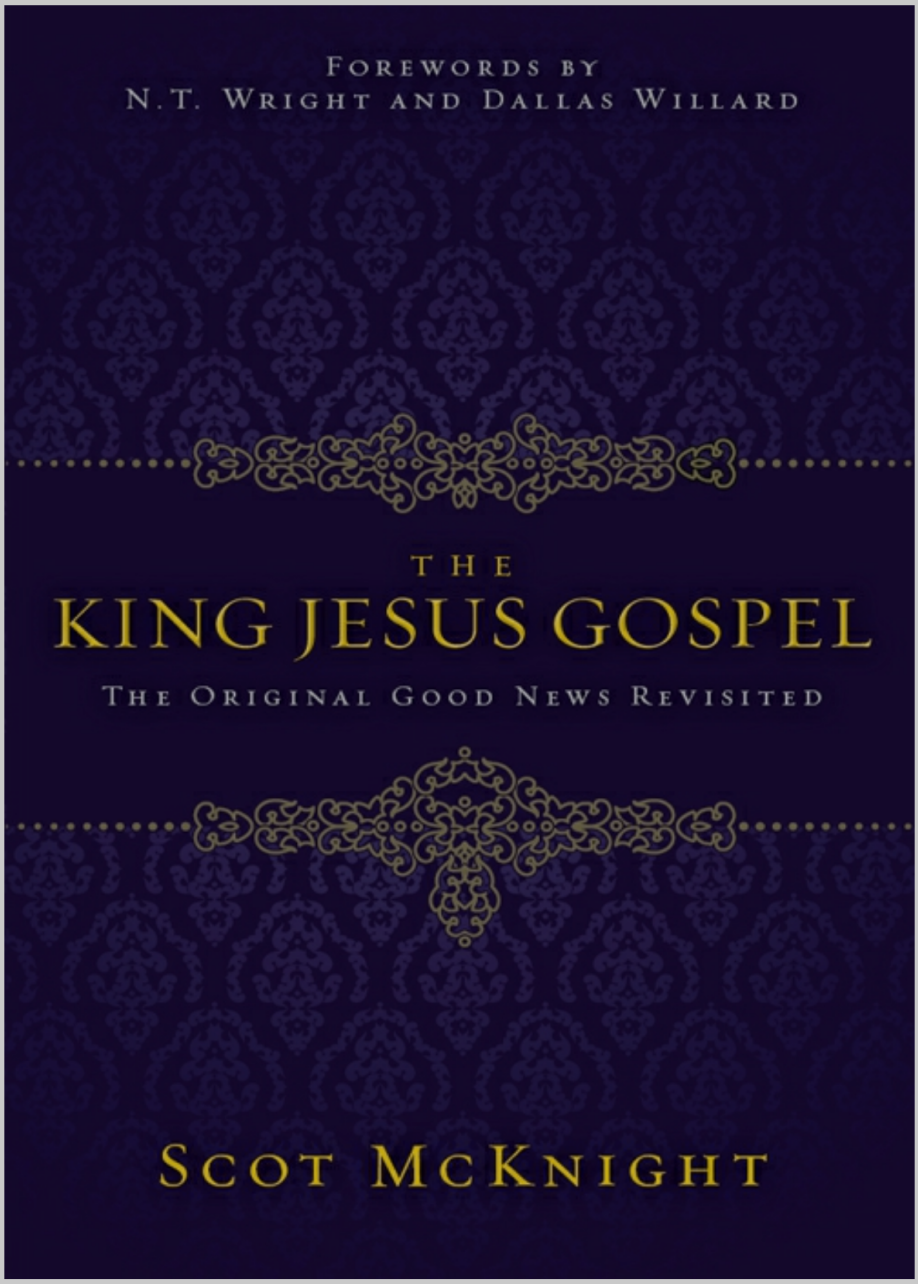
FOREWORDS BY
N.T. WRIGHT AND DALLAS WILLARD
THE
KING JESUS GOSPEL
THE ORIGINAL GOOD NEWS REVISITED
SCOT MCKNIGHT

CHAPTER 5

HOW DID SALVATION TAKE OVER THE GOSPEL?

I DID NOT GROW UP in a creedal world. My church was so nervous about creeds and reciting creeds and prayers that we never even recited the Lord's Prayer together. Zeus would have tossed thunderbolts at us had we even tried to recite the Apostles' Creed. We were nervous about any creed other than "I believe in the Bible." So I had to break through the boundaries of my own conscience when I began to learn about the creeds. I succumbed to the creeds only after considerable study and thought and prayer and resistance. But I now see the creeds, especially the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, or the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, as fundamental to the faith of all Christians.

But there is something far more important to learn about the creeds than that they are part of our heritage. Careful attention to words has now convinced me that "creed" and "gospel" are intimately connected, so intimately one can say the creed is the gospel. Perhaps you are shocked that I could even connect "creed" to "gospel." This will become clearer by the end of the chapter.

Though I've been aware of the words used in the creed for a long time, it was in reading a book by Ted Campbell called *The Gospel in Christian Traditions* that a historical reality about the creeds and the gospel dug its way into my bones and brought new life to my own personal faith.[25] After I read Ted Campbell's book, I read (or slogged my way through) Jaroslav Pelikan's Credo.[26] Both Campbell and Pelikan discuss how the earliest Christians arranged what they believed into what is now called the "Rule of Faith" (in Latin,

regula fidei). And this Rule of Faith developed over time to become the three principal creeds of the Christian faith: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedon Definition. In studying this history I landed on something that I think is uniformly ignored by most Christians — that the earliest Christians were developing a "gospel" culture. Put in summary form here is the big picture we will sketch in this chapter:

> First Corinthians 15 led to the development of the Rule of Faith,
> and
> the Rule of Faith led to the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed.
> Thus, 1 Corinthians led to the Nicene Creed.
> Thus, the Nicene Creed is preeminently a gospel statement!

But this gospel framing of the creed was revised later — and that revision led from a gospel culture to a salvation culture.

In studying this history and development, I began to see this simple observation: *the classic universal (or "catholic") creeds of the church flesh out Paul's articulation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3 – 5,* or paragraph B above. Here are Paul's words again:

> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve.

Let me say this with emphasis: the creeds articulate what is both implicit and explicit in Paul's grand statement of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15. This point must be emphasized because it may not even be known to many Christians today: *1 Corinthians 15 is the genesis of the great Christian creeds.* This means these creeds were designed from beginning to end not to banter back and forth about speculative doctrines *but were shaped to clarify the gospel itself.* One can say with accuracy that the Nicene Creed is an *exegesis* or *exposition* of the gospel tradition of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

That's a simple observation that deserves a hundred qualifications once one enters into the intensity of the debates in the first four centuries, and once one entertains the complexity of the issues involved. There wasn't simply a straight line from 1 Corinthians 15 to Nicea, but that line is still apparent in that history.

I have always encountered people who boldly announce to me that they are "noncreedal" and even say "I don't believe in the creeds" because of their next words: "I believe in the Bible." I respond with one question, and I think I ask this question because I too was at one time one of their number: "What line or lines in the Nicene Creed do you *not* believe?" I've never had one say they didn't believe any of it, though some have had enough substance in their anti-creedalism to wonder if "one holy catholic and apostolic church" just might mean "Rome," and since they're not Catholics, they wonder if they believe that line. Other than that, though, there's nothing there *not to believe.* In fact, denial of the creeds is tantamount to denying the gospel itself because what the creeds seek to do is bring out *what is already in the Bible's gospel.* I will show why I say that below.

The Story from Paul to Nicea

Let's begin with one of the earliest theologians and martyrs, Ignatius. On his trip — one might call it a "march of triumph" — across Turkey (Asia Minor) toward Rome to be put to death,[27] Ignatius wrote seven letters to churches in Asia Minor. In the letter *To the Trallians* 9.1 – 2, he expresses what he believes about Jesus Christ:

> who is of the stock of David who is of Mary,
> who was truly born, ate and drank,
> was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate,
> was truly crucified and died in the sight of the beings of heaven, of earth and

> the underworld,
> who was also truly raised from the dead.

While Ignatius is not explicitly quoting from 1 Corinthians 15, his words bear a striking similarity to how Paul summed up the Story of Jesus. These words could not have been said this way without Paul having said what he did and without the apostles forming that "gospel tradition" that they passed along. Yes, there are words and ideas here that are not found in Paul, and yes, Ignatius is interacting with both Judaizing and docetic tendencies, which lead him to express the gospel in terms of the suffering *(pathos)* and resurrection of Jesus.[28] But one can say Ignatius makes explicit what he thought was implicit in the apostolic gospel.

In about AD 190, Irenaeus framed the earliest and clearest *regula fidei,* and his words too show a striking resemblance to the words of the apostle Paul, and I have highlighted those Pauline echoes in italics:[29]

> this faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who made known through the prophets the plan of salvation, *and the coming, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise anew all flesh of the whole human race.*

As with Paul, Jesus' entire life is at work: the incarnation "for our salvation," the birth, the passion, the resurrection, the bodily ascension, and his future appearing. And like Paul, Irenaeus sees a story with a goal: "to sum up all things and to raise anew all flesh of the whole human race." Irenaeus's *regula fidei,* or creed, is

shaped by Paul's gospel. Creed and gospel are connected.

A decade or so later another early theologian, Tertullian, provided yet another creedal statement that derives from Paul's gospel statement. Here are Tertullian's words and, though he's getting some of his stuff from the gospel of John, I italicize the words that show connection to the apostle Paul's gospel statement in 1 Corinthians 15:[30]

> We, however, as we indeed always have done and more especially since we have been better instructed by the Paraclete, who leads men indeed into all truth, believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or *oikonomia,* as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made.
>
> Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her — being both Man and God, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ; *we believe Him to have suffered, died, and been buried, according to the Scriptures, and, after He had been raised again by the Father and taken back to heaven, to be sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that He will come to judge the quick and the dead;* who sent also from heaven from the Father, according to His own promise, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost.
>
> *That this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel,* even before any of the older heretics, much more before Praxeas, a pretender of yesterday, will be apparent both from the lateness of date which marks all heresies, and also from the absolutely novel character of our new-fangled Praxeas.

One notable observation remains: in the third paragraph, Tertullian claims that this "rule of faith" (again, *regula fidei)* came down to him — that he "received" it as did the Corinthians and Paul —

"from the beginning of the gospel." That is an overt connection to Paul's own statement and to the apostolic gospel tradition. Creed and gospel are connected.

One more before we get to the Nicene Creed, and this one comes from Hippolytus about one or two decades after Tertullian.[31] A candidate for baptism, stripped naked, in the order of children, men, and then women, was asked a series of questions, and then the baptisand, or person being baptized, was to make a confession. Roughly, this is the sacred act of being questioned before baptism was permitted:

> [Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?]
>
> Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?
>
> Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and in the resurrection of the body?[32]

Again, observe that the confession required for baptism was a confession rooted in the gospel statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, showing once again that creed and gospel are united.

Perhaps what is most notable is that the gospel statement of Paul was almost entirely about Jesus Christ, while the growing church tradition about creeds became increasingly Trinitarian as it filled in the lines of what was assumed (or believed to be assumed) by the original apostolic gospel.[33] What is most notable, though, is this: the so-called second article of the creed, the lines about Jesus, *are always shaped by what Paul said about the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 5, 20 – 28.* First Corinthians 15 was not just a casual statement by Paul; it was the apostolic definition of the gospel that Paul himself passed alongside the other apostles.

Finally, we come to the Nicene Creed (AD 325),[34] and it doesn't take but a moment's notice to see that the Son clauses are rooted in 1 Corinthians 15.

> We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
> the only Son of God,
> eternally begotten of the Father,
> God from God, Light from Light,
> true God from true God,
> begotten, not made,
> of one Being with the Father.
> Through him all things were made.
> For us and for our salvation
> he came down from heaven:
> by the power of the Holy Spirit
> he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
> and was made man.
> *For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;*
> *he suffered death and was buried.*
> *On the third day he rose again*
> *in accordance with the Scriptures;*
> *he ascended into heaven*
> *and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*
>
> *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.*

The same connection to 1 Corinthians 15 is seen in the second article in the Apostles' Creed:[35]

> And [I believe] in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, *was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge*

the quick and the dead.

Much more could be said about this sketch of creedal history but this one thing needs to be observed: *the Nicene Creed, as well as the* regula fidei *leading up to it, and the creeds that flowed out of Nicea, are not to be seen as exercises in theological sophistry or speculation but profoundly gospeling events.* To recite the creed for these early Christians was not to dabble in the theologically arcane but to articulate and confess — aloud and often — the gospel itself. To deny these creeds was to deny the gospel.

We have traveled a considerable distance from Paul's letter to the Corinthians in the heart of the first century to Nicea in the fourth century, but we had to traverse this landscape to make two points clear: the gospel is the Story of Jesus as the completion of the Story of Israel as found in the Scriptures, and that gospel story formed and framed the culture of the earliest Christians. That culture was first and foremost shaped by this gospel, and within that gospel culture the subculture of a salvation culture was formed. Those who were saved were those who embraced the gospel Story of Jesus Christ.

But I don't want to suggest that the early churches were perfect nor that the first four centuries were ideal. There never was an ideal church because the ideal is the kingdom, and that is yet to come. In fact, those early churches had their own sorts of problems, including theological debates that somehow managed — against all claims to gospel love and peace and justice — to inflict punishment and even capital punishment on dissenters. Their disputes escalated into such levels of acrimony that their confessed unity of the church became a wish instead of a reality. They set in motion a sacramental process that far too often made salvation automatic for the baptized. They capitulated to Constantine so much that the church and the Roman empire became an invisible wall of indifference. "Crusades" is all one has to say, even if there

are careful nuances now being put on what happened (and what did not).

No, I don't want to suggest the gospel culture created a beautiful gospel church or an overwhelming number of genuine disciples of Jesus. All I want to contend for is that the first four centuries were shaped by a gospel culture that derived directly and profoundly from the apostolic gospel tradition. But something happened that has led to the contemporary superficial perception of gospel and reduction of salvation to personal decision and has all but wiped out the gospel culture of Jesus and the apostles.

How, then, did we get from this gospel culture to our salvation culture?

What Happened?

You may now be asking, as I have myself numerous times, *What happened?* How did we develop a salvation culture out of a gospel culture? How did "evangelicals" become "soterians"? Or, when did the "gospel" become the Plan of Salvation? It began in many ways with Augustine, but its more focused beginning was in the Reformation, though it did not happen during the Reformation. We can pinpoint the documents themselves that both provide evidence for the shift that was underway and that also provide the foundation for creating a salvation culture. Those two documents, one from the Lutheran wing and one from the Calvinist/Reformed wing, are the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Genevan Confession.*

But before we get there, my own confession. Cutting out the inevitable nonsense that accompanies everything humans do, including Calvin's wretched decisions that led to the burning of Servetus, Luther's wretched beliefs about Jews and his wretched decisions about the Anabaptists, and wretched tendencies of the Anabaptist sectarian to think of themselves as the only people of God, I believe the Reformation was a profound work of God that

both enlivened the church and altered Western European history for the better. The singular contribution of the Reformation, in all three directions — Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist — was that the gravity of the gospel was shifted toward human response and personal responsibility and the development of the gospel as speaking into that responsibility.

This is not to deny the important and real differences between these three movements, but it is to say that the one thing that emerged in each was a heavy sense of the need for personal salvation. I do not mean that such was not found in Roman Catholicism; rather, the Reformation said, in effect, that the "gospel" must lead to personal salvation — and the rest is history.

But with that emphasis, regardless of how important it was and remains, came a price. The gospel culture began to shift to a salvation culture. Our contemporary equation of the word *gospel* with the Plan of Salvation came about because of developments from and after the Reformation. When I read today's thin and superficial reductions of the gospel to simple points, I know that that could never have happened apart from the Reformation. I also know that it didn't happen during the Reformation itself but as a result of the Reformation's reframing of the apostolic gospel-become-creed.

Now, briefly, the two documents mentioned above. I begin with the Augsburg Confession. The Reformation statements focused on the elements of the Christian faith that led to their differences with the Catholic Church, but in so doing the Reformation churches did not deny the Nicene Creed. Instead, they reframed the faith in ways that provided a lens through which they now saw the creed itself.

In 1530, Philip Melanchthon presented to Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg a confession built on conclusions that were forming among the Lutheran Protestants. I draw attention here to the

order and substance of this confession, which need to be seen over against the classical order and substance of the Nicene Creed. Nicea framed things through God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and the God the Son articles were derived from 1 Corinthians 15. The Augsburg Confession converted the order of the "articles" into sections on *salvation and justification by faith.* It is precisely here that a "gospel culture" was reshaped into a "salvation culture" or, better yet, "justification culture." Here are the central categories of the Lutheran confession:

God as Triune [as at Nicea]
Original sin [major reshaping idea]

The Son of God [as with Nicea and Chalcedon, with a clear understanding of a satisfaction and propitiation of God's wrath]

Justification by faith

Then the Augsburg Confession covers the office of ministry, the new obedience, the church, baptism, the Holy Supper, confession, repentance, sacraments, order in the church, church usages, civil government, the return of Christ to judge, freedom of the will, the cause of sin, and a lengthy discussion of faith and good works, and it concludes with the cult of the saints before it discusses matters about which the Reformers were in serious dispute. I wish to make only one point: this Lutheran confession framed the gospel in terms of salvation. It would not be inaccurate to say that the gospel "story became soteriology," or the Story of Israel/Bible/Jesus became the System of Salvation.

The Reformation did not deny the gospel story and it did not deny the creeds. Instead, it put everything into a new order and into a new place. Time and developments have somehow eroded the much more balanced combination of gospel culture and salvation culture in the Reformation to where today a salvation culture

has eclipsed the gospel culture.

The Genevan Confession of 1536, set out by William Farel and John Calvin, like the Augsburg Confession, had both predecessors and subsequent clarifications, such as the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) or the Westminster Confession (1646), but those aren't our concern here. What is important is that the genius of the Reformation's focusing of the gospel on salvation by faith alone comes to the fore also in the Genevan Confession. Like the Augsburg Confession, the Genevan Confession is framed even more by a "salvation culture." Hence, here are the central articles that express the heart of the Reformed perspective on the gospel:

> The Word of God
> The one and only God
> The law of God alike for all
> The natural man — total depravity
> Man by himself is lost
> Salvation in Jesus
> Righteousness in Jesus
> Regeneration in Jesus
> Remission of sins necessary for the faithful

Once again, the list continues with other items of the faith: all our good in the grace of God, faith, invocation of God only and intercession of Christ, prayer intelligible, the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Supper, human traditions, the church, excommunication, ministers of the Word, and magistrates.

Even more so with Calvin (and William Farel) than with Luther, the gospel story is set into a new framing story, the story of salvation. Contemporary evangelicalism, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, has absorbed this Reformation (salvation) story. To put it lightly, in many cases it has not only absorbed but done plenty of subtraction and reframing. There are huge pockets of evangelicalism where this profound Reformation

reframing is little more than four simple (and thin) points: God loves you, you are messed up, Jesus died for you, accept him and (no matter what you do) you can go to heaven. My contention is not that the Reformation created that sort of gospel, but that the Reformation's reshaping of the gospel story has made it a pale shadow of what it ought to be.

In fact, no one can read either Luther or Calvin and not observe that they operated with both a profound gospel culture and a profound salvation culture. I have no desire to blame them or the Reformation for the soterians or a "salvation culture." I thank God for the Reformation. But I do want to point out that the seeds for the contemporary and mostly evangelical four-points approach to the gospel could not have happened were it not for the Reformation's shifting from the story to soteriology.

Evangelicalism's Experiential Focus

So let's push a bit into what happened after the Reformation and examine the evangelical movement.[36] To be a true-blue evangelical in our heritage or to be accepted into the membership of a church in the evangelical tradition, one has to give witness to one's personal experience of salvation. The Puritans sometimes called this personal statement of faith a "relation"; but whatever one may want to call it, the experience of personal salvation is the threshold-crossing event, and the ability to give witness to that event is required for full acceptance. John Wesley expresses in pristine words the evangelical experience:[37]

> In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, *I felt my heart strangely warmed.* I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine,* and

> saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

To this day in most evangelical churches, both where they baptize infants and where adult baptism is practiced, a potential member is asked to meet with deacons or elders or the pastor to witness to one's experience of salvation. Though it need not sound like Wesley's or other archetypal conversion stories, the story will be examined to see that it is real and personal. While contemporary descendants of these groups may not have the rigor or create the anxiety that some of the early Puritan Congregationalist churches created, the person who listens to the testimony of faith in today's churches is expected to be able to discern if the signs of grace or conversion are present. This culture of personal salvation and personal testimony captures what I mean by a salvation culture. For this culture, it is the ability to witness personally to the experience of conversion that matters most. Once one has had this experience, it's all over … until the final party arrives.

Pastor Dallas

Like Pastor Tom Wright, Dallas Willard does double duty: he's both a professor and a pastor. Willard discusses this reduction of gospel to salvation and the reduction of salvation to personal forgiveness and gives it a potent and damning label: *the gospel of sin management.*[38] Willard uses the image of a bar code for this salvation culture: if we get the right barcode — say the right thing, make the right confession, have the right experience, make the right decision, etc. — when God scans the barcode, the lights will go off and we will be safe. Willard proposes salvation culture's problem in this way:

> If you ask anyone from that 74 percent of Americans who say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ what the Christian gospel is, you will probably be told that Jesus died to pay for our sins, and that if we

> will only believe he did this, we will go to heaven when we die.

And he continues:

> In this way what is only one theory of the "atonement" is made out to be the whole of the essential message of Jesus [the gospel].
>
> What does it mean in this setup to "believe"?
>
> But for some time now the belief required to be saved has increasingly been regarded as a totally private act, "just between you and the Lord." Only the "scanner" would know.

The difference between what Calvin and Luther (as well as Wesley) and what Willard excoriates in his book is so dramatic one has to wonder if they are even reading the same Bible.

From the enhancement of a gospel culture with a profound emphasis on salvation we have now arrived at the ability for a person to be able to say he or she has had the right experience. And that experience far too often is nothing more than "I'm a sinner; Jesus, take my place." A gospel culture will have none of it, nor will a proper sense of salvation. I leave the last words here for Willard:

> What must be emphasized in all of this is the difference between trusting Christ, the real person Jesus, with all that that naturally involves, versus trusting some arrangement for sin-remission set up through him — trusting only his role as guilt remover.

These are the words of his that haunt the pages of this book, and here he is pointing at the "you" of evangelicalism:

Your system is perfectly designed to yield the result you are getting.

And here it comes with full force:[39]

> "Gospels of Sin Management" presume a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming humankind … [and] they foster "vampire Chris-

> tians," who only want a little blood for their sins but nothing more to do with Jesus until heaven.

Dallas Willard takes us then into the kingdom vision of Jesus, but his concern, like mine, is about a salvation culture that has eclipsed a gospel (and discipleship) culture.

This is perhaps all, if not more than, we need for our point, which is that the "gospel culture" that ruled the church from the time of Jesus to the Reformation and which was shaped and built on 1 Corinthians 15, was reshaped during the Reformation — for mighty good reasons I might add — into a salvation culture. One more time, let me emphasize this: I'm not idealizing the early church or the medieval church. I have plenty of beefs with developments during those periods, including struggles over the increasing centeredness of Marian themes, the momentous shifts in centralizing power that led, tragically, to such things as indulgences, as well as a near automatic sacramentalization that impeded the message of personal response to the gospel. I don't want to call into question the God-led significance of the Reformation. So, I do not dispute the need for clarifying salvation and making its personal application clear and necessary. Rather, what happened is the apostolic gospel culture was reframed in such a way and so successfully, largely as a result of the powerful evangelistic culture of evangelicalism in American revivalism and then later in America's culture war between fundamentalists and modernists, that today we are losing contact with the gospel culture.

We need to regain contact with the gospel culture in a way that we do not lose the salvation culture, but to do that we have to begin at the beginning one more time. We began this book by asking whether Jesus preached the gospel. Now that we have examined both the apostolic gospel and how that gospel shifted to a system of salvation, we can ask this question about Jesus with fresh eyes.

If we believe that Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 15 are the gospel, then we have to ask a slightly different question than many think they are asking when they ask if Jesus preached the gospel. More often than not, folks are asking if Jesus preached the Plan of Salvation instead of asking if he preached the "gospel." They are asking, in effect, if he came to establish a "salvation culture" or a "gospel culture." In our next two chapters we want to look at the four Gospels and at Jesus, and we will suggest that, in fact, Jesus did preach the gospel — but this all hinges on what we mean by the word *gospel*.

CHAPTER 6

THE GOSPEL IN THE GOSPELS?

WE BEGAN THIS JOURNEY with Paul. I admit that it may sound backward to go first to Paul and only then to Jesus and the Gospels. I wanted to begin this study with a sketch of Jesus' view of the kingdom of God, but I knew that what I would emphasize would sound strained until we encountered how centrally Jesus is in the gospel of 1 Corinthians 15. But now, in light of what Paul says about the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, we have been given a whole new angle on this term. Until we can clear from our minds the idea that the gospel and the Plan of Salvation are the same thing, we cannot find the principle of unity in the entire history of the church. But, once we do show the relation of gospel and salvation, which we sketched in what we said about 1 Corinthians 15, we suddenly discover that not only did Paul preach a gospel different than many of us think, but we find that Paul's gospel was the same as Jesus' and — in fact — the same as everyone's in the first century.

So our contention is that examining 1 Corinthians 15 all over again leads us now to ask an entirely different question. It would be good for us to remind ourselves how the questions have been asked in the past. Everyone observes that there's a shift from Jesus to Paul. Jesus focused on kingdom but Paul focused, at least in Romans and Galatians, on justification. So, the former questions were these: Did Paul preach kingdom? Or, did Jesus preach justification? With a little bit of twisting or turning — in fact, sometimes with a lot of twisting and turning — we could get Jesus to preach justification or Paul to preach kingdom. I suggest this gets it wrong

because in each case it defines "gospel" as either kingdom or justification. My contention is that the gospel is bigger than both terms.

The gospel, I am arguing, is declaring the Story of Israel as resolved in the Story of Jesus. That was Paul's gospel, and it was the apostolic gospel tradition, and that gospel shaped everything in the church until the Reformation, at which time that gospel was slightly shifted and eventually — and it took the better part of two or three centuries for this to happen — gospel was submerged under salvation so much that gospel was equated with Plan of Salvation. But now that we have seen what Paul actually preached, which again was the declaration that the story has been completed in Jesus himself, we are led to a whole new question. Rather than ask if Paul preached kingdom or if Jesus preached justification, we now ask this question:

Did Jesus claim Israel's Story was fulfilled in himself?
Or, even more directly,
Did Jesus preach himself?
And, if he did,
Then Jesus too preached the gospel!

We can frame this in a number of ways, so here's one more: *Did Jesus make his kingdom message center on his own role in the Story of Israel?* If we answer "Yes" to any of these questions, we are saying that Jesus preached the gospel.

Once we learn to frame the question in this manner, everything falls into place, and this leads me to the question we have not yet asked or answered. It's an important question, and more important than perhaps many realize. Here goes: *Have you ever wondered why the first four books of the New Testament are called "the Gospel"?*

The Gospels And The Gospel

I will not forget the day I was sitting at my desk pondering the first