

The Power of the Gospel

23

No Other Gospel

In the lessons to date, we have established two clear facts:

- The Gospel is God's complete solution the human predicament
- Satan's primary activity is to blind people's minds to the Gospel

It is this second fact – the recognition that Satan's main strategy is to thwart the Gospel through either ignorance or deception – that we will be examining more closely in this lesson.

An Angel of Light

Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Paul spoke strongly regarding certain false teaching that had infiltrated the Corinthian church, even going as far as calling those who taught such doctrines as “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.” He then goes on to liken them to the source of this false doctrine: Satan himself.

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”

Paul is not mincing his words. He speaks in such strong terms because the problem he is addressing is so serious. Satan seeks to warp the Gospel in any way he can, for he knows that if he can do this, he has effectively disarmed the Church. The Gospel is Satan's undoing. The only way Satan can thwart the Gospel is by:

- **Subtracting from the Gospel** – reducing the Gospel to a more benign, weakened form.
- **Adding to the Gospel** – watering down the Gospel with non-Gospel philosophy and solutions, making it a hybrid gospel.

It's worthwhile quoting here once again the words of 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.”

There is only one true Gospel. But if we do not understand that it is a whole Gospel for the whole life, then we will try to live the Christian life in our own strength and wisdom. The result will be a negating of the daily power of the Gospel (note again **1 Corinthians 1:17**).

Anything – anything at all – that distracts from the Cross of Christ waters down the power of the Gospel. This will result in a Christian life which is sub-standard and church life which is sub-standard.

Everything the Holy Spirit does in your life revolves around the finished work of the Cross. This is the main yardstick against which we determine whether a teaching is truth or error.

Read 2 Peter 3:17-18

The Bible constantly warns us to be on our guard against error. To do this we need to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” So let’s back-pedal for a moment and take a quick look at what we’ve established so far about the Gospel. Toxic Gospels

Read 2 Timothy 4:3-4

The Church is described as “the body of Christ” (**Ephesians 1:23**). But if a doctor were to examine this body, he would likely come to a diagnosis that it was very sick. The symptoms of this sickness are obvious: bickering and in-fighting, selfish ambition, competition between churches and lax moral standards.

Read Galatians 5:19-21

Read Ephesians 4:29-5:4

Read Colossians 3:5-9

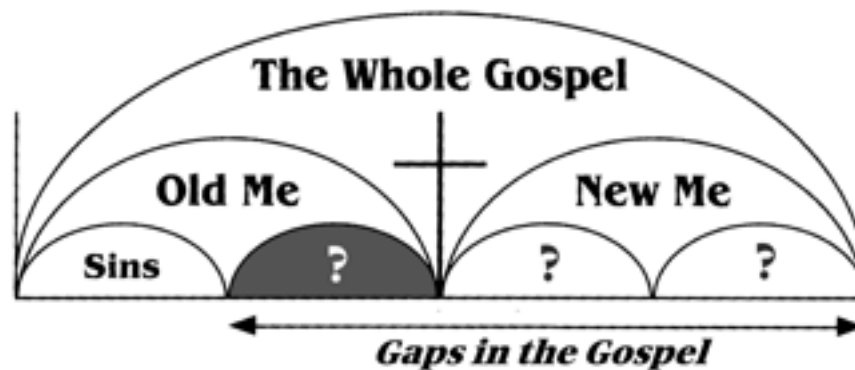
These symptoms of the old self plagued the first century Church and they are visible in today’s Church too. But like the symptoms of a physical disease, these problems reveal a more serious, underlying condition.

If a natural body is injected with toxins, it will quickly become very sick. The skin might break out in spots, the hair may shed, health will fail and the body will generally become very weak. But all of these are just symptoms. A good doctor would not just try to cure the symptoms. He would try to find out the cause of the underlying condition.

What is making the body of Christ sick is what we call “toxic gospels” – teaching that is foreign to God’s Word, yet is poisoning the Church.

Gaps in the Gospel

It is vitally important to understand that the Gospel can suffer no gaps. If there is a gap in our understanding of the Gospel, the Gospel doesn’t work properly. And if the Gospel doesn’t work properly, people will automatically try to fill in the missing portions of the Gospel with something else.



The Bible calls anything that substitutes for the whole or a part of the Gospel “other gospels.” These are not just the obvious heresies. What Paul calls “another gospel” (KJV) and “a different gospel” (NIV) is *any* teaching that acts as a substitute for part of the Gospel of Christ.

Read Galatians 1:6-7

The Gospel, as we know, means “good news.” It is the good news of God’s solution to the human problem. But the Gospel is not the only “good news” around. The world’s bookstores are packed with books that proclaim their own brand of “good news.” And some of this counterfeit “good news” has been imported into the ranks of the Church.

If we don’t perceive that the Gospel deals completely with the problem of the old self, then the old self will still continue to hold sway in people’s lives. Because the problem of unregenerate self is unresolved, we obviously begin shopping for a solution to this nagging problem. There are four so-called solutions to the problem of the old self, four “toxic gospels” that can be found in the Church today.

Four Toxic Gospels

Many of the New Testament letters were written to correct the young Church and to clarify the Gospel. In fact, Paul wrote some of his epistles “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (**2 Corinthians 2:4**). The first century Christians had made the mistake of filling in the last three-fourths of the Gospel – the parts that deal with self, life and ministry – with other gospels. And their life in Christ was being poisoned by these substitute gospels.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:2-3

The church in Corinthian was in danger of being deceived in exactly the same way that Eve was deceived at the start of human history. The original deception in the Garden of Eden was being replayed in the Corinthian church! Satan was seeking to lead the Corinthians away from their “sincere and pure devotion to Christ. But the way he was doing this was through the preaching of “a different gospel.”

Read 2 Corinthians 11:4

As you examine the New Testament letters, you will discover four false gospels that had infiltrated the first century Church. And guess what! These four substitute gospels are alive and well today! Let's list the four toxic gospels, then we will examine each in greater detail:

- **Toxic gospel #1** – a gospel of *outward law*
- **Toxic gospel #2** – a gospel of *human wisdom*
- **Toxic gospel #3** – a gospel of *secret knowledge*
- **Toxic gospel #4** – a gospel of *worldly living*

These four false gospels are what we call “substitute gospels” – gospels “which [are] really no gospel at all” (**Galatians 1:7**). These pseudo-gospels don't pretend to redefine the basis of your salvation in Christ (the first quarter of the Gospel); rather, they try to redefine how God deals with the old self (the second quarter of the Gospel) and how Christian life and ministry is conducted (the third and fourth quarters of the Gospel). Each tries in a different way to fill in the missing parts of the Gospel. Let's look at each in turn.

Toxic Gospel #1 – A Gospel of Outward Law

Read Galatians 5:4

The Galatian Christians had received Christ by faith. But now they were trying to live the Christian life through an observance of outward rules and regulations. This gospel of law had “[perverted] the gospel of Christ” (**Galatians 1:7**). Their

How to Handle God's Correction

According to **2 Timothy 3:16**, God's Word has been given for four reasons:

- Teaching
- Rebuking
- Correcting
- Training

You should bring a word of correction or rebuke only if you are in a position of church leadership. And rebuke should always be tempered by encouragement.

Read Titus 2:15
Read 2 Timothy 4:2

If you are not in a position of leadership, and you see an area in the church that does not line up completely with God's Word, there are two things you do:

- Pray
- Share with the leadership

It is always important to act out of a spirit of humility. God has given leadership in the church to protect and to guide, and your role is to support them in this and make their role a “joy” (**Hebrews 13:17**). It is important to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Whenever God brings a rebuke, he has a goal – to bring you to the full likeness of his Son. As you submit to this process of correction, the result will be encouragement and strengthening. God's rebuke is always out of his love for you.

Read Hebrews 12:5-6
Read Revelation 3:19-20

problem was not in their understanding of the first quarter of the Gospel. It was in their understanding of the other three-quarters of the Gospel.

Read Galatians 3:1-3

J. B. Philips, in *The New Testament in Modern English*, translates this verse in this way:

“O you dear idiots of Galatia, who saw Jesus Christ the crucified so plainly, who has been casting a spell over you? I will ask you a simple question: did you receive the Spirit by trying to keep the Law or by believing the message of the gospel. Surely you can't be so idiotic as to think that a man begins his spiritual life in the Spirit and then completes it by reverting to outward observances?”

Paul wrote the book of Galatians to bring the Galatian Christians back onto the course of the pure Gospel (note **Galatians 2:19-21**). He says of them nine things:

- They had come under a curse (**3:10**)
- They had lost their joy (**4:15**)
- They had become burdened again by a yoke of slavery (**5:1**)
- They had been alienated from Christ (**5:4**)
- They had fallen away from grace (**5:4**)
- They had ceased obeying the truth (**5:7**)
- They were biting and destroying one another (**5:15**)
- They were conceited, provoking and envying each other (**5:26**)
- They had become weary of doing good (**6:9**)

These are nine symptoms of a legalistic lifestyle. Now note that Paul is not talking here about “backsliding.” To “fall away from grace” does not mean you have backslidden. It means you have reverted to “the old way of the written code” (**Romans 7:6**) and thus stepped out of the daily influence of God's grace in your life.

Paul's exasperation with his Galatian “children” comes through clearly throughout his letter to the Galatians.

Read Galatians 4:7

Read Galatians 4:19-20

Many Christians today have fallen into the same trap as the Galatians. They are trying to “crucify themselves” and “die out to self,” not realizing that they cannot do it themselves. This is a gospel of self-effort – using outward regulations to impose control over the old self.

Read Colossians 2:20-23

This toxic gospel – a “gospel” of outward law and self-effort – can never deal with the problem of self. Only the true Gospel can.

Read Romans 7:4-6

Toxic Gospel #2 - A Gospel of Human Wisdom

Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

The wisdom of the Gospel is not compatible with the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of the world focuses on self – self-esteem, self-love, self-realization, self-change. This wisdom started at the fall of man. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because they saw it was “desirable for gaining wisdom” (**Genesis 3:6**). From that point on, mankind chose a path of self-wisdom – a wisdom independent of God. The source of our wisdom has been the central issue with God ever since.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:19

The wisdom of the world

Read 1 Corinthians 1:20

In this verse, Paul identifies three levels of worldly wisdom:

- **Wise man** – wisdom learnt from the experiences of life
- **Scholar** – wisdom learned from study and higher education
- **Philosopher*** – wisdom learnt from the search for answers

The wisdom of this world is “darkened” by pride and sin, making people “enemies [of God] in [their] minds” (**Colossians 1:21**).

Read Romans 1:21

As we have seen before, the word “futile” means “to go rotten, to go sour (like curdled milk), to become without value.” This is how God views even the best of worldly wisdom. Yet the Church has had a long-running affair with the wisdom of this world. Like the church at Corinth, many Christians today try to pepper the Gospel with worldly wisdom. We add courses in philosophy, psychology and self-help techniques. We chase the next formula that will help us solve complex problems. Yet all that this produces is Christians who are “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (**2 Timothy 3:7**).

Read Colossians 2:8

Read 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2:6-8

The wisdom of God

Read 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

The Gospel encapsulates God’s wisdom. This is because it targets the root problem of mankind – independence from God. God’s wisdom was to place the solution to man’s problem in one package – Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:24,30

* Corinth was famous for its philosophers – high-level thinkers who were the forerunners of the specialists in modern human sciences – philosophy, psychology and sociology.

God's wisdom is found in the Gospel of the Cross – plus nothing! This Gospel releases his power into your life to bring salvation, change and victory. The answer to solving the complex problems of human life – whether they be physical, emotional or spiritual – is not found in a “gospel” of self-wisdom. It is found in the pure Gospel of the Cross.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12

Toxic Gospel #3 - A Gospel of Secret Knowledge

Read Colossians 2:18-19

The heresy of Gnosticism was a rising force toward the end of the first century and it had begun to influence the early Church. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “knowledge.” A secret knowledge was given to those initiated – a knowledge of principalities and powers and the keys to break their authority. This teaching went into great detail concerning their hierarchy and the passwords needed to break through their layered ranks. Jesus referred to this gnostic teaching when he spoke to the church of Thyatira.

Read Revelation 2:24

One of Satan's most subtle strategies is to flavor the Gospel with gnostic concepts. This can happen on two levels:

Deliverance

We have been given authority over demons (**Luke 10:19**). But demons should never become the focus of our ministry. If we begin to search deeply for demonic bondage and generational curses, we have strayed from the core of the Gospel. It is in Christ that “the old has gone; the new has come!” (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

We do not need to have a “Dick Tracey” ministry in deliverance. We do not need to go back to previous generations to cut the Enemy off. The good news of the Gospel is that God went *all the way back to Adam* and cut it off there! We are either “in Adam” or “in Christ” (**1 Corinthians 15:22**). There is no in-between.

As you read the New Testament, you will never find a place where deliverance – the casting out of evil spirits – was a ministry *within* the Church. Deliverance was ministered to unbelievers. Now to be sure, there are times when deliverance is needed for a Christian – but this is invariably because the Gospel has been only half-communicated at the point of the believer's conversion. Much demonic baggage is brought over into the Christian life because the old self was never targeted clearly at the beginning.

God intends for deliverance to be experienced at the point of 1) revelation of the Gospel and 2) repentance in response to that revelation. The biblical “formula” for deliverance is none other than **Romans 6:6-18** and **Ephesians 4:22-24**.

There is no need to perform “spiritual autopsies” on the old self. It has been buried in Christ and you are now free to be “alive to God” as you walk in the Spirit (**Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:16**).

It seems evident in the New Testament that when the Christians were confronted by demonic spirits, they dealt with it, cast the spirits out, then moved on. There’s no indication that they stopped to have special courses on demonology, nor is it apparent that there were specialist, dedicated ministries in deliverance. Rather, deliverance was part and parcel of the preaching of the Gospel.

Spiritual warfare

Spiritual warfare is a biblical reality (note **Ephesians 6:10-17**), but Satan seeks to draw the believer into gnostic extremes. The Bible teaches that principalities and powers are real, but declares that their authority has already been broken at the Cross of Christ (**Colossians 2:15**). In fact, almost every time “principalities and powers” are listed in the New Testament, it relates to the Christian’s position in Christ *above* them.

We are not called to “rail against” principalities and powers (note **Jude 8-9**). At no time in the New Testament do we see either Jesus or the apostles dealing directly with spiritual “strongholds” over a community. Demonic strongholds are real, but note these facts:

- The “strongholds” Paul identifies in **2 Corinthians 10:4-6** were in the Corinthian church. Although these strongholds were probably mirrors of the strongholds that existed in the city of Corinth, Paul was directing his weapons with “divine power” at the strongholds in the church, not in the world.
- The “strongholds” were mindsets – arguments, reasonings and thinking that had been imported from the world. They were the strongholds of the old self.
- The weapon that has “divine power to demolish strongholds” is the word of truth – the Gospel itself. It is the Gospel that demolishes strongholds in people’s minds.

We do not need to map the principalities and powers so as to discover the inner workings of Satan’s dominion. Instead, as we preach the Gospel, God gives special discernment and anointing to break through every barrier that the Enemy would erect against the reception of the Gospel. Note that there is no place in the book of Acts which records Paul praying against principalities and powers. It was in the course of preaching the Gospel that he “wrestle[d]...against principalities and powers (**Ephesians 6:12**, KJV). There is no indication that this wrestling should be an activity that we do separate from the preaching of the Gospel.

Read Acts 19:11-20

The “scrolls” that the Ephesians burnt were gnostic formulas for gaining power over principalities and powers. Note that it was Ephesian *believers* who burned

their scrolls (**verse 18**). Because of the events of **verses 13-16**, where the seven sons of Sceva thought they could use the name of Jesus as a magical formula, that many Ephesian Christians suddenly had a revelation that their gnostic approach to principalities and powers was wrong.

We need to understand that it is the old self – both on an individual and a corporate level – which is *the* stronghold for demonic activity. By preaching the whole Gospel of the Cross, we are undermining the very power base of Satan’s activity. Intercessory prayer backs up the preaching of the Gospel, focusing on two things:

- That eyes may be opened to the truth of the Gospel (**2 Corinthians 4:4-6**)
- That doors may be opened to the proclamation of the Gospel (**1 Corinthians 6:8-9; Colossians 4:3**)

Read again 1 Corinthians 2:2

The focus of the Gospel is the Cross. If our eyes become distracted to demon-hunting or principality-wrestling, the core power of the Gospel is weakened. It is with our eyes fixed on Jesus that we confront the powers of darkness and win! It is as we move forward and proclaim the power of the Gospel that the principalities that oppress a city must yield! If there is any demonic power that dare resist this forward momentum, it is then that we have authority to bind and to loose.

Read Romans 16:19-20

In **verse 20**, Paul declares that “[the] God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” In **verse 19**, however, he provides a context for this statement:

“...I want you to be *wise about what is good*, and *innocent about what is evil*.”

You do not need to be wise about what is evil in order to see Satan crushed under your feet. You do not need to know the names of all the spirits that control your area. Your focus in spiritual warfare should not be, “What is the devil doing?” but rather, “What is the Father doing?” The secret to spiritual warfare is simple: Find out what God is already doing and join with *his* work in *his* authority and power.

Read again John 5:19

Toxic Gospel #4 - A Gospel of Worldly Living

Read 1 John 2:15-16

It was to the Corinthian church that Paul wrote “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (**2 Corinthians 2:4**). This was because of what had infiltrated church life. A look at the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians shows the sorry state of affairs:

- Division, quarrelling (**1:10-13; 3:3,21**)
- Boasting, pride (**chapter 4**)
- Greed, focus on wealth (**4:8; 5:9-11**)

- Immorality (**chapter 5**)
- Lawsuits – believer taking believer to court (**chapter 6** – note **6:7**)

All of this was a direct consequence of the infiltration of worldliness into the church. Another gospel – the gospel of worldly living – had perverted the Gospel of Christ. James addresses this same problem in his letter.

Read James 4:1-4

The gospel of worldly living has three main elements:

The motives of the world

The gospel of worldliness changes a Christian’s focus from God to the world. This generally involves four things:

- Wealth (**2 Corinthians 2:17; 1 Timothy 6:3-19** – especially **verse 5**)
- Success (**2 Corinthians 10:12,18; 11:5,18; 12:11**)
- Pleasure (**James 4:3; 2 Timothy 3:4-5; Romans 13:13-14**)
- Power (**Mark 10:42-44; 2 Corinthians 1:24**)

The methods of the world

Read 2 Corinthians 10:2-4

In **2 Kings 16:10-15**, we find the story of King Ahaz, who went to Damascus and saw a pagan altar. It was so beautiful that he sent the design to the high priest and ordered a duplicate made for him in Israel. He replaced the bronze altar (which had been prescribed by God) with this new pagan altar and started to offer sacrifices to God on it. In his mind, he was not worshipping foreign gods but the Lord. But the results were a gradual change in the temple’s format to become like that of a pagan god (read **2 Kings 16:10-18**).

In a similar way, the Church has introduced many methods of worldly entertainment and performance into church worship, evangelism and fellowship. This does not mean that we should not use innovative methods in our evangelism or new instruments or music styles in our worship. The issue is one of focus. If the focus of these methods is on self and not on God, then these methods fall outside the parameters set by the Gospel.

The boasting of the world

Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-13

The Corinthian church had been swayed by the so-called “super-apostles” who boasted of their gifts and eloquence (just like people did in the world – note **2 Corinthians 11:8**) and were peddling the word of God for profit (**2 Corinthians 2:17**). The focus of the Corinthian church had become “personality ministries” who preached a gospel which promised a “Hollywood Christianity” of worldly status, wealth and success. The church at Laodicea had also fallen into this same trap.

Read Revelation 3:17-18

The blessings of the world

The Bible says that it is God's good pleasure to bless us. But when we chase the material blessings of God, we have missed the whole point of the Christian life. Our focus should be on God, not on his blessings. As we walk with him, he blesses us with:

- Spiritual blessings in Christ – peace, joy, love, etc (**Ephesians 1:3**)
- Material provision according to our need (**Philippians 4:19**)

Back to the Gospel

Each and every one of the toxic gospels we've looked at is a "self-gospel." The focus is on self in the context of righteousness, wisdom, the devil or the world. These false gospels empty the Cross of its power, watering down the true Gospel and making it ineffective as a solution to the core problem of human life.

So what is God's answer? How do we cleanse the Church from any and every "different gospel" that would undermine the power of God's sole solution?

Read Ephesians 5:25-27

The answer to this problem of toxic gospels does not come by pointing our finger at other parts of the Body of Christ. We are all part of the same Body. We *all* take corporate responsibility before God for the condition of the Church and individually repent from anything contrary to the pure Gospel of Christ.

No, God's answer to every toxic gospel is the Gospel itself! The Gospel is a cleansing Gospel. It is by the "washing with water through the word" that God cleanses his Church. It is in the preaching of the pure Gospel of the Cross that will see every other gospel eliminated from church life. You are part of this answer – not just your words, but you yourself! God is raising you up to be a person who is "separated to the gospel of Christ" (**Romans 1:1**).

We need to run with the message of the pure Gospel! On every level – in our teaching, in our preaching, in our witnessing, in our counselling, in our praying – it is the Gospel which is the power of God! Our rallying cry must be:

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