

The Power of the Gospel

1

What is the Gospel?

Most Christians have a rudimentary understanding of the Gospel. After all, in order to become a Christian, you need to understand the Gospel, right?

Well, half right. Yes, in order to experience God's salvation, you need to have an understanding of how God saves you, which is a vital part of the Gospel. But the Gospel is far more than this. The Gospel also describes the parameters within which God relates to you and works within your life.

Read Colossians 1:6

Note how Paul connects the fact that “the gospel is bearing fruit and growing” to the fact that the early believers understood “God’s grace *in all its truth*.” Like the love of Christ, the grace of God has awesome length, breadth, height and depth (see **Ephesians 3:18**). In this module, we will be exploring the length, breadth, height and depth of the Gospel so that we can begin to understand God’s grace in *all its truth*. The result of this revelation is that the Gospel will begin to bear fruit and grow like we have never experienced before.

The Power of God

Read Romans 1:16

In the introduction to his letter to the Romans, Paul makes a brazen statement. He is not ashamed of the Gospel, he says, because the Gospel is the power of God.

According to *Vincent’s Word Studies*, the statement “the gospel is the power of God” means “[not] merely a powerful means in God’s hands, but in *itself* a divine energy.”¹ Paul doesn’t say that the Gospel *contains* the power of God. Nor does he say that it is the key which *unlocks* the power of God. According to Paul, the Gospel *is* the power of God.

Let’s take an everyday example of life to illustrate how this works. An automobile is designed to run on gasoline. It comes equipped with a fuel tank and an internal combustion engine, fine-tuned to draw power from the gasoline. But until the tank is topped and the engine started, a car is only so much dead weight.

Have you ever experienced being in a car which ran out of fuel? Imagine a group of people pushing such a car uphill, perspiration pouring off their foreheads as they grunt and groan, trying to keep the vehicle moving upwards. That is what many Christian lives are like. Everybody's at the back of the car, pushing – not just the Christian himself, but also the pastor, the elders and many others – all trying to make this person's Christian life work. It is not pushing that is needed. What is needed is fuel in the engine. Then when the key to the ignition is turned, power throbs through the car and the vehicle is able to move upward under its own power.

The Gospel is the engine. The fuel is the Holy Spirit. When the Christian begins to understand what is “under the hood” of the Christian life, what a difference this makes! Instead of struggling, trying to make the Christian life work by your own strength and power, you suddenly experience life the way the Lord has designed it to work. The Gospel is the power which energizes the Christian life.

The Meaning of the Gospel

Let's take a quick look at this word “Gospel” which the Bible uses so frequently. What does it really mean?

Most people know that the original word for “Gospel” in the Bible means “good news.” Yes, but it actually means much more than that.

The word which we translate “Gospel” is the Greek word *evangelion*. This is where we get the English words “evangelist” and “evangelism” from. But in Paul's day, the word *evangelion* was not a religious word. It was a military term.

In ancient days, when a battle had been won, a herald would be dispatched to run back to the home city with the good news of the victory. As he ran through the city's streets, he would cry out, “Gospel! Gospel!” A great crowd would then gather to hear the good news of the victory.

Read 2 Timothy 1:11

This is why Paul calls himself a herald. What he had in mind was the herald who ran with the *evangelion*, the good news of a victory already won. We too are called to herald the good news of the Gospel. And as heralds-in-training, let's have a look at the Gospel we've been called to proclaim.

A Whole Gospel

The Gospel is the salvation of God in action. But it is much more than just the entry point to the Christian life – a salvation message that we need when we are first saved, but then we no longer need except when we share it with those who don't yet believe. No, the Gospel is about God's salvation *continuing* to work in our lives. The Gospel is not just God's method of salvation. It is also God's method of life.

The Gospel is designed by God to embrace your total life. It is a *whole* Gospel for the *whole* Christian life.

Read Romans 1:17

The New International Version of the Bible translates this verse in this way:

“For in the gospel a righteousness *from God* is revealed, a righteousness that is *by faith from first to last*...”

This reveals three things about the Gospel:

- It is from God
- It is by faith
- It is from first to last

Let's have a look at each of these three descriptions.

From God

The Gospel describes a righteousness that is “from God.” These two words summarize the whole orientation of the Gospel. It is a God-to-you direction, not the other way around.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:6

The Gospel sets the compass bearing of your life to a “from God” bearing, not a “from me” bearing. The Gospel returns your life to the orientation that God created you for.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

In verse 17, Paul summarizes the entire Gospel is one sentence. Then note how, in verse 18, he says, “All this is from God...” All what is from God? Everything he just wrote in verse 17. The new creation life, which is the subject of the Gospel, will only work in a “from God” orientation.

Every religion, philosophy and ideology in the world relies on self-effort to change a person. Only the Gospel is different. The power that is released by the Gospel is not “from me” but “from God.”

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7

By faith

The Gospel reveals the way we receive the gift of righteousness in Christ – “by faith” (see **Philippians 3:8-9**). God has designed the Christian life in such a way that as we release our faith toward God, he releases his power toward us.

Read Hebrews 12:2

Note that Jesus is not just the *author* of our faith. He is also the *finisher* of our faith. Faith is not just the starting point of the Christian life. It is also the finish-

ing point – and everything in between. It is the very basis of our approval before God.

Read Hebrews 11:6

From first to last

The Gospel is about a life that operates by faith *from start to finish*. Every born-again believer knows that we are saved by faith (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). But many have still to discover that the whole Christian life is also lived by faith (**Romans 1:17**).

Read Colossians 2:6

This verse tells us that how we begin with Christ is also how we continue to live in him. How does the Christian life begin? We begin by faith in the saving power of God. And the Gospel reveals that we live the whole Christian life by faith in the same saving power of God. This is the secret to the Christian life – it's all by faith! From beginning to end, the Christian relies on a total dependence upon God to do what we cannot do ourselves. The Christian life is a “from first to last” experience!

Read Galatians 2:20

The Gospel does two principal things:

- It *introduces* us to Christ (**Ephesians 1:13**) – “from first.”
- It *establishes* us in Christ (**Romans 16:25**) – “to last.”

The Two Halves of the Gospel

It is one Gospel, but that one Gospel has two distinct halves. We need to understand both halves in order to understand the whole Gospel.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

This verse encapsulates the entire Christian experience. And it also summarizes the entire power of the Gospel, showing clearly its two halves:

The old has gone...

The first half of the Gospel describes how God got rid of your old life. On the Cross, Jesus took the judgment you deserved so that you could be set free. This resulted in many incredible benefits for you:

- Your sins have been wiped away by his blood (**Ephesians 1:7-8**)
- You now have a relationship with God free from condemnation (**Romans 5:1-2; 8:1**)
- You have received eternal life as a free gift from God (**John 5:24**)

In summary, the first half of the Gospel reveals how your past has been wiped clean and you have been given a brand new start with God.

The new has come...

The second half of the Gospel describes the new life we now have in Christ. God sent his Spirit into our lives to outwork his salvation in our daily lives. Thus the Gospel reveals a number of ongoing benefits:

- The Holy Spirit enables you to overcome sin (**Romans 6:14**)
- The Holy Spirit transforms you into the likeness of God's Son (**Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18**)
- The Holy Spirit empowers you to be witnesses for Christ (**Acts 1:8**)

In summary, the second half of the Gospel reveals how your new life works through the power of God's Spirit.

This is the wonder of the Gospel! Not only do we have *eternal* life (the first half of the Gospel), but we also have *abundant* life right now (the second half of the Gospel).

Read **John 10:10**

Old Me, New Me

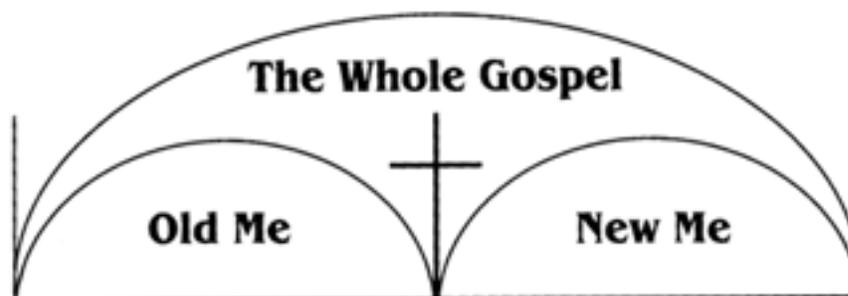
Do you believe **2 Corinthians 5:17**? I mean, *really* believe it? Take a closer look at what it says.

Note that it doesn't say: "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation *sometime soon*; the old has *mostly* gone, the new has *mostly* come." No, Paul here speaks in absolute terms:

"Therefore, if *anyone* is in Christ, he *is* a new creation; the old *has gone*, the new *has come!* All this is *from God...*"

Note the tenses. If you are in Christ, when are you a new creation? When has the old gone? When has the new come?

This is our first window in on the nature of the Gospel. The Gospel deals *totally* with your old life and *totally* with your new life. To illustrate it, let's take a look at the diagram below:



This is the essence of understanding the whole Gospel:

- The Gospel is God's *total* solution for the "old me"
- The Gospel is God's *total* solution for the "new me"

If we are to understand "God's grace in all its truth," we must understand the Gospel's answer to the "old me" and the Gospel's answer to the "new me". This old me/new me solution lies at the core of the Gospel's comprehensive answer to the human predicament. And this is what we will be exploring as we progress through this module.

A Gospel Emptied of Power?

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5

The Bible consistently speaks of aggressive action of Satan to thwart God's purposes by negating the power of the Gospel. In his letter to Timothy, Paul speaks a type of person who has "a form of godliness," yet denies its power. But is that possible? Can the Gospel be emptied of its power?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4

The Gospel is Satan's undoing (see **Colossians 2:15**). Thus it is his obsession to blind the minds of people to the understanding of what the Gospel is really all about. But Satan's interest in stopping a person from understanding the Gospel doesn't stop when they give their life to Christ. He continues to seek to blind the minds of believers "so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."

Satan seeks to negate the power of the Gospel for the Christian life in three ways:

- He seeks to *distract* from the Gospel
- He seeks to *reduce* the Gospel
- He seeks to *add to* the Gospel

Through this strategy of *distracting* a Christian away from the Gospel's core orientation (Christ), *reducing* a Christian's understanding of what the Gospel is really all about (the power of God released for the whole life), and *adding* to the Gospel (by perverting it with the philosophies and methodologies of the world), Satan succeeds in watering down the power of the Gospel so that it has almost no effect in the day to day life of a Christian. In the words of Dr J. I. Packer:

"You cannot add to [the Gospel] without subtracting from it. By augmenting it, you cannot enrich it; you can only impoverish it."

Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

Here Paul says that he refused to preach the Gospel with words of human wisdom "lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." This is a remarkable statement. What Paul is saying is that it is *possible* for the cross of Christ to be emptied

of its power if we do not understand how it works! Oh, how vital it is that we understand how to work with the Lord within the parameters he has set, lest we end up working at cross-purposes to him.

At the core of the Gospel lies the Cross of Christ. Anything that distracts from the Cross waters down the power of the Gospel. The Christian life will then be substandard, as will be church life. Everything the Holy Spirit does in our life revolves around the finished work of the Cross. But if we do not fully understand the Gospel – if there are gaps in our comprehension of the finished work of the Cross – then we will naturally try to fill in the missing parts with other things.

The Bible has a name for any philosophy or teaching drawn from the world that tries to plug the holes in our understanding of the Gospel. It calls them “different” gospels “which [are] really no gospel at all.”

Read Galatians 1:6-7

Read 2 Corinthians 11:2-4

Paul speaks harshly to both the Galatian and Corinthian churches, rebuking them for turning aside from the pure course of the Gospel. Such is the imperative for us as believers to understand and embrace the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – not just in part, but in totality.

As we go through this module, we will discover what the pure course of the Gospel is. The resounding motto of the Church must be and will be:

The Gospel.
The *whole* Gospel.
And nothing *but* the Gospel.

Only the pure Gospel produces pure results. Only the whole Gospel releases the whole power of God for the whole Christian life. Step by step, it unfolds the incomparable wisdom of God in action. This wisdom is not just learned about; it is experienced in the Gospel. Let’s begin a marvellous journey of discovery as we uncover what has been in the Gospel all along, just waiting for us to discover!

¹ Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*, Vol.3, Romans 1:16, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.