

## The Power of the Gospel

# 11

## The Gospel on the Inside

The Gospel is not just about what happened on the Cross 2000 years ago. The Gospel is about what happens because of the Cross in your life *right now*.

We often refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as the four Gospels. But this is not entirely accurate. There is only one Gospel, but the Bible as four Gospel *accounts*. It is the Gospel through the eyes of four eyewitnesses.\*

### Read 1 John 1:1-3

The Gospel is not just what is taught *about* Jesus. The Gospel is what is *experienced* of Jesus. The Gospel is what “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched” (**verse 1**).

*The Message* captures John’s wonder at the fact that he actually experienced daily interaction with the Word of Life:

“From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in – we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we’re telling you in the most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. We saw it, we heard it, and now we’re telling you so *you* can experience it along with us...”

The essence of evangelism – heralding the good news of a victory already won – is the proclamation “of what we have seen and heard” (**verse 3**).

### Read Acts 4:20

The Gospel accounts did not end with the ascension of Jesus, for the ministry of Christ on earth never closed. During the four Gospel accounts, Jesus had a physical body through which he ministered to the world (**Hebrews 10:5-7**), but now the Bible says his body on earth is a spiritual body – his Church – through which he continues to minister to the world (**Ephesians 1:22-23**).

\* Although Luke was probably not a personal eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry on earth, and Mark had witnessed only the latter part of Jesus’ ministry, they compiled records directly from eyewitnesses – Mark primarily from Peter, and Luke from a variety of sources, including the disciples of Jesus, the family of Jesus and the women who travelled with Jesus.

**Read John 14:12-14**

The whole context of Jesus' statement here is the fact that he was soon to return to his Father. He was declaring that the miracles that would take place after his ascension would be an extension of his own ministry on earth. That's why he said to his disciples:

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

The invitation to ask in Jesus' name is connected directly with the continuing ministry of Jesus upon the earth (note **John 15:7-8**), not so that we “may spend what [we] get on [our] pleasures” (**James 4:3**).

The ministry of Jesus continues to this day, but now through us. The Bible never says that the Gospel accounts were meant to be complete. They were highly selective accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, ordered in such a way as to highlight the most important themes selected by each writer (note **Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 21:25**). But this ongoing account of the Gospel did not end with Jesus' ascension to heaven.

**Read Mark 1:1**

Mark describes his Gospel account as the “*beginning* of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The first century Church never saw the four Gospel accounts as the final chapter of the Gospel. They saw the same Gospel being enacted and outworked through their own lives.

**The Fifth Gospel Account****Read Acts 1:1-2**

Note what Luke writes in the first few verses of Acts:

“In my former book [the Gospel account of Luke]...I wrote about all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach *until the day he was taken up to heaven...*”

Now, in Acts, Luke is giving the account of all the Jesus *continues* to do and to teach *through his Church*. Acts is, in fact, Luke's “Sequel” of an ongoing saga of the Gospel in action. The book of Acts is the *fifth* Gospel account.

The day Jesus was taken up to heaven was a dividing line in the Gospel accounts. For when Jesus ascended to his Father's throne, the Bible records that two things happened:

- The Holy Spirit was outpoured on the Church (**Acts 1:8; 2:1-4**)
- Ministry gifts were imparted to the Church (**Ephesians 4:7-8,11-13**)

This event, on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus' ascension, marked the beginning of the *fifth* account of the Gospel, which is still being outworked in and through your life.

## The Two Halves of the Gospel

As we have seen, the Gospel can be clearly divided into two halves:

### ***The finished work of the Cross***

The Christian life is totally based on what Christ accomplished on the Cross. Not only did Christ die for me (dealing with my sins), he also died as me (dealing with my self). Two thousand years ago, I died in Christ on the Cross. Both the judgment of sin *and* the power of sin were broken on the Cross.

This understanding of the finished work of the Cross is non-negotiable in the Gospel, for this is the starting point of faith. I realize that I cannot save myself or change myself. I must rely on what God has done for me in Christ.

The key words that capture the essential meaning of the first half of the Gospel are:

⇒ ***Once for all***

Christ died *for* me, *once for all*. And *I died in Christ, once for all*.

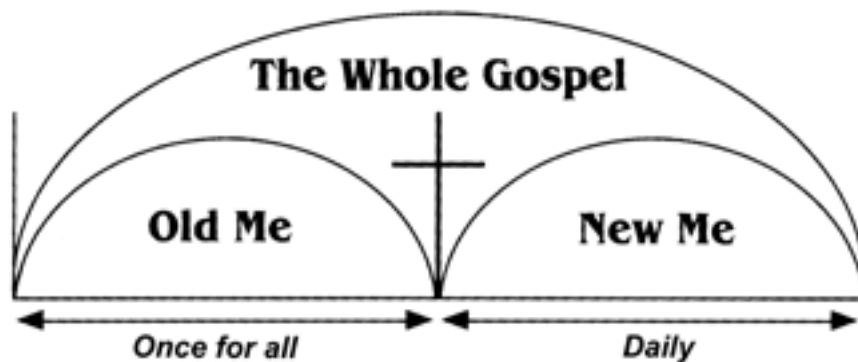
### ***The second half of the Gospel***

Based on the finished work of the Cross, God now gets to work in your life, translating the once-for-all death of Christ into a daily experience in your life.

The key word that captures the essential meaning of the second half of the Gospel is:

⇒ ***Daily***

The way the Gospel works is this: You receive the work of the Cross by faith as a *once-for-all* fact. Then the ongoing translation of this accomplished fact into experience is a *daily* work of the Holy Spirit.



It is vitally important not to get the key attributes of the two halves of the Gospel mixed up. Some Christians see the dying out to self as a daily work. This is not the

case. The death of your old self upon the Cross is a *once-for-all* work. The outworking of the life of the *new self*, however, is a *daily* experience.\*

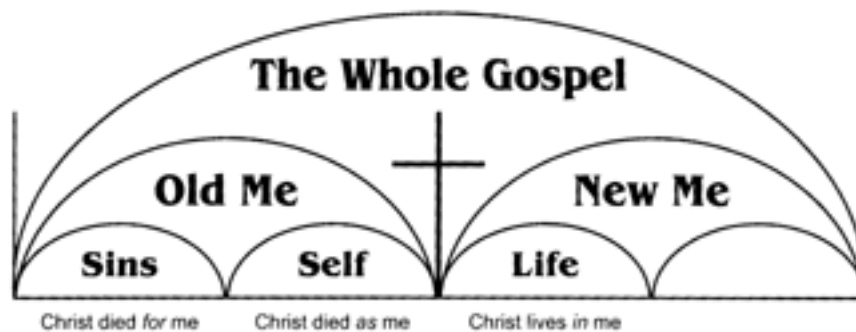
The opposite error is just as damaging. Some Christians believe that now, because of their position in Christ at the throne of God (**Ephesians 2:6**), they have “arrived.” They see the Christian life as a *once-for-all* accomplished fact. This also is not true. As Christians, we are “*in all things* [growing up] into...Christ” (**Ephesians 4:15**). The new self is the *daily* outworking of the reality of the Cross.

### Read Galatians 2:20

This wonderful declaration by Paul sums up the whole Gospel in its two halves.

“I *have been* crucified with Christ and I no longer live [first half of the Gospel], but *Christ lives in me* [second half of the Gospel]. The life I live in the body, I live *by faith* in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

So now, let’s return to our overview of the Gospel so that we can see the *third* quarter of the Gospel.



Here are the three quarters of the Gospel we have examined so far:

- **First quarter:** Christ died *for* me – deals with the problem of *sins*
- **Second quarter:** Christ died *as* me – deals with the problem of *self*
- **Third quarter:** Christ *lives* in me – deals with day-to-day *life*

## Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Everything in the Christian life works through the power of the Holy Spirit. We did not just die in Christ. We are also now alive in Christ. We are not just dead to sin. We are now alive to God! (remember **Romans 6:11**?)

Once we understand this basic truth of the Gospel, we are ready to see how the Gospel outworks in the real world of day-to-day life.

\* As we shall see in a later study, Jesus does tell the Christian to take up his cross *daily* and follow him. But as we’ll discover, this is the second half of the Gospel, not the first. Jesus was not talking about dying to self. He was talking about an attitude of radical commitment to the kingdom of God.

## Read Romans 7:6

Paul here shows that there are two clear ways we can live the Christian life – a wrong way and a right way. These two ways are:

- The old way of the written code
- The new way of the Spirit

Let's take a look at both of these ways.

### ***The old way of the written code***

#### Read Romans 7:8-24

If we are to understand this often misunderstood passage of Scripture, we need to realize that **Romans 7:14-25** is Paul elaborating on what he means by “the old way of the written code” in the same way that **Romans 8** is Paul elaborating on what he means by “the new way of the Spirit.” He is not writing about the “normal Christian life” in **Romans 7**. Far from it, he is describing what it is the Gospel rescues us from!

Note the catchphrases that Paul uses in this passage that signal that he is talking about the unregenerate old self:

- “But sin...produced in me every kind of covetous desire” – this is a classic description of the old self (see **Ephesians 4:22**).
- “I am unspiritual” – This too is a description of the old self, not the new self (read **1 Corinthians 2:14-15**).
- “I am...sold as a slave to sin” – Paul has already established in **Romans 6:6** that the reason our old self was crucified in Christ was “so that...we should *no longer* be slaves to sin” (note also **Romans 6:17**).
- “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” – this is a description of what it means to be a slave to sin. In **Romans 8:7**, Paul describes the old self by stating that “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law; nor can it do so” (see also **Romans 10:3**).
- “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” – the old self was entrapped in futile thinking and futile living. It wasn’t just that it was half-bad and half-good. The old self, by definition, is in a state of sin and separation from God.
- “I see another law at work within [me]” – the core problem of the old self was that there was an inner bias toward sin. It didn’t matter how much I wanted to obey God, I did not have the capacity to obey God.
- “What a wretched man I am!” – Paul ends his description of unregenerate self with a plaintiff cry. He has painted a helpless and hopeless picture of life outside of the Gospel.

**Read Romans 7:25**

Here Paul does two things: He summarizes the answer and he summarizes the problem. And the way he summarizes the problem is this:

- My mind desires to live for God
- My old self will not let me live for God

This is the wretched condition in which we find ourselves *outside of Christ*. We are pulled in two opposite directions.

Some people describe **Romans 7** in this way: The Christian has two natures, they say, an old nature and a new nature, and these two natures are at war, one pulling against the other. In order to let the new nature win, you must feed it. And in order to make the old nature lose, you must starve it.

But this is *not* what Paul is talking about. As a Christian you do *not* have two natures battling inside of you. You have either one or the other. You either have the old self, alive and well, trying to please God in its own strength, or you have the new self, which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. There is no in-between.

If there is an inner struggle, this is not because there are two natures battling within you. It is because the old self has not been resolved. Do you see what Paul is saying in **Romans 7**? It is the *old self* that cannot please God. It is the *old self* which is a slave to two incompatible masters: It is a slave to the law of sin and it is, at the same time, a slave to God's righteous decree.

This creates a horrendous tug of war on the inside. And in the end, sin always wins out. This is because the power of sin is an inner law, while God's righteous decree is an outer law. The inner law will always prove the stronger than the outer law.

This is why God decided to put an end to the intractable problem of unregenerate self. He dealt a death blow to the whole problem of **Romans 7:8-24** by placing it all on the Cross in Christ.

**Read Romans 8:3-4**

God put an end to the inner/outer law dilemma that lies at the core of the old self.

## The Church and the Gospel

The Gospel is the Church's charter. It is the foundation upon which the Church is built (**1 Corinthians 3:10**) and the substance of its life (**Colossians 1:6**).

The relationship between the Church and the Gospel is important to understand, for you cannot have one without the other. Here is a simple definition of how the two work together in God's plan of salvation:

- The Gospel is God's *means* of salvation
- The Church is God's *vehicle* of salvation

Unless the Gospel is being outworked in the life of a church as a genuine *fifth account* experience, then all church activities are nothing more than marking time. It is only as our lives are living out the Gospel that we will be able to preach the Gospel with authority to a dying world.

He dealt with the problem from both angles:

- He put *the power of sin* to death in Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:21**)
- He put the *written code of the law* to death in Christ (**Colossians 2:14**)

This is what it means when Paul says we no longer live in the old way of the written code. The written code was the long list of God's righteous decrees – a list we could never keep. And as long as that list was there for us to try to keep, we would struggle and strive and strain to keep it. And so God nailed the law (even though it was righteous and good - see **Romans 7:7,12,14**) to Christ on the Cross.

### Read Romans 10:4

God has ended the problem of unregenerate self so that we, as Christians, should no longer live in the old way of constant struggle. He has instead opened up a whole new mode of living for you!

### ***The new way of the Spirit***

Now let's have a look at the context of **Romans 7:6**.

### Read Romans 7:5-6

Paul says that "*when we controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.*" This was our pitiful condition prior to the Cross. We could not bear fruit for God, because the fruit we bore was poisonous and contaminated.

But all this has changed, says Paul, for "*by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*"

Everything has changed because of Christ! When Jesus died on the Cross, he released us from the old way of self-effort and struggle to comply with an outward list of rules and regulations. We now live the Christian life in the "new way of the Spirit."

### Read Romans 8:1-2

The Holy Spirit is the one who translates the finished work of the Cross into a daily reality for you. He is the "Spirit of grace" who actually applies the grace of God to your life. He is the one who is the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" that has set you free from "the law of sin and death."

Just as the old "law of sin and death" which ruled the old self was an inner power, so now God has placed a new inner power to rule our lives. This new inner power is called "the law of the Spirit of life." It is a bias, not toward sin and rebellion, but toward righteousness and holiness.

This is the dynamic of the Spirit-filled life. He has replaced the inner power (for the law of the Spirit of life cancels out the law of sin and death), and he has also

replaced the outward goal. Instead of the outward goal being a list of commandments *to obey*, it is now the Lord himself we now *pursue*. And guess what! The inner power and the outer goal are compatible. There is no tug-of-war, for one complements the other!

### Read Romans 8:9

The Holy Spirit does what self-effort can never do. But the important thing to remember is that Holy Spirit will never try to do the work of the Cross. The Holy Spirit is not in the business of crucifying your old nature. The Holy Spirit only works on the basis of your faith in the finished work of the Cross. He energizes the truth of God's Word, making it a step-by-step reality for you.

In closing, we encourage you to sit down and read the following passage all the way through from the first verse to the last. Soak in the Word of God. Let it wash over you, renewing your mind and challenging your heart.

### Read Romans 6, 7 and 8

In the next few lessons, we will be discovering just how the Holy Spirit works in your life. We will be identifying what the Holy Spirit's responsibility is and what your responsibility is, and the difference between the two. When you have a clear understanding of the boundaries of your responsibility (so that you don't cross over by mistake into the job description of the Holy Spirit), then you will find that you will begin to do what the Bible calls "walking in the Spirit." It is then that the Gospel will become what it was designed by God to be:

*A Gospel on the inside!*