

Are We Preaching “Another” Gospel: A 31-Day Journey toward Rediscovering the Gospel of the Grace of God

by C. D. Hildebrand, 24-7-365 Version 2026

Day 27

TO SERVE OR BE SERVED

One afternoon after a particularly demanding period of time, I stopped what I was doing to pray because the demands of ministry were beginning to overwhelm me. The situation is that David works full-time in a “secular” job and in the ministry in his “spare” time. He travels to appointments during the day and is constantly coming and going. On top of that, he is very diligent in sharing in the responsibilities of our home, and he pampers me beyond belief! Since I work from home, I have more time to devote to ministry details. This means that the responsibility of the administration of Studies in Grace and Faith is mostly mine. This includes communications, merging of our study notes into outlines, reproduction of teaching materials, mailings, and PowerPoint presentations for both our lessons and music. Doing these things is a labor of love and a blessing, but it can become a bit overwhelming.

It was a particularly stressful season for me since the holidays were just winding down and a new year was beginning. David, much to my delight, got an organizing “bug” and was busy emptying every file and drawer that pertained to him and filing, shredding, and putting this and that “in its place”. While working on my ministry responsibilities in the background of all this welcomed organizing, it became obvious that his busy schedule and organizing were causing him to get backlogged on his normal “duties” and causing me to get behind on my preparations for ministry. This began to weigh heavily on my mind, and a good amount of resentment began to simmer.

“Lord, tell David to help me!” I prayed, not believing the words that just came out of my mouth, shaking my head and chuckling at myself before the Lord as I prayed.

Luke 10:38-40

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

*³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “**Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me.”***

Now, most Christians are aware of this passage and its import, but how many of us who work in ministry have prayed, “Lord, give me more Marthas!” or “Lord, tell them to help me,”?

It’s so easy to take potshots at ministers, and honestly, I get tired of hearing all the pastor-bashing that goes on in social media—viewing them *all* as greedy for gain and power. I’m not saying this does not exist. It does, but before you begin to hurl insults and accusations, please consider the demands on the modern-day pastor.

Most people don’t realize how much work it is to oversee a ministry. The Christian public has certain expectations today about finding what we call a “full-service” church, one that offers not only a dynamic Sunday morning service replete with a sermon that will minister to everyone in attendance (nowadays with aspects of a multi-media presentation) and a professionally polished worship service, but also an exciting children’s ministry, a meaningful, involved, and vibrant youth group, an aesthetically pleasing and meticulously clean facility, friendly greeters, a much-needed nursery, an office staff that is kind and helpful during the week, benevolence services for those in need, marriages, funerals, small groups, evangelism, outreach into the community, hospital and prison visitation, the righting of injustices, an awesome website replete with the latest multi-media, and to top it all off, a school from preschool through high school, etc., etc., etc. Obviously, no pastor and his wife can do all of these things themselves. It takes “everyone” working together to develop a gathering place with these services.¹

Most of us in ministry have been in more than one “leadership” meeting where someone complains that 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work, and that someone should encourage the people of the church to “come and help” them. That “someone”, of course, is the pastor. Oh, and please add that to the list of things the pastor is supposed to do—motivate people to serve!

So, without giving consideration to the fact that the complaint is identical to Martha’s, the much-needed teaching series begins, usually in the form of “helping” people to find their gifts in the body of Christ. This series is usually concluded by giving opportunities for individual service within that local assembly. This is not to say that “equipping the saints for the work of the ministry” is inappropriate, but that it is often motivated by the need for more workers. What we are really doing is recruiting and developing Marthas.

1

I realize that many of my contemporaries in the gospel of grace renewal will dispute whether this form of gathering is even Scriptural. I do not wish to debate that here. I am speaking of the realities of our current perception of “church” and its cultural context.

Even though we know the story, we still persist in this madness, referring to those who are not involved in the ministry of the church as mere “pew warmers”. These pew-warming Marys drop off their children in the nursery and Sunday School, and walk in the sanctuary door. They seem so happy to see all the Marthas again as they scurry about “serving the Lord” while these lazy Marys have the nerve to just sit there receiving the word—not lifting one finger to help! They get to go home and spend the rest of the day with their families while the Marthas clean up and get ready for another Sunday ministry.

“Lord, tell them to help me!”

Luke 10:41-42

*And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴² But **one thing** is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”*

What was that “good part” which would not be taken from Mary? It only says that she “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word”. Many traditionally have seen this as a call to prayer (sitting at Jesus feet) and reading the Bible each day (hearing His word).

Now, here’s where it gets a little complicated. Most Marthas, and I’d say “especially” Marthas in the church today, already have a consistent prayer life and read the Bible nearly daily, and some of them do this for the express purpose of being a Mary. Then, they get up and think and behave as did Martha, faithfully “serving the Lord” while sometimes resenting that they have been left to do all the work alone.

Was Jesus really giving a lesson on the importance of prayer and Bible study? We should be significantly struck by Jesus saying that “one” thing was needful. If what Jesus meant to teach was that we need to have prayer *and* Bible study, why didn’t He say “two” things? Think about this for a minute. What really is that “one” thing if not these two things?

Picture the scene. Jesus came to Martha’s house. The long-awaited Messiah just walked into her home. The Messiah, mind you! Mary did the right thing and took a seat as close as she could so she could hear His word. Martha did the polite thing and began to prepare a meal.

What was the word that Jesus spoke to Mary? What was the word the Messiah preached? Was it not the good news of the kingdom of God?

That one thing Mary chose was to hear Jesus. We don’t know his exact words to Mary, but we can assume that just as Jesus did everywhere (Mk. 2:2), He was sharing the gospel. Maybe He told those listening along with Mary a parable or talked about being born again or perhaps one of His other messages. The point is, Jesus came to Martha and Mary’s house not so that Mary and Martha would serve *Him* a luscious meal, but with the

purpose of serving *them* the good news.

Did Jesus say, “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will put you to work serving me”?

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

The pressure to perform is tremendous in most churches, particularly upon the pastor (and his family). Knowing he can't possibly do it all, he then delegates responsibilities to those who are willing to help him. Soon, there can be a whole ministry staff stressed out beyond their own belief. Then, after all this hard work takes effect (*if it takes effect*) and the church begins to grow, the need for more Marthas seems to grow exponentially.

Where is the “one” thing? Where is the good news? So many of us are weary or in need of healing. Instead of hearing that Jesus is our Healer and that He is reaching out to *us* in love, we are inspired to work harder for the Lord to prove *our* love. Many believers today are held captive, some of them by their excessive compulsion to serve, others by sin they never imagined would plague them. Will we teach them the truth that sets free or continue to condemn them for weakness? Many more are blind. Shouldn't we teach them the truth that will open their eyes instead of heaping on burdens that we cannot possibly bear? And what about the oppressed, those who are heavy laden by laws and traditions that increase each week? They need to know that Jesus came to serve them, to love them, to give them freedom.

Where is the gospel, the good news about what Jesus did and who He made us? **With most viewing the gospel as something for the lost, the good news is seldom taught to the saved.** Without this one thing, without hearing the glad tidings of good things from our benevolent God, the focus is turned upon the ministry instead of on Him. **When our focus becomes serving Him, instead of what He has done to serve us, we quickly become Marthas.** Please read that sentence again.

What is the answer to this puzzle? Grace, of course!

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

We know how diligently Paul worked. Most of his ministry, he supported himself financially (and those with him) by working as a tent maker. This,

no doubt, took many hours a day. Yet he and his fellow workers turned much of the then-known world upside down! How did they do this? By His abundant grace.

When we preach the gospel of God's unmerited favor and love for His people, something happens that is far superior to our efforts to train Marthas. When believers are fed with the good news of what *Jesus* did and does to serve and love **us**, the rivers of living water begin to flow, and all the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow. When we, like Mary, "hear His word", the gospel, and allow Jesus to serve us, when we receive from Him all the good He has done for us and all the good He is still giving us, the good works for which we were created, simply happen.

Jesus made a very interesting statement.

Matthew 20:24-28

*And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man **did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom *for us*. So, we automatically jump into "follow Jesus' example" mode and overlook the impact of what Jesus is saying. We cannot skip this first step: Jesus came to **serve us**. He has done so much for us that we can spend our lifetimes discovering it all. He continues to serve us throughout our lives. His heart is all about serving us, not us serving Him. This goes against *everything* we formerly believed and all that we practiced. **Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve.**

So, the first step is to let Jesus serve us.

"Martha, thank you for all the work you are doing to make my visit a pleasant one, but I did not come to your house today so that you would serve *Me*. I came to serve *you*. Please come and sit here with your sister and hear the good news of the Father's great love for you."

Many in the church today think that people who preach grace as God's unmerited favor are presenting some sort of candy man God, always giving out prizes. We tend to find it selfish to think that any one of us would focus on what *God* gives *us* instead of what *we* can give *Him*. Yet, Jesus is the one who said that He did not come to be served, but to serve. He was the one who **commended Mary for receiving from Him.**

So—Jesus serves us, then we serve Him, right? No, not exactly. Look again at verses 26 and 27. Jesus serves us, and then we serve each other.

We tend to see being involved in church ministries and all of our other spiritual disciplines as “serving the Lord”, but what we should do is let Him first serve us, then labor to serve and love *each other* as He commanded.

Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you (Jn. 15:11-14).

Jesus loved us. He gave His life for us. Now, he wants us to love and serve each other. What is His motivation? “That your joy may be full and that My joy may remain in you.”

That “one thing” that Mary chose was hearing the word of Jesus, which was the gospel of His grace. In doing so, she knew she was loved. He was giving to her, and she was receiving from Him. He was serving her while Martha was focusing on serving Him. This is the most important thing for every Christian—to take time to hear His glad tidings of good things, of the love that caused Him to give His life for us. When we deeply know His love for us, serving each other is a joy, not a burden, and He receives that service toward each other as love unto Himself. If resentment creeps into your mind because you are carrying most of the load, stop and let Him love you.

Matthew 25:37-40

*“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.**”*

Let’s allow Jesus to serve and love us by teaching us the glad tidings of good things from our benevolent God. Then and only then can we effectively serve and love each other. How and when this love and service from God comes is not important—only that we allow it. We need to make His love for us the focus of our study. When we are in need, we simply remember His love and let Him serve us. What we are doing is allowing the rivers of living water to flow into us, and then we are equipped to let them flow out of us.

When we serve and love each other, then we are serving and loving God. What a beautiful circle of love and grace! He loves and serves us. We receive His love and service to us. We love and serve each other. He receives our love and service for each other as love and service toward Him.

Might the church as we know it fall apart without more Marthas? This is a reasonable question, and I think the logical answer is, "It might." At the very least, the church will change considerably. Would this be so awful? Wouldn't it be a good thing if all of us simply received from Jesus? Then wouldn't letting people minister to each other, instead of feeling "the church" must minister to each and every aspect of someone's life, not be a healthy step?

As we learn more about the true gospel, we will see drastic changes in our church structures and ministries, but this need not be a negative thing, but one that will bring relief and rest to those who are weary. We must keep in mind that our focus is not on building a full-service organized church or building a ministry, but on serving the sheep with the pure gospel. Feed and care for the sheep, and they will grow, and God will be pleased, whether that is to 30 people or 30,000. It isn't the format that matters. It's the message. Focus on Jesus. Let Him serve you. Then serve each other. That's true ministry.