

The Power of the Gospel

24

The Gospel We Preach

In this last lesson of **Module 102**, we will be looking at the content of the Gospel which we minister to others.

Read Matthew 24:14

The Gospel is not just something we receive; it is something we share with others. The Gospel is designed to be preached. Once you have had a revelation of the wonder of the Gospel, it is possible to hold back from sharing with others?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:16

Paul was *compelled* to preach the Gospel. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he identifies the source of that compulsion.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14

It was the love of Christ that compelled Paul to preach the Gospel. It was a revelation of the Gospel itself which drove Paul and others to tell as many people as they could about the love of Christ.

Read Acts 8:4

The word translated “preached” here has the sense of “to prattle.” Everywhere the believers went, they “prattled” or “gossiped” the Gospel. In this sense, we are *all* called to preach. We are all ambassadors for Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:18-20**). We are all heralds of the Gospel message.

Wherever the early Christians preached, they saw great fruit (**Colossians 1:6**). Everywhere “the word of God grew and multiplied” in and through the lives of those coming to the Lord. This was because the full power of the Gospel was unleashed in their preaching.

The Gospel We Preach

The results we get depends upon the gospel we preach. If we preach a deficient Gospel, this will result in deficient Christian lives and deficient churches. It is the

whole Gospel which releases the *whole* of God's power to change a person's life.

The Gospel's power is in its simplicity. Don't ever be tempted to add to the message of the Gospel or adapt it to suit the needs of the hearers. The message of the Gospel can be communicated in a great variety of ways and through innovative means, but the Gospel itself never changes.*

In our preaching of the Gospel, there are two things we should never do:

Do not add to the message

Read Proverbs 30:5-6

Your responsibility as a preacher of the Gospel is to communicate God's message to people. But the Gospel is not a do-it-yourself add-extra-ingredients kind of message. Any hybridization of the Gospel simply weakens it (note again **1 Corinthians 1:17**). The power of God is released in the communication of the *pure* Gospel message.

The Message renders **Colossians 1:27** in an interesting way:

“The mystery in a nutshell is this: Christ is in you, therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. That is the substance of our Message. We preach *Christ*, warning people not to add to the Message.”

This was why Paul preached “in weakness and fear, and with much trembling” (**1 Corinthians 2:3**) and why he did not rely on “wise and persuasive words, but [on] a demonstration of the Spirit's power” (**1 Corinthians 2:4**). He refused to preach outside of the parameters of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (**1 Corinthians 2:2**).

Read again 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Do not subtract from the message

Read 2 Corinthians 4:2

There is a temptation, when sharing the Gospel with someone, to make it more palatable, easier to receive. But if we reduce the Gospel message to what is “acceptable” to the hearer we do not do them any service. Although the wisdom of Mary Poppins may be that “a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down,” sugar-coating the Gospel only produces sickly Christians with a sweet-tooth for God's blessings.

In **Deuteronomy 4:2**, God commanded the people of Israel:

“Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.”

A New Testament version of this might read something like this:

* We always need to pioneer innovative ways to communicate the Gospel to people under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But while our *communication* of the Gospel message needs to be constantly re-invented so as to be relevant to our hearers, the Gospel itself is *always* relevant.

“Do not add to [the Gospel] and do not subtract from it, but [preach the Gospel of Christ] that I give you.”

But what does this mean when it comes to sharing the Gospel with someone? Does this mean that I have to share the *whole Gospel* in one sitting? After all, it's taken us 24 lessons in the Online Bible College to explain the *essence* of the Gospel, and even then we have not exhausted all that the Gospel means for us! Do I have to communicate all four quarters of the Gospel to an unbeliever before he or she can decide to follow Christ? Should I be explaining that Jesus not only died for them, but that they also died in Christ?

We need to understand that there is an *immediate* part to the Gospel and a *continuing* part to the Gospel. The first is the entry point to salvation and the second is the basis for walking with God. The first in the new birth experience; the second is the growing experience.

We must remember that the Gospel message is not complex! It is deep, but simple! All that a person needs to understand and receive at the beginning of their Christian walk is the *seed* of the Gospel – that part which, when planted in their hearts, brings forth the life of God. It is *after* a person receives Christ that his or her understanding of the Gospel needs to grow. The seed of the Gospel must flower and produce fruit.

The Seed of the Gospel

Read 1 Peter 1:23

Jesus described the message of the Gospel as being like a seed (**Luke 8:4-15**). Once planted in a person's heart, this seed then brings forth the full life of God.

What is this seed? Charles Spurgeon described it succinctly when he wrote:

“My entire theology can be condensed into four words: ‘Jesus died for me.’¹

This is the seed of the Gospel – “Jesus died for me.” There is nothing complex about it. It is small, it is plantable, yet it is full of the life of God. It is not the Gospel *reduced* as much as it is the Gospel *encapsulated*. When that seed is mixed with faith and planted into a receptive heart, the result is eternal life.

All that a person needs to understand is, “Jesus died for me.” A response by faith to that one statement introduces a person to the kingdom of God and brings the gift of eternal life.. It is so simple, even a child can understand it.

Yet this statement is at the same time both simple and deep. For it demands an intelligent response in answer to these questions:

- Why did Jesus die on the Cross for me?
- What did the Cross do for me?
- What should my response to the Cross be?

As you can see, the seed of the Gospel is just the starting point of the Christian

experience. It is the gateway into greater and greater revelation of the finished work of the Cross.

The seed of the Gospel comes in many shapes and forms. As you read the Bible, you will never find a set formula. God shapes that seed according to the need of the individual hearer.

Note the following passages and the many different shapes this “seed of the Gospel” comes in:

Read Acts 2:36-41

Read Acts 3:12-26

Read Acts 5:29-32

Read Acts 8:30-38

Read Acts 10:34-44

Read Acts 13:16-43

Read Acts 16:30-34

Read Acts 17:22-34

Do you notice how differently the message is presented on each occasion? It was the same Gospel message, yet geared to different hearers in different situations. Our presentation of the Gospel will differ from person to person, and situation to situation, but whatever the occasion, the seed of the Gospel should contain two vital elements:

- Believe
- Repent

All too often, we preach only *half* the seed of the Gospel to the unbeliever. If we have a Gospel which *only* leads a person to *believing* in Christ, we are potentially crippling that person’s future walk with God. When Peter told the crowd to “repent” in **Acts 2:38**, he saw this as equivalent to “sav[ing] yourselves from this corrupt generation” (**Acts 2:40**). The issue at stake is not so much faith in Christ as it is *obedience through faith in Christ*.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:13

Paul talks here about “the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ.” To truly believe on Christ means you *must* repent from sin and the world! As we have previously seen in **2 Peter 1:4**, “escap[ing] the corruption in the world” and “participat[ing] in the divine nature” go hand in hand.

A Gap in the Gospel Seed

If we preach only a partial Gospel seed, this will result in malformed, weak births. If Christians are experiencing continuing difficulties in their walk with God, we must go back to square one and examine the Gospel they received.

Read Acts 2:36

It was at the point of *two* revelations of Jesus – that he was both Lord and Christ – that Peter’s hearers “were cut to the heart.” These two revelations are also essential to the seed of the Gospel. For the Jews of Peter’s day, the term “Christ” was broadly equivalent to our term “Savior.” Thus the dual revelation that comes with the seed of the Gospel is a revelation of Jesus as both Savior and Lord.

Jesus as Savior

Read Hebrews 5:8-9

This is the very first relationship we can ever have with Jesus. We cannot know God as Father or Friend until we first have had a revelation of Jesus as Savior – the One who died for us and rescued us from Satan’s kingdom.

Read Hebrews 2:10

Discovering Jesus as Savior is one of the most amazing revelations of the Gospel. But this is not enough to launch a person into the fullness of everything that the Gospel has in store for them.

Think of it this way. If you were swimming at the beach and found yourself caught in a rip tide, you might struggle to get free and quickly discover that you did not have enough strength to get back to shore. As a last desperate measure, you put up your hand, signalling the lifeguards on the beach that you are in trouble. Moments later, a lifeguard dives into the water and swims toward you, pulling you back to the safety of the shore.

You have just been saved by a “savior.” You would naturally express tremendous gratitude to this savior. You may even invite him over for dinner. But just because he is your savior does not mean that you will continue in any depth of relationship with him. Discovering someone as savior invokes great gratitude, but does not necessarily establish a daily relationship.

In the same way, your relationship with Christ cannot be based simply on a revelation of him as Savior. There is yet another dimension of him for you to discover.

Jesus as Lord

Read Romans 1:4

Discovering Jesus as Savior is your passport into the kingdom of God. But once inside the kingdom of God, your relationship with Christ takes on another dimension. You discover and confess Christ as Lord of your life!

Read Romans 10:8-10

Now knowing Christ as Lord is very different from knowing him as a Savior. To know Jesus as Lord demands an ongoing relationship of love and obedience to him (note **John 15:9-14**). Both these revelations – Jesus as Savior and Jesus as Lord – are intrinsic to the seed of the Gospel.

Read 2 Peter 3:18

It is vitally important that we don't just preach Jesus as Savior but also Jesus as Lord (note **2 Corinthians 4:5**). If we fail to impress this truth on a new convert from the very beginning, they will experience a continuing fallout in their walk with God.

Read Colossians 2:6

How we begin the Christian life is very important. Paul here encouraged the Colossian Christians to continue in the same vein in which they had received Jesus. Let's take a closer look at his instruction to the Colossians:

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus *as Lord*, continue to live in him...”

This instruction reflects on how Paul had originally preached the Gospel to the Colossians. He had instructed them to receive Christ Jesus as Lord of their lives. Now to see for a moment what would happen if we preach only half the seed of the Gospel, let's temporarily substitute the word “Savior” for “Lord.”

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus *as Savior*, continue to live in him...”

However you receive Christ, that is how you will continue to live in him. If you receive him merely as Savior, then you will continue to relate to him merely as your Savior. Many Christians are like that today. They are in continual “salvation mode.” Whenever they face problems in their life, that is what Jesus is there for. They call out for help. They call out for a Savior.

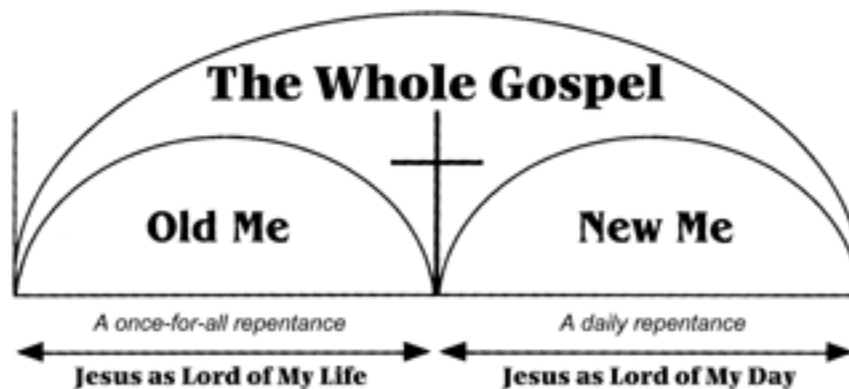
Now we know that Jesus is our Savior. He continues to fulfil this function in our lives. When we need healing, he heals us. When we are in trouble, he rescues us. He will forever be the “author of [our] salvation” (**Hebrews 2:10**, NIV). But if this is all we know Christ as, we will be stuck in an eternal childhood mode. Our sole expression of relationship to God will be the cry of a baby's “I need! I want!”

When you discover Jesus as Lord, you move from “salvation mode” to “obedience mode.” God continues to express his salvation in your life, but your life is no longer me-oriented, but God-oriented. The lordship of your life has been passed from yourself to God!

The Initial Repentance**Read Acts 17:30**

The switch from you being the lord of your own life to Christ being Lord of your life is called repentance. As we have already seen, repentance is a continuing reality in your ongoing walk with God. We have already defined repentance as the realigning of your will with God's will, of your life with God's life.

But it is difficult, if not impossible, to repent in small matters on a daily basis (the second half of the Gospel) unless you have repented once-for-all by relinquishing your rights as the lord of your own life (the first half of the Gospel). It is difficult,



if not impossible, to submit to the Lord on a daily basis unless you have made that ultimate point of submission at the foot of the Cross. The little decisions involved in following the Lord are so much more difficult if the Big Decision has not yet been made.

But the moment we repent once and for all at the foot of the Cross, we are equipped by the Holy Spirit to be able to repent – align our lives with God – on a daily basis.

This one-time repentance involves three things:

- A change of lifestyle (**2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 1:18**)
- A change of ownership (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 7:4**)
- A change of focus (**Hebrews 12:2; Romans 8:5-8**)

As we have seen, this change of focus is a non-negotiable part of the Gospel. By its very definition this is faith in operation, and as the *Amplified Bible* translates **Hebrews 11:6**:

“...without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to [God]...”

In the Gospel, God has changed the center of gravity from *yourself* to *himself*. This God-centered theme flavors the whole Gospel message.

A God-Centered Gospel

Read Romans 11:36

As we have seen in **Module 102**, the Gospel is founded upon this most basic revelation of God’s nature. But much more than just getting a person to give lip service to this statement about God, the Gospel actually enables a person to declare:

“For from him and through him and to him are all things” *in my life!*

This is the foundational creed of the Gospel message. The Gospel is designed to be God-centered and not man-centered. In **2 Corinthians 4:5**, Paul states:

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

Whenever you preach the Gospel, the most important question you can ask yourself is:

Where is the center?

Is your message centered in man or centered in God? Is it from God, through God and to God?

There is no question that the Gospel answers two levels of human need:

- **The perceived need** – the need for healing, for comfort, for companionship, for love, for deliverance, or for any other need that a person recognizes in their life.
- **The core need** – the need for eternal life and reconciliation with God.

The Gospel meets a person's need on both levels. Not only is the core *spiritual* need of eternal life and reconciliation with God resolved, but the Gospel also addresses the perceived *physical* and *emotional* needs. This is a vital part of the salvation message contained in the Gospel. But the focus of the pure Gospel message is always on Christ, not on man. It is because the Gospel is God-centered that it meets every human need.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

This one verse encapsulates the entire meaning of the Gospel, targeting both the *perceived* needs and the *core* need. Any person with a consciously perceived need – whether that need be drug dependence, alcoholism, marriage difficulties or any other expression of the human predicament – has a desire to embrace the reality of **2 Corinthians 5:17**. They may not understand it theologically, but they want to be a new person. They want the old to go and the new to come.

It is at the point of embracing this revelation of total exchange that a person is saved. It doesn't matter that they don't understand everything contained in the Gospel. After all, have you yourself fully plumbed the depths of the Gospel yet? The only thing that a person needs to understand is what God requires of them.

The Art of Counselling

We need to understand that the Gospel is God's answer to 100% of a person's problem – bar nothing. But because the Gospel we preach has often been defective, we often end up with defective Christian lives in our churches.

This endemic problem in our churches is generally addressed through counselling. But we must be careful that we do not take on board the world's counselling methods. It is all too easy to import the latest concepts from self-help pop-psychology, but by doing so, we run the risk of "empty[ing] the cross of its power" (**1 Corinthians 1:17**).

Counselling is important, but we must counsel in the Gospel! When we counsel someone, no matter what the problem may be, we need to bring them to the Cross. We need to stay with them for as long as is necessary until they receive a revelation from God of the power of the Gospel.

In **Matthew 28:19-20**, Jesus did not instruct his disciples to: "Go into all the world and counsel people..." No, he told them to go and "make disciples."

Counselling is a part, but only a small part, of what it means to make a disciple. As we teach and model the Gospel to others, we will then disciple believers *in the Gospel*. We are not just trying to sort out people's problems. We are discipling people to Christ!

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

The Gospel seed is, in its essence, a message of reconciliation (**Colossians 1:21-23**). All that a person needs to understand in order to receive this reconciliation are the terms of that reconciliation. Those terms of reconciliation are the terms of “a contract of exchange.” And the terms of this contract go like this:

You give yourself totally to God and God gives himself totally to you. God takes your sin and gives you his goodness in return. You give him yourself, with all its problems, and he gives you Christ, with all the answers.

The seed of the Gospel is, in its essence, this concept of exchange. But once this exchange has taken place, a new believer embarks on a life-long journey of discovery, finding out everything that now belongs to him because of that once-for-all exchange.

After the Seed

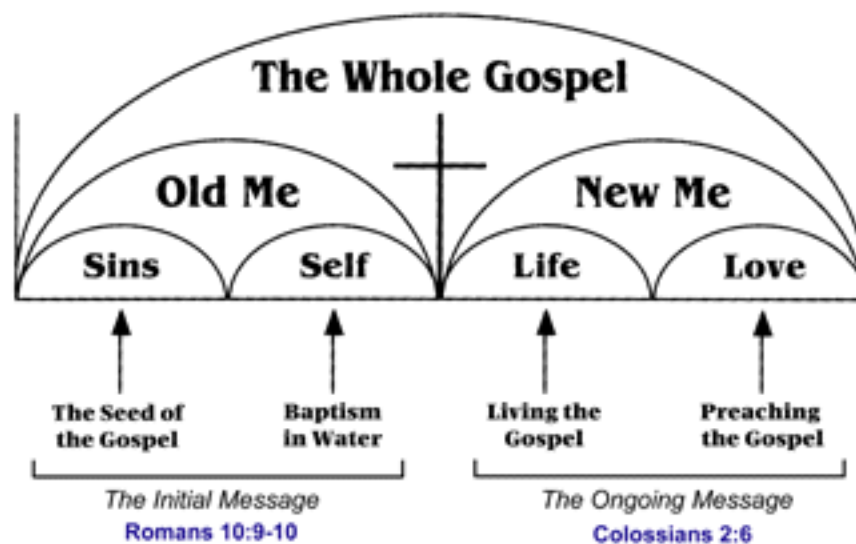
Read Luke 13:18-19

The seed of the Gospel planted in a person’s heart is intended by God to grow and flourish. This takes watering and nurturing. The Bible calls this watering and nurturing process “making disciples.”

Read Matthew 28:19-20

This command of the Lord Jesus is often called “the Great Commission.” But note that the Great Commission is not a command to *evangelize*. It is a command to *make disciples*. And the way we make disciples involves a two-fold process:

- **Baptizing them** – this is the enactment of the Gospel message, the identification of the believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This is the time when the *second quarter* of the Gospel is taught.



- **Teaching them** – this is the ongoing revelation of the Gospel message, conforming the believer to the likeness of Christ. This is the time when the *third and fourth quarters* of the Gospel are taught.

The Great Commission is a command to make disciples. Evangelism is simply the first step in discipling a person. We lead a person to Christ, but from there we train them to walk with Christ. All too often what we are after is *decisions* for Christ, when what God is after is *disciples* for Christ.

A Gospel for the World

When we look at the world, we see the horrific results of Adam’s sin. We see a world torn by war, filled with injustice, stricken by poverty, disease and hunger. People are crying out for an answer. They are looking for that answer in politics, in religion, in activism of all kinds. God’s answer to the problems of the world, however, is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we know that Jesus is the answer to the world, but how do we get Jesus and the world together? It is through *the Church* that Jesus touches the world. It is through *your life* that the answer comes to a sin-ravaged world. Just as Jesus was the Gospel embodied, so God also intends for you to be the Gospel embodied.

Read Romans 16:25-27

Paul here concludes his treatise on the Gospel, written to the Roman Christians, with these words:

“Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ...”

God does not just want you to *understand* the Gospel. He wants to *establish* you in his Gospel. And what will be the result of Christians like yourself being established in the Gospel? God’s declared aim is...

“...so that all nations might believe and obey him.”

It is only as we are established in the truths of the Gospel that the world will be exposed to the power of the Gospel through our lives.

Summarizing the Gospel

The Gospel is described as “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (**2 Corinthians 4:4**) and “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (**1 Timothy 1:11**), a Gospel that Paul was able to say he had “fully proclaimed” (**Romans 15:19**).

In **Module 102**, we have only had the briefest overview of this glorious Gospel. We trust that as you continue to read God’s Word, the Lord will continue to open up new depths in the simplicity of that Gospel.

As we close this module, let’s take a brief tour of the highlights of the Gospel:

First Half of the Gospel	Second Half of the Gospel
The old has gone!	The new has come!
I died in Christ	I was raised in Christ
Dead to sin	Alive to God
Me in Christ	Christ in me
The finished work of the Cross	The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit
My position in Christ	My experience in Christ
Saved by grace	Living by grace
Key phrase: "Once for all"	Key phrase: "Daily"

The Holy Spirit's ongoing work of transformation in your life is based upon the work of redemption completed by Christ upon the Cross. It is a revelation of the finished work of the Cross which lays the foundation for the new creation life in Christ. It is the embracing of the *once-for-all* aspect of the Gospel which launches you into the *daily* walk with God.

In Conclusion

Some years ago, members of the OBC team were staying at the home of a dear elderly man, 103 years of age. When you entered into the room where he was seated, it was like entering into the presence of one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. He had a snowy-white hair with a long beard and sat very erect in his chair. He had known the Lord since he was 20 and had been preaching the Gospel for over 80 years! He was now stone-deaf and almost totally blind, yet the presence of God seemed to hover around him.

During the time we stayed with him, there was one question that burned in our hearts. Yet there was only one way to communicate with him, and that was to write any question we wanted to ask him on a pad of paper always kept beside his chair. So before we left, we wrote out in large letters on the pad:

"Please tell us, in all your walk with the Lord, what is the most important thing you've learned?"

He raised the paper close to his eyes, read slowly, then looked up at us and smiled. His answer, we feel, sums up the entire Gospel:

"It's *all* by grace!"

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers), excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0 (Deluxe Edition).

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