



The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ

Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.

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How does the church portray the beauty of Christ?

The gospel is a theological message. But this message also creates human beauty--beautiful relationships in our churches, making the glory of Christ visible in the world today.

In this timely book, Pastor Ray Ortlund makes the case that gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. In too many of our churches, it is the beauty of a gospel culture that is the missing piece of the puzzle. But when the gospel is allowed to exert its full power, a church becomes radiant with the glory of Christ.

The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ Details

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From Reader Review The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ for online ebook

Nate Walker says

Great little summary on Gospel doctrine and Gospel culture in a church—why both are essential.

Josh Miller says

Another excellent, short read in the 9Marks Building Healthy Churches series! The subtitle of this book is fitting - How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ.

Here is a quote (among many) that jumped out to me:

"The ministry of the gospel in our churches involves more than doctrinal argumentation. The work of the gospel is subtle, like the work of a fragrance. It is not just brute facts landing hard on someone's mind, but an aroma wafting into a heart."

As articulated in a recent podcast that I listened to, I used to believe the gospel strictly as "the entry-point to a relationship with Christ." I have come to learn that it is SO MUCH MORE! It is with this in mind that I am striving to learn what it means to have a gospel-focused life, a gospel-focused family, a gospel-focused ministry! And Ortlund makes a propelling case for how the gospel can affect & infect every part of one's life.

Here are the seven chapter titles:

1. The Gospel for You
2. The Gospel for the Church
3. The Gospel for Everything
4. Something New
5. It Isn't Easy, But It Is Possible
6. What We Can Expect
7. Our Path Forward

God willing, I plan to use this book for an upcoming Men's Book Club.

Sam - Reading Reformed says

This review was originally published on readingreformed.com

How is Christ's beauty put on display in local churches? That is the question that Ray Ortlund seeks to answer in his book: *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*. Ortlund is the pastor of Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee and wrote this book to be included in the 9Marks series Building Healthy Churches.

Summary

The main thrust of Ortlund is not to define and expound the Gospel but rather to show how it should work itself out in the church. However, he does spend the first three chapters explaining how the good news of Jesus Christ applies to individuals, the church, and all of creation. In doing so, he gives a short but excellent definition of the Gospel:

God, through the perfect life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, rescues all his people from the wrath of God into peace with God, with the promise of the full restoration of his created order forever – all to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Proclaims the Beauty of Christ*, 16

This concise definition of what the gospel is ensures that everyone is on the same page for discussion that follows in the book. I also find it to be helpful in general, especially in our time when the gospel is not frequently proclaimed in a clear manor.

On page 23, Ortlund makes use of an equation to show the importance of having correct gospel doctrine and healthy gospel culture in a church and this becomes central to the book:

Gospel Doctrine – Gospel Culture = Hypocrisy

Gospel Culture – Gospel Doctrine = Fragility

Gospel Doctrine + Gospel Culture = Power

The final four chapters of the book discuss the culture developed by the gospel, the difficulty of creating healthy gospel culture, what we can expect when we proclaim the gospel clearly and how we move forward considering everything that has been addressed.

Content

It would be an impossible task to detail out all the ways that the Gospel shines through our churches when we clearly proclaim it, but for the size of this book I think that Ortlund has done an excellent job exploring this topic. The book is a good starting place for discussion or contemplation on why it is important for our churches to teach clear gospel doctrine and what the resulting culture should look like. Ortlund lays out the good news for individuals, the church, and creation and then immediately moves into what should happen when this is taught in our churches. We should see a community formed around that teaching which looks different than anything else we see in the world because there is no other message in the world which contains this good news.

The witness of the church based on its visible culture is discussed in the fourth chapter. I think that if you were to read this chapter independently, not considering it in the whole of the book one could come away with a pragmatic sort of motivation for having a good gospel culture shown by our church. How we think about our gospel culture is important because if we see an inconsistency between what we preach and how we live in community then we have reason to be concerned that our witness may be impaired. But more importantly, we should consider why we have a disconnect between proclamation and living. The community formed by the preaching is our first test of the preaching. When we see a disconnect between the two, we must ask if the gospel is either not preached clearly or received clearly.

I do not believe that Ortlund was pushing from some sort of pragmatic motivation because in chapter 6 he goes on to talk about the joy with which people receive the gospel or the bitterness with which they reject it.

I think that this was a very important chapter to include in the book as it can be discouraging to see people reject the wonderful news of the gospel. As we consider our role in proclaiming the gospel, it is helpful for us to be reminded that the power is not in our ability to attract and convince people, but rather the power is in God who softens people's hearts to receive the message.

As indicated by the series which this book is included in, *Building Healthy Churches*, the target audience is those who are looking at how a church is organized and run. I found this book to be clear and easy to read. It is very useful as a starting point for discussions and has helped guide my thinking in what the community centered around the gospel should look like. Ample Scripture references were used throughout the book to make or support arguments and some of the chapters included expositions of certain texts. I think that Scripture references were used appropriately and consistent with their meaning.

Physical

The overall length of the book is short, just 7 chapters and 117 pages with the introduction starting on page 15. The physical size of the book is small, 5-1/8"x7-1/4", which allows it to be read quickly. The font size and spacing allow for easy reading in general, although the font size of block quoted text is a little small. This likely isn't an issue for most readers but may be inconvenient for some. The footnotes are contained at the end of the book, listed by chapter, which I personally dislike. I prefer the footnotes to be shown at the bottom of the page that they pertain to so that they can be glanced at quickly.

Recommendation

This is an excellent book on the topic of the gospel culture that should be produced in churches by gospel preaching. The target audience of the book is church leadership; however, I recommend this book to all people involved in their local church as they consider how gospel doctrine should influence gospel culture.

Drew Miller says

A great reminder that right doctrine combined with right living is a powerful attraction in today's age. Ortlund's take on the new heavens and new earth in chapter 3 was refreshing as well! While this book is fairly short, it is chocked full of helpful reminders!

Steve Johnson says

A delightful and easy read about a very important topic: the good news of Jesus and what He accomplished through His death and resurrection for those who will turn to Him, repent, and trust Him as Lord. Ortlund is a gifted writer and you will find much worth quoting in this short book. (I read it while teaching a study on what the Bible teaches about the gospel.) If you want to better understand the gospel and how it is intended to transform the way you live your life, read this excellent book.

Josh Smetzer says

I enjoyed Ray Ortlund's work on The Gospel and how he explains gospel doctrine as well as a gospel culture. He also shows how the church portrays the beauty of Christ by showing that the gospel transforms our relationships within the church, which can be seen by the world around us.

Matt Kottman says

This is an excellent, clear, and concise work on what the gospel is all about. I found it refreshing and encouraging. Now I want my whole church to read, enjoy, and be challenged by this book.

Aaron Lawson says

Sort of disappointed in this book or maybe I was expecting more of something along the lines of the Gospel that Henri Nouwen or Brennan Manning would teach. I feel it takes a very fundamentalist approach to telling the reader what the gospel should look like, which initially I had no problems with. Eventually it got me to the point that if the gospel of Christ is really good news, than this book does a poor job of letting the reader know that. "The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ refuses to be held at arm's length with critical detachment. No one judges the gospel. It judges all, and it saves some." Is this really what is meant by the "good news" of the gospel? Judgement for all and salvation for some? How well does this book read to unbelievers? How well does it present itself as the truly good news? Not well so far...

Ray Ortlund. The Gospel (Kindle Locations 1137-1138). Crossway.

Dan Montgomery says

It was the great American poet Tom Petty who said "Oh, yeah, you wreck me, baby/ You break me in two/ But you move me, honey/ Yes you do." That's this book.

Ray Ortlund is gifted with velvet gloves. He rebukes and corrects through the encouragement of what *can* be because of Christ. The Church really can -and ought - to be the most beautiful community on earth. Righteousness and mercy, joy and forbearance, purpose and peace. All of these things that often fly apart are Christ's purpose for his church. This happens as the church is dug down deep in the gospel. As much as we may WANT this, we are - because of sin - powerless to have it in any true and lasting sense. The Gospel is God's power from on high to create this community.

The simple formula "Gospel Doctrine + Gospel Culture = Power" pretty much summarizes the book. Those who really value doctrine as primary as well as those who really value practice as primary will feel both respected and challenged by Ray's gentle seasoned wisdom.

Read this book slowly. Humbly. With a group you can be vulnerable with.

The IX Marks series has a number of good entries. This one, to me, sticks out by a lot.

Daniel Henderson says

Excellent.

Laura says

This was a book our pastor encouraged the whole church to read. It may be tiny but it packs a big punch. The author's writing was very concise- no extra fluff to be found. He pointed to Christ in every single paragraph. I underlined something on nearly every page!

My criticisms would be that I wish he could have shared even more specific examples of how he envisions this church full of gospel loveliness (mostly just lists forgiveness, love, hope, etc. in generic terms). The last chapter also wasn't as powerful as all others. Most importantly, though, is that I did not like the way he paraphrased Scripture sometimes and put words in God's mouth (pgs. 26, 42, 80).

Overall, I highly recommend this book. I think it is good for church-going Christians, but also important for Christians who aren't connected to a church to see the importance of a corporate body.

Mason says

One of the most influential books in my life and one I will continue to go back and read once or twice a year. I am so blessed to be under the pastoral care of Ray and am able to call him friend. May the Lord use this book and Pastor Ray's ministry for generations.

Jon Stockley says

I love this little book. It is full of grace, it is challenging, it is encouraging, it is provocative - it is in a nutshell the Gospel. It has reminded me of Jesus's passion for His Church and it has reinvigorated my passion for His Church. More than that it has reminded me, not that I needed reminding, of the world's need for the church to genuinely reflect the full beauty and power of Christ Himself.

Working as part of the CVM team means that I continuously inhabit the Gospel, but it has been a real joy to read this book, so loaded with the Gospel goodness.

My last words go to Ray Ortlund Jnr with this one beautiful and inspiring sentence:
"The greatness of Christ creates courage within us!"

Jeff Short says

It sounds correct to speak of being Gospel centered. I wonder how well we understand what it actually means to be a Gospel centered church. The author makes a case for what it looks like to be Gospel centered in practice as well as profession. Every church has a culture, whether it is deliberately shaped or more organic. Having the Gospel correct in our doctrinal statement does not mean our church body is Gospel centered in practice. Ortlund brings out that Gospel centeredness can happen, but it doesn't happen by a plan or program. A church must adorn the Gospel preached with a community of disciples who live out the Gospel in their lives.

Bill says

Fantastic. Gospel Doctrine + Gospel Culture = A church that portrays the beauty of Christ. The first half of the book outlines the message of the gospel from the point of view of an individual, a church, and the world. The second half takes a realistic look at why it is that so many churches fail to live out a culture that corresponds with the gospel. When the gospel is truly preached, people will either respond with joy or take offence, and persevering despite the negative responses (usually from church members) requires prayer, courage and love. What a challenging and constructive book. Plus, it's short (130 pages, small format), readable and nicely presented.
