

## The Power of the Gospel

# 22

## A Gospel of War

The Gospel is a Gospel of war. The Cross was God's strategic assault upon the condition of sin and death that reigned supreme over human destiny. So far in this module we've examined only the issue of man's broken relationship with God, but there is another factor in the equation. Unless this factor is understood and addressed, the Gospel cannot have its full impact upon the human condition.

### Read 1 John 5:19

The Gospel not only deals with humanity's broken relationship with God. It also deals with humanity's broken authority. The Gospel is God's response to the broken authority of the world's system.

Let's take a brief look at what the Gospel has been designed to address.

## Identifying the Enemy

### Read Ephesians 2:1-2

Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air" (KJV) and "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (NIV). This statement identifies both the official title of Satan and his sphere of influence. His authority operates within the parameters of disobedience.

Elsewhere, Jesus refers to him as "the prince of this world" (**John 14:30; 16:11**). This denotes the measure of authority that Satan possesses and expresses over the world's system. To be a prince, in its scriptural sense, means that authority is exercised over a territory. Just as the territory ruled over by a king is called a "kingdom," so the territory ruled over by a prince is called a "principality."

### Read Luke 4:5-7

This passage reveals both the extent of Satan's authority and its origin. The Bible says that Satan showed Jesus in an instant "*all* the kingdoms of the world." Satan then says that *all of this* belongs to him, and then hints at why this is so: "...for it has been *given* to me."

In the Garden of Eden, Satan obtained the title and rights of the world system. By rebelling against God, Adam and Eve unwittingly places themselves, and every future generation, under the authority of Satan.

### Read Colossians 1:13

As we have already seen, the Gospel has been designed by God to reverse this condition. The Gospel frees you from Satan's authority and brings you under God's authority. It breaks the chains of slavery to sin and death and releases you to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Naturally, this brings God into direct confrontation with Satan's "dominion of darkness."

To fully understand the Gospel, we need to understand God himself, for the Gospel is simply an extension of who God is. So far we have looked at specific aspects of God's nature – his love, holiness and wisdom – and have seen how these are reflected in the Gospel. Now we will examine one other aspect of God's nature and we'll see how the Gospel perfectly echoes who God is.

## A God of War

Every part of the Christian life is related to the nature of God. Who God is reflects on who we are. What God does reflects in what we do. Now it is true that God is a God of love (**1 John 4:10**), but he is also:

- A God of anger (**Psalm 7:6,11-13**)
- A God of hatred (**Isaiah 61:8; Proverbs 6:16-19**)
- A God of vengeance (**Psalm 94:1-10; Hebrews 10:30-31**)
- A God of war (**Exodus 15:3**)

Note that all these attributes are untainted by sin and tie in with God's nature of love. In his anger, God does not sin (note **Ephesians 4:26**). And his hatred is pure and righteous, the reaction of his heart to the destructiveness of sin. It's God's love for people that takes him to war.

### Read Isaiah 42:13

The 19th century military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, in his epic book, *On War*, stated:

“Two different motives make men fight one another: *hostile feelings* and *hostile intentions*.”<sup>1</sup>

We know that Satan has plenty of both. But so does the Lord! God has intensely hostile feelings about sin and the ruin it brings to people's lives. And he has hostile intentions. The Cross of Christ was an act of war directed against Satan's rule.

## A Declaration of War

The Gospel is a declaration of war against the authority and plans of Satan. The Gospel has many important goals for you personally, including:

- Setting you free from sin (**Romans 6:6-14**)
- Reconciling you to God (**Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20**)
- Conforming you to the image of Christ (**Romans 8:29**)

But the overall aim of the Gospel – its overarching purpose – can be summarized by just one verse – **Ephesians 1:10**:

“...to bring *all things* in heaven and on earth together *under one head*, even Christ.”

As far as Satan is concerned, this is as hostile an intention as you can get. Is it any wonder he is so aggressively opposed to the Gospel? For in the Gospel is the undoing of Satan’s dominion.

### Read Matthew 11:12

From the moment of John the Baptist’s appearance on the scene, the kingdom of God has been on the advance, eating into Satan’s dominion one large bite at a time. Prior to the Cross, the cutting edge of this invasion was just a handful of men – Jesus, John and their disciples. But with the birth of the Church, this invasion army began to swell its ranks at an ever-increasing rate.

### Read Matthew 16:18

Carl von Clausewitz observed that war is “the impact of opposing forces.”<sup>2</sup> As the vanguard of God’s strategy of warfare, the Church’s mandate is to storm the gates of hell. Note that this is an offensive action, not a defensive one. The gates of Hades, Jesus says, will not be able to withstand the assault of the Church.

The Church is the Gospel embodied. Is it any wonder, therefore, that the Church is the cutting edge of God’s invasion plan!

### Read Ephesians 3:10

## The Victory Won

### Read John 12:31

The coming of Jesus was a direct assault against Satan’s authority over this world. Jesus’ mission involved two inter-related aspects. He was sent on...

- A seek-and-save mission (**Luke 19:10**)
- A seek-and-destroy mission (**1 John 3:8**)

The point in time when the tide turned in this strategic attack on Satan’s authority was the Cross of Christ.

### Read Colossians 2:15

Satan is a defeated enemy. This cannot be overstated. The Cross was the point of that defeat. To get a full impression of what this means to Satan, let’s look at **Colossians 2:15** from the vantage of a number of Bible translations:

**The New International Version:** “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

**New King James Version:** “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in [the cross].”

**New Century Version:** “God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.”

**New Living Translation:** “In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.”

**The New Testament in Modern English:** “And then, having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, he exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in his final glorious triumphant act!”

**The Message:** “He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.”

**The Amplified Bible:** “[God] disarmed the principalities and powers ranged against us and made a bold display and public example of them, in triumphing over them in Him and in it [the cross].”

Just as the Gospel deals *totally* with your old self and *totally* with your new self, so the Gospel also deals *totally* with Satan’s defeat. And like everything else in the Gospel, there is a *once-for-all* aspect and a *daily* aspect to Satan’s defeat.

### ***Satan’s once-for-all defeat***

The Cross dealt a death blow to Satan’s dominion. Satan may still be active in the world, but he is in his death throes. At Calvary, Satan was knocked out, and at present his dominion is still in the ring but down for the count.

### ***Satan’s daily defeat***

This does not mean that Satan is now cowering in a corner with his tail between his legs. His demons still thrive in the darkness of this world, mustering their forces to resist the onslaught of the Gospel. But they cannot stop the inevitable. Every day they lose people to the kingdom of God. Every day they experience the power of the Gospel cutting into their ranks.

### **Read Luke 11:17-22**

This passage shows clearly the two aspects of Satan’s defeat – the once-for-all defeat and the daily defeat.

- **The binding of the strong man:** The strong man was bound at the Cross. This was when he was “disarmed” and “triumph[ed] over.”

- **The plundering of his goods:** Each day we are applying the victory of the Cross to the oppression and tyranny of Satan's dominion. This plundering is effected through healing, the casting out of evil spirits and the setting free of Satan's captives.

### Read Mark 3:27

As a soldier in the ranks of God's kingdom, it is imperative to know what your responsibility is. Determining what is your responsibility in this warfare (and, equally important, what is *not* your responsibility) is dependent on ascertaining what is part of the finished work of the Cross and what is not. It is not the responsibility of the Christian to bind the strong man. It is the responsibility of the Christian to plunder the strong man's goods. The first is a once-for-all victory. The second is the daily outworking of that victory in ongoing warfare.

This is vitally important. We are not trying to get the victory. As believers in Christ, we already have the victory. The position we move from is a position of an *already won* victory. We are moving *from* victory *to* victory.



Everything that we have studied so far in Module 102 – all that we have learned about God's solution to the old self and God's prescription for the new self – is the Gospel's answer to the issue of Satan's usurped authority. Remember: There is no answer outside of the Gospel. Everything that pertains to life and godliness falls within the parameters of the Gospel.

Do you want to read one scripture which sums up the Gospel's answer to Satan's dominion?

### Read Romans 6:6

Think about it for a moment. Where does Satan gain his authority? From the old self – not just your *individual* old self, but the *corporate* old self that is fallen humanity. This corporate old self is Satan's power base, the sole authority he has to rule over this world. It is the unregenerate human nature which is the basis of

his rights to rule and that's where he focuses his authority to bind up an individual's life. And guess what God did with that hideous old self, infested as it was with demonic activity! He crucified it in Christ on the Cross!

At the Cross, Satan's right to rule was demolished in one fell stroke. His authority to bind a person's life was also dissolved. Although he continues to rule and to bind people, when confronted by the reality of the Gospel, he must back down. This is the simplicity and beauty of the Gospel solution. God's solution for the entire human predicament is found in the Cross!

There are two vital things we need to understand about the nature of the battle we are in:

- Satan is in defensive mode
- God is in offensive mode

Now just because Satan is in defensive mode does not mean that he will not attack. As any military strategist will tell you, the best defence is a good offence. But even in his most vicious attacks, Satan is simply trying to stave off the inevitable. God's purpose will prevail!

In the same way, just because our side is on the offence does not mean we should not prepare adequate defences against our enemy's attack.

**Read Ephesians 6:10-17**

## **The Wiles of the Enemy**

Having looked at God's strategy in the Gospel, let's now examine Satan's counter-strategy. There are two parts to Satan's work:

- To blind
- To bind

### ***To blind***

Since the Gospel is the devil's undoing, Satan and his forces stand in direct opposition to people understanding and receiving the Gospel.

**Read 2 Corinthians 4:4**

Satan is called "the god of this age" (NIV) or "the god of this world" (KJV). His primary activity is to blind the minds of people so that they cannot see the Gospel, for the moment they understand and receive the Gospel, his basis for authority over their lives is dissolved.

### ***To bind***

Once he has successfully blinded a person's mind to the truth of the Gospel, Satan then has free rein to bind and oppress that person.

**Read Luke 13:16**

As we confront the Enemy's activity in people's lives, we are called to address these two principal activities in people's lives – the blinding of deception and the binding of sin. This is how the once-for-all victory declared by the Gospel is applied in the here-and-now in people's lives.

## The Weapons of Our Warfare

### Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

The weapons with which we fight this battle with Satan's forces are not the world's weapons. They are weapons with divine power. They are weapons of the Gospel. Only the power and authority of the Gospel can directly assault the strongholds of lies and deception that has been built by the Enemy in the minds and lives of people.

### Read Luke 10:19

As a disciple of Jesus, you have been given authority that can be exercised against "serpents and scorpions." These two creatures illustrate the nature of Satan's work in people's lives.

### *Serpents*

#### Read 2 Corinthians 11:3

The serpent was known for its craftiness (**Genesis 3:1**) and its patience as a hunter. There was once an experiment conducted where a mouse was placed in a terrarium that contained a snake. The snake was well camouflaged and remained stone still, but the mouse sensed something was wrong. It was nervous and jumpy, looking for the hidden danger. But after a while, the mouse began to calm down. Still the snake did not move, until finally, after the mouse was completely relaxed, it made its move in one lightning strike.

The *Dictionary of the Bible* describes this aspect of Satan's wiles:

"Animated by an unrelenting hatred against God and all goodness, Satan is engaged in a world-wide and age-long struggle against God, ever seeking to defeat the divine plans of grace toward mankind and to seduce people to evil and ruin. His primary method is that of deception – about himself, his purpose, his activities, and his coming defeat..."<sup>3</sup>

There is the serpent-like aspect to the Enemy's nature. He deceives people, lulling them into thinking that all is well. This is the *blinding* aspect of his strategy.

### *Scorpions*

In Scripture, scorpions represent cruelty and torture (read **1 Kings 12:11**; **Revelation 9:3,5,10**). A scorpion sting can be painful if not fatal. Once the Enemy has

\* Just because a person has given their life to the Lord does not mean that Satan's strategy of blinding and binding immediately ceases. Even if a Christian understands a part of the Gospel (for example, the first quarter), Satan will seek to continue to blind their mind to the rest of the Gospel. As long as a Christian does not see in the Gospel the basis of their victory over Satan, demonic forces can continue to play havoc in their lives.



blinded a person's mind to the nature of the Gospel, he can then cruelly play with his victim, oppressing and torturing him.\* By aligning his life away from God, a person, by default, aligns himself with the Enemy and suffers the consequences of his submission to a sadistic ruler.

This is the scorpion-like aspect to the Enemy's nature. Having blinded a person's mind, he then seeks to inflict pain. This is the *binding* aspect of his strategy.

The serpent and the scorpion represent the full arsenal of Satan's dominion. They represent the blinding of deception and the binding of sin. And you have been given authority to "trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome *all* the power of the enemy." This authority you have received is the authority of the Gospel.

## The Authority of the Gospel

The Gospel is God's answer to man's total need. If there is anything blocking a person's access to God – whether it be sin, deception or outright rebellion – then the Gospel deals with this decisively, completely and with an authority delegated directly from the throne of God.

### Read Matthew 16:19

As an heir to the throne of God (**Galatians 4:7**), you have been given "the keys of the kingdom," the same keys that Jesus now holds in his hands (note **Revelation 1:18; 3:7**). This authority is expressed in "binding" and "loosing."

Now it's important to understand the flow of authority released in this binding and loosing. The *New International Version* translates **Matthew 16:19** in this way:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

From this translation, it would appear that the flow of authority is from you to God. You do the binding, and God backs you up. You do the loosing, and God backs you up.

But the sense of the original Greek is actually slightly different. According to the Linguistic Key to the New Testament, **Matthew 16:19** would probably be better rendered this way:

"...whatever you bind on earth will have [*already*] been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have [*already*] been loosed in heaven."

Can you see the difference in the way this is translated? The flow of authority is now from God's throne to you, then through you to the situation that needs to be bound or loosed. Once again, the secret to ministry is in closeness with God – doing what you see the Father doing, and obeying the instructions you hear from him.



God has decided to bind and to loose the Enemy in specific situations, according to his sovereign will, as part of the forward thrust of the Gospel. And the means by which he has chosen to do this is you! When you bind the Enemy's activity in a person's life, it is because this has already been decreed in heaven. When you loose a person from the power of Satan, it is because God has already announced it should be so.

## A Military Mandate

### Read Acts 26:17-18

Paul's commission from God in his mission to the Gentiles was very clear. It involved three closely related things:

- To open their eyes
- To turn them from darkness to light
- To turn them from the power of Satan to God

The result of this three-pronged commission would be that people would "receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [God]."

This commission is essentially that same commission you have received. Like Paul, you have been sent into the world to bring people back to God, but as you do so, you will come into direct confrontation with the Enemy. This is why, in **Ephesians 6:12** (NKJV), Paul said:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

As the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must realize that the war is on. We are not called to lie down in the dust for Satan to tread over us (read **Isaiah 51:22-23; 52:1-2**). Nor are we simply to wait for the Enemy to attack us.

Yours is not just a defensive warfare, a matter of parrying Satan's attacks. You are called to be a part of God's elite troops, to take the battle into enemy territory in order to see people released from his grip.

### Read Romans 16:20

As you step forward in taking the Gospel out into the world, God's promise is that *he* will crush Satan beneath our feet. It is in the forward movement of the Gospel that Satan experiences the daily outworking of a once-for-all defeat.

<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Dictionary of the Bible*, excerpted from *Compton's Interactive NIV*.

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