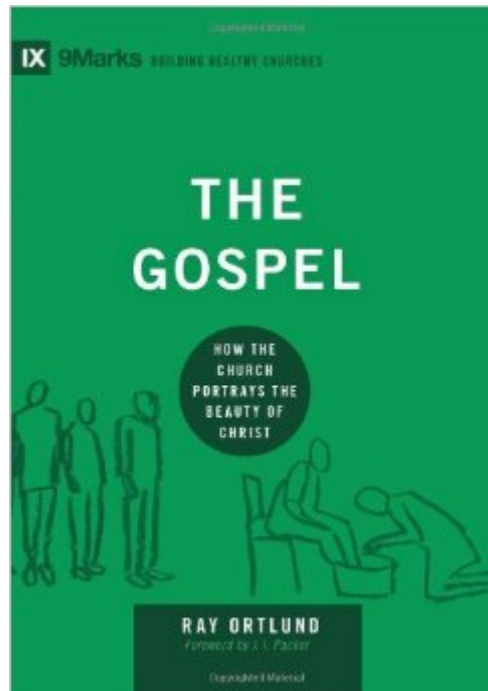


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The Gospel: How The Church Portrays The Beauty Of Christ (9marks: Building Healthy Churches)



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I really like Ray Ortlund Jr. I have appreciated the gospel saturated wisdom that I read on his blog and that I have heard in his teachings, so I was excited to read *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (2014, Crossway). This short book is exactly what I would have expected from Ortlund—a cool, refreshing drink of the gospel. In this book, he explores the themes of gospel doctrine and gospel culture as equally essential. In the introduction, he writes, "if a message so good lies at the defining center of our churches, why do we see such bad things in those same churches—ranging from active strife to sheer exhaustion? Where is the saving power of the gospel? Why don't we see more of Tyndale's singing, dancing, and leaping for joy in our churches, if the good news is setting the tone?" (page 16) This question, it seems to me, is exactly the right one. Why are our churches not more routinely thought of as joy-stations? A few pages later, he sets forth his thesis: "the need of our times is nothing less than the re-Christianization of our churches,

according to the gospel alone, in both doctrine and culture, by Christ himself" (page 19). Ortlund moves out with the gospel in concentric circles, starting with its importance to the self, then the church, and eventually "for everything". He rightly argues that the gospel transforms at each of these levels. In other words, Christ's redeeming work is not just for the individual soul, though it is assuredly for that, but it is also for the whole world. One of the things that I very much appreciate about Ortlund and which was evident in this book is how my spiritual hero, Francis Schaeffer, leaves his mark.

The "gospel" has become somewhat of a buzzword in evangelical circles. It's a funny thing because the gospel is at the very center of the Bible and God's redemptive purposes. So it's counterintuitive to claim the very idea that the gospel has become a buzzword. Christ-followers knowingly or unknowingly validate a ministry, band, or organization by attaching the label, "gospel." In most cases, this approach is a good measuring rod of the validity of anything or anyone which claims to adhere to the historic Christian faith. But in some cases, it is a mere word that carries no more meaning than a sticker on a product. In this sense, the word becomes another piece of Jesus junk. Thankfully, the book under consideration does not fall into the latter category. *The Gospel* by Ray Ortlund is the latest in a series of books in the 9Marks series, edited by Mark Dever. I've read nearly all the books in the series. They're all good and are chock-full of sound biblical counsel. Each of the books is designed to help establish and nurture healthy churches. I commend each book to pastors, leaders, and Christ-followers who love the church and have a passion to see Christ's glory penetrate the nations. It's almost unfair to compare the books because each one stands alone and is an important contribution. Having said that, Ray Ortlund's book stands head and shoulders above the others. Ortlund establishes the beauty of the gospel in the introduction: "God, through the perfect life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, rescues all his people from the wrath of God, with a promise of the full restoration of his created order forever - all to the praise of the glory of his grace."

It seems like every few minutes there's another book, article, or message being released with "gospel" in the title. Usually it's followed by a hyphen: "The gospel-driven life," "gospel-centered ministry," "gospel-influenced driving," etc. It's not that any of these are bad (well, except the one I made up), but sometimes I wonder if we're in danger of turning the gospel itself into a modifier for the thing we're really talking about. When that happens, we risk leaving the gospel assumed. And you know what happens when you assume, right? Ray Ortlund is a

man who doesn't assume the gospel. The pastor of Immanuel Nashville, Ortlund is one of those guys who you read or hear, and think, "Wow | he really believes this." • He gets that what we believe about the gospel shapes us and the culture of our churches, that "gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture" (117). But what does that look like? This is what he aims to show readers, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*. Loosely divided into two parts, *The Gospel* begins by exploring the deeply personal and epically cosmic purposes of the gospel. The gospel is about the eternal fate of individuals "but it is also about our churches and the world as a whole. This "both/and" • Ortlund strikes is so necessary in our day when we need to introduce the God of the Bible to people with no frame of reference. People who have no concept of either an intimately personal God or a transcendent Creator who holds the universe together with but a word. So how does this shape our culture?

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