have? How much is God in all those plans of yours? And what about God's commands? How real are they to you? How much do you seek them out? Be honest. Let your thoughts either defend you or accuse you on this day. They themselves can be better teachers than any preacher. Let them tell you. Are your thoughts and your ways nothing more than a manifestation of the world because you are of the world?

Some of you might be here right now and I want to be careful not to bring in a false condemnation on true believers but some of you are here right now and you're going, "Oh, I, you know, I read his word but I need to read it more and I want to be more like him and I don't seek him enough and sometimes I am so worldly and I hate myself." That's a good place to be. Against you I have no fight but it's against the average Baptist youth that I have my quarrel where you sleep in complacency because someone one time told you you were saved because you prayed a prayer with someone one time and there has never been a manifestation of God in your life. It is so easy to grow up Southern Baptist and be in church all your life and go straight to hell. Everything in our denomination is designed for it. You get saved in Vacation Bible School by someone who just asks you if you want to go to heaven. You're taught language. You're taught the things. You're full of activities. You're entertained. You're given a moral place to have fun all the days of your life but the serious things of God are never brought before you and you practice religion all the way to hell.

Is there any evidence of God having saved you? I'll leave you alone to that for this first lesson.