

The Power of the Gospel

5

A Radical Gospel

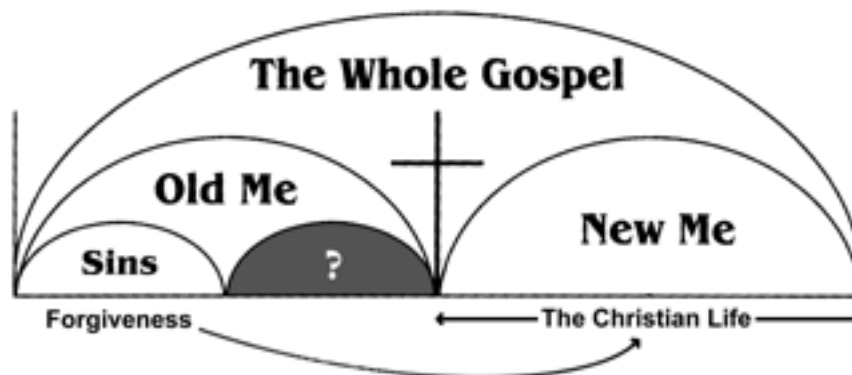
Everything we've been studying until now is all contained in just one fourth of the Gospel – the quarter that deals with your sins. This is unquestionably the most important part of the Gospel, since it:

- Eliminates the barrier of sin that separated you from God – ***forgiveness***
- Confers on you citizenship in heaven – ***eternal life***
- Brings you into God's family as a son and heir – ***adoption***
- Changes the orientation of your life from self-effort to rest – ***grace***

It's important to realize that even if all you've understood and embraced is this first quarter of the Gospel, you are saved. You have eternal life and are a citizen of heaven. You are a child of God and an heir to all that he has prepared for you.

But here's the problem. A Christian can have his eternal salvation secured, yet still not be experiencing the fullness of the Gospel's good news. Many Christians continue to struggle in their day-to-day lives. They know their sins have been forgiven. They know they are now a child of God. Yet sin continues to pull them down, frustrating their walk with God and crippling them with condemnation. Their sins have been forgiven, but the *power* of sin continues to grip their lives.

What has happened is that a major portion of the Gospel's answer to our lives has been missed. Take a look at the diagram below:



Without realizing it, a vast majority of Christians have embraced the salvation offered in the first quarter of the Gospel, then begun to try to walk the Christian life without understanding the second quarter of the Gospel.

Yes, their sins are forgiven. Yes, they have a righteousness that has come from God, giving them bold access into the presence of God. But because a vital part of the Gospel has been neglected or ignored, the rest of the Christian life doesn't work as it is supposed to.

We call the second quarter of the Gospel, the "good news for Christians." The Gospel's solution to the *power* of sin is just as revolutionary and radical as the Gospel's solution to the *separation* caused by sin.

But before we can look at this "good news for Christians," we need to first look at the bad news it is targeting.

More Bad News!

Read Romans 7:14-24

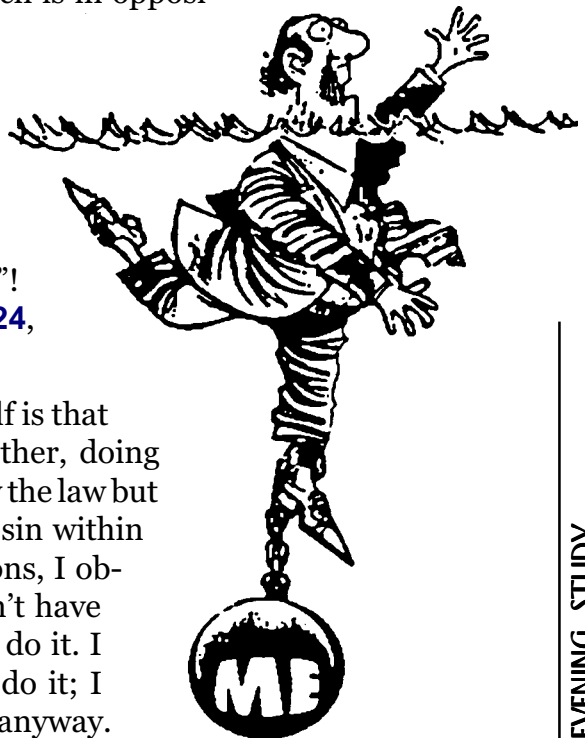
Paul cries out in [verse 24](#), "What a wretched man I am!" The condition he describes seems unbearable. He is torn between a desire to obey the righteous requirements of God's Law and another inner law – the law of sin – which pulls him in the opposite direction.

The problem, as Paul so eloquently describes it in [Romans 7](#), goes like this:

- I desire to align my life to God's will
- There is a power on the inside which is in opposition to God's will
- This inner power is greater than my desire to do God's will
- I am therefore a slave to two opposing masters – God's will and the power of sin

No wonder Paul calls himself "wretched"! Let's take another look at [Romans 7:15-24](#), this time as rendered in *The Message*:

"What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise...For I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway.



My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

“It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?”

Yes, that is the real question. “Is there no one who can do anything for me?” But just in case you think Paul is leaving us in the lurch, he immediately provides us with the answer.

Read Romans 7:25

Here Paul summarizes the answer that the second part of the Gospel brings. Like the first quarter, it is through Jesus Christ that the good news comes.

Many Christians have read **Romans 7:14-24** and assumed that Paul was simply describing his normal Christian experience. But this is not the case. Paul is describing the problem to which he had found the answer.

Do not be fooled by the fact that he writes in the present tense. This is just a grammatical tool he uses to bring the point home with vivid clarity. Paul's declaration, “Thanks be to God – [the answer comes] through Jesus Christ our Lord!” – is the theme of the whole of the book of Romans. And it is this answer that we will be discovering together as we continue in this module. For the nature of the Gospel is this:

Whatever bad news there may be, there is always good news to match it.

The Root of the Problem

The Gospel is radical. It doesn't just deal with the surface issues. It gets right down to the root of the problem.

The Christian is often described as being like a tree. When we look at a tree, we see only what is above the ground – the trunk, the branches, the fruit. But the unseen part of the tree below the ground is just as important – the roots. By looking at the fruit, we can tell what the condition the roots are in.

Read Matthew 12:33

Our actions are likened to fruit. Now the Bible describes clearly two kinds of fruit:

- The fruit of the flesh (**Galatians 5:19-21**)
- The fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**)



Fruit is the visible evidence of the nature of the tree. Most Christians try to fix up bad fruit by plucking the fruit. Through a code of “do this” and “don’t do that” they attempt to pluck the bad fruit from the tree in the hopes that good fruit will begin to grow in its place. There is a serious problem, though. No sooner do you pluck the bad fruit than more bad fruit grows back to take its place.



Read Romans 11:16

The Gospel does not target the fruit of your life but the roots of your life. The Bible not only describes two kinds of fruit; it also describes two kinds of roots:

- Roots in the flesh (read [Jeremiah 17:5-6](#))
- Roots in the Spirit (read [Jeremiah 17:7-8](#))

The word “flesh” means two things. Firstly, it means the “acts of the flesh” (note Galatians 5:19-21) or “self-gratification.” Secondly, it means the “way of the flesh” or “self-effort.” Note how the word “self” is in both definitions. If the roots of a person’s life are planted in self (either self-effort or self-gratification), then those roots are ingrown and will never produce life.

God wants our roots to be in his Spirit. This is the aim of the Gospel. But before this can happen, God must first deal with the old roots.

Read Matthew 3:10

The Cross of Christ was God’s ax, chopping off the old roots so that God could plant new roots. But before we examine in more detail how God dealt with those old roots, let’s take a closer look at exactly what those roots are.

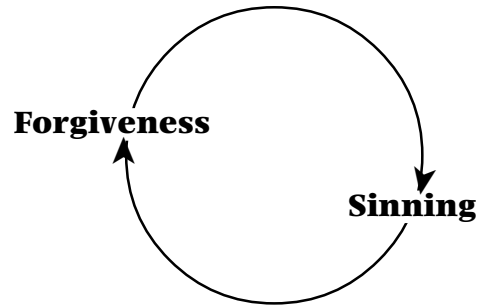


The root of the problem is what the Bible calls “the old man” or the “old self.” It is a sinful human nature inherited from our parents in a line of ancestry that can be traced right back to Adam and Eve. This sinful nature is like a “factory of sin” – unless the factory is put out of operation, sin just keeps on being produced.

During the 1930s, the United States went through a period called Prohibition. The sale and consumption of alcohol was prohibited by federal legislation. Bars and liquor stores closed down. The nation’s stocks of wine, beer and spirits were destroyed. But it didn’t take long before alcohol could again be bought by those who wanted it. Underground distilleries began producing alcohol faster than federal agencies could locate them. Secret bars multiplied around the country. Although alcohol had been prohibited by law, the desire for

alcohol still remained. Prohibition failed, because no one was able to effectively enforce the law. They were able to close the visible bars but they failed to close the underground factory line.

In the same way, many Christians live in a state of spiritual prohibition. They sin, ask God's forgiveness, promise God they will change, but then they find themselves sinning again. They know God's Law, but seem powerless to keep that Law. They have become caught in the forgiveness loop:



Now we know from Scripture that God has made provision for us if we sin (read **1 John 1:9; 2:1-2**). But God's intention is not that we remain in the forgiveness loop. He has not simply prohibited sin. He has dealt a death blow to the power of sin itself. He has dismantled the factory.

Read Romans 8:3-4

The essence of the Gospel is God doing what you cannot do yourself. The Gospel's answer to the dilemma of sin and death is "God did [it] by sending his own Son."

As *The Message* continues to describe in **Romans 8:3-4**:

"God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all."

The Gospel breaks the cycle of sin and death. It deals once and for all with the factory of sin, setting you free to live a life aligned to God's purpose and will. How it does this is the subject of the second quarter of the Gospel.

The Good News for Christians

All true Christians understand that when Jesus died on the Cross, he was taking our place. He was our substitute, dying for us so that we could escape the judgment of God. And this is the truth. Jesus *did* die for you. This is the crux of the first quarter of the Gospel.

But something far more wonderful than even this transpired at the Cross. At the Cross, God didn't simply target the *fruit* of the problem – your sins. He targeted

the *root* of the problem – your self. You are your biggest problem. You may change your environment and alter your circumstances, but the real problem – you – always remains. And so at the Cross, God dealt with the you-problem once and for all – not just your *acts* of sin, but *you yourself*.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14

Not only did Jesus die *for* you, but he also died *as* you. As far as God was concerned, when he looked down upon the Cross, he saw you dying there in Christ. This is the crux of the second quarter of the Gospel.

Read Romans 6:6-7

At the Cross, *you* died in Christ. Your “old self” was crucified once and for all, in order that you “should no longer be [a slave] to sin.” Now note the tense used by Paul in this passage. He is not saying that the old self will be crucified or should be crucified. And he is definitely not saying that you are the one who is supposed to crucify yourself. He says, simply and clearly:

“For we know that our old self *was* crucified with him...”

The Message phrases **Romans 6:6-10** this way:

“Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross of Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life – no longer at sin’s every beck and call!...From now on, think of it this way: Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you; God speaks your mother tongue, and you hang on every word. You are dead to sin and alive to God. That’s what Jesus did.”

Read Romans 6:1-2

This simple fact – that you are dead to sin – is the life-changing truth of the second part of the Gospel. And guess what! Just like the first part of the Gospel, the second part of the Gospel is not *you* doing it, but *God* doing it! It’s by faith and by grace from first to last!

The Finished Work of the Cross

The last words of Jesus on the Cross were: “It is finished!” (**John 19:28-30**). That means there is nothing more that needs to be done. The Cross of Christ is a finished work. This does not mean 80% finished, with 20% left for me to do. It was 100% absolutely finished. Nothing can be added to the plan of redemption that God enacted at the Cross.

Read Hebrews 9:12,26,28

Note the words “once for all” used in these verses. The Cross was a “once for all” work of salvation. This means it was complete and comprehensive, never to be repeated and embracing every single person. Christ does not need to be constantly recrucified every time a person sins. No, the Cross was an act of eternal salvation

– once for all. All we do is embrace this once-for-all fact by faith and it becomes a reality for us.

Some might say, “But how can this be? How can I have died 2000 years ago? How can God have solved my problem before I was even born?”

Think of it this way. Your judgment was taken by Christ on the Cross 2000 years ago, but this only becomes a reality for you when you believe in that finished work. In the same way, God’s Word tells you that your “old self” was also dealt with on the Cross 2000 years ago, yet this only becomes a reality for you when you believe in that finished work.

It is absolutely vital for each of us to understand the nature of the Gospel. At no point does Scripture ever tell you that you must crucify yourself. In fact, even the phrase “dying out to self” is not found anywhere in the Bible. This is because anything that even remotely sounds like something that you need to do yourself is totally against the flow of the Gospel.

Many Christians try to kill themselves off. But they are attempting the impossible. After all, if we could have done it ourselves, then Jesus would not have needed to have died on the Cross, would he? (note **Galatians 2:21**). This ingrained pull toward self-effort is, in fact, evidence in itself that the “old self” is still alive and well, that the truth of the finished work of the Cross has not yet sunk in.

There are two reasons why you shouldn’t try to crucify your old self:

- It displeases God – self-crucifixion is actually self-effort in disguise.
- You don’t *need* to crucify yourself – God has already done it for you!

The Bible doesn’t tell you to die out to yourself. It informs you that in Christ you died. Then it tells you, on the basis of that established fact, what you are supposed to do.

Read Romans 6:11

The word “count” (NIV) or “reckon” (KJV) means “to calculate, to add up the facts, to count as true.” Note in the verse how Paul establishes that there are *two* things we are to count as true for our lives:

- Count yourself *dead to sin*
- Count yourself *alive to God*

Dead to sin and alive to God. These are the two opposites. You cannot be both alive to sin and alive to God. It must be one or the other.

Now, remember what we established in Lesson 101-09 about reading every scripture in its context? Note in **verse 11** how Paul starts this command with, “In the same way...” What is the “same way” he is meaning? In order to find out, we need to read the verse before.

Read Romans 6:10

Paul declares that the death Jesus died “he died to sin *once for all*” and that the life that Jesus now lives “he lives to God.” Then Paul says: “In the same way, count *yourself* dead to sin and alive to God.” Paul is saying that in the same way that Jesus died to sin once for all, so you too are to count yourself dead to sin *once for all!* And in the same way as Jesus now lives a life totally alive to God, so you too are to count yourselves *totally* alive to God.

Read Galatians 5:24

Notice again the tense that Paul is using: “Those who belong to Christ *have* crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”

Notice how God has not left anything for you to do in self-effort. Everything was done in a once-for-all act on the Cross. The only thing left for you to do is believe and take it for yourself. By accepting that Jesus’ death on the Cross was your death on the Cross, God’s grace is released into your life to make it a daily reality for you.

The “problem you” was totally dealt with on the Cross. This is a past-tense, established fact in heaven, a fact that you now appropriate by faith. Never let us get caught in the trap of trying to complete the work of the Cross ourselves.

Read Galatians 2:20

Old Me, New Me

Read Ephesians 4:22-24

Here Paul clearly teaches what is required for you to do. At no point does he say: “Kill off your old self.” Rather, in the light of the finished work of the Cross, Paul tells you to do three things:

- *Put off* the old self
- Be *made new* in the *attitude* of your mind
- *Put on* the new self

Let’s take a brief look at these three instructions:

Put off the old self

Read Ephesians 4:17-19

“So I tell you this,” says Paul, “and *insist* on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do...” Everything Paul lists in **verses 17-19** is a description of the old self that he later tells the Ephesians they must “put off.”

The old self is “corrupted by its deceitful desires” (**Ephesians 4:22**). It is “hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so...[It] cannot please God” (**Romans 8:7-8**). This is why God had to deal with it once and for all on the Cross. There was no way the old self – in its self-gratification, self-effort and self-righteousness – could be allowed to play any part in the life God had planned for you.

Read again Romans 7:22-24

Paul is not describing the normal Christian life in these verses. He is describing the old self! Paul had already established in **Romans 6:6-7** that the reason God crucified your old self was “so that [you] should no longer be [a slave] to sin.” And in **Romans 6:17** Paul declares that “you *used* to be slaves to sin.” So when Paul describes himself in **Romans 7:14** as “unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” he can only be talking about the old self. This is what God *had* to deal with if he was to conform you to the image of his Son. And so, like old clothes, Paul instructs you to “put off the old self” which was crucified with Christ.

Be made new in the attitude of your minds

Read Romans 12:2

As we saw in the last module, God’s Spirit combines with his Word to conform your thinking to the thinking of Jesus. Note how Paul says in **Romans 6:6**: “*For we know* that our old self was crucified with Christ...” Again, in Romans 6:16, he says:

“*Don’t you know* that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey – whether slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

God wants you to *know* the good news of the whole Gospel for your life. Knowing the Gospel will shape your attitude to God, to yourself and to others.

Put on the new self

The new self has been “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (**Ephesians 4:24**). The old self could never be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. Only the new self can. And like new clothes, you are instructed to put this new self on (note **Galatians 3:27**).

Read Romans 8:2

At the heart of the new self is the law of the Spirit of life. This is not an outer law but an inner one. Because your old self was crucified with Christ, this new inner law of grace cancels out the law of sin and death. This does not mean that we can no longer sin. Rather, the inner dynamic has changed from a bias toward sin to a bias toward righteousness. As you walk in the Spirit (something we will be looking at later in the module), this new life in Christ becomes a daily reality.

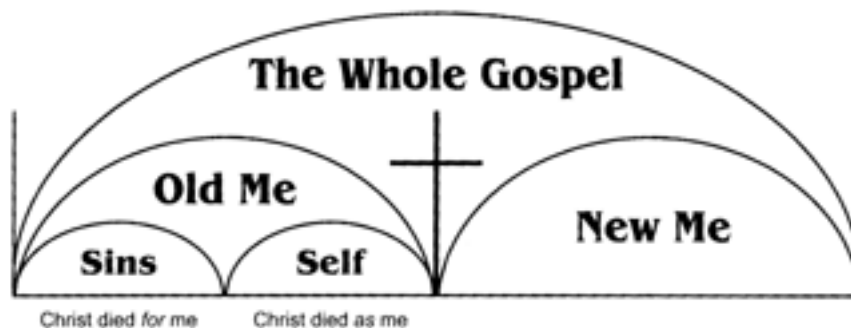
Read Colossians 3:9-10

Note how Paul mirrors the same statements of **Ephesians 4:22-23** in this passage, but how he assumes that the Colossian Christians are already putting it into practice. This is because, as Paul says in **Ephesians 4:22**, “you were taught” (to do these things). The second quarter of the Gospel was an indispensable part of Paul’s regular teaching to the young churches he had established (note **Ephesians 4:20-21**).

The Second Quarter of the Gospel

As we have seen, the Gospel has two halves. The first half deals with the Old Me and the second half deals with the New Me. And we have also discovered that the first half of the Gospel can be divided into two quarters:

- The **first quarter** of the Gospel deals with your **sins**. Understanding and believing this first part of the Gospel brings you forgiveness and eternal life. This is the most important part of the Gospel, for your eternal destiny depends on it.
- The **second quarter** of the Gospel deals with your **self**. If you do not believe and embrace this vital part of the Gospel, you will be forever trying to deal with your old life yourself. This will creep over into your new life in Christ and spoil your walk with God. The second quarter of the Gospel unlocks your new life in Christ.



When Jesus died on the Cross, he didn't just die *for* you, he also died *as* you. He didn't just die in your place. As far as God was concerned, Christ *was* you dying on the Cross. This concept is so simple, yet so revolutionary!

The Bible states that:

- When Christ died, you died *in him* (**Romans 6:6-7**)
- When Christ was buried, you were buried *in him* (**Romans 6:3-4**)
- When Christ was raised, you were raised *in him* (**Romans 6:4-5**)
- When Christ ascended, you ascended *in him* (**Ephesians 2:6**)

We have only just embarked on a discovery of the treasures found in the Gospel. In the next lesson, we will continue to look at the wonder of how God has completely and comprehensively dealt with your old life – *once and for all*.

This is just the beginning of the Gospel. No wonder Paul said:

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (**Galatians 6:14**).

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