

THE GOSPEL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Like the hub of a wheel, the gospel is the hub of God's written revelation. All the spokes of revelational truth find their connectedness in the gospel.

What is the Gospel? At the outset, I will make a general statement and elaborate upon it as we proceed with the subject. The word "gospel" means "good news" – it is good news about Jesus Christ Who, by His sacrificial death and confirming resurrection, paid the redemptive price to set self-confessed sinners free from sin's penalty. This is not only good news but it is the greatest news a soul "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph.2:1) can receive.

It is good news about a Person – the Person of the living Lord Jesus Christ. C.S. Lewis, in his book "Mere Christianity," makes the following statement about Jesus: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg--or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."

Make no mistake about it, the gospel is not about religion, it is about a Person. It is not about turning over a new leaf, it is about a new life; it is not about choosing a church, it is about confessing Christ as Savior and Lord. To speak with more specificity, consider that:

The gospel is a declaration.

"Moreover, brethren, I *declare* to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve." (I Cor.15:1-5)

The gospel that Paul preached was not about rigorous religious rules and regulations; it was not about self-helps to a better life. It was a transformational message. Therefore, he declared it with full confidence, not in his rhetorical ability, but in the power and authority of the Author of the message.

The gospel is a demand.

The message is plain in its content, decisive in its utterances and emphatic in its pronouncements. By its very nature the gospel message, once declared, demands of the hearer a response. The message must be received or rejected. The one having heard the "good news" must respond in belief or in unbelief. It thunders out the need for repentance and trumpets the call to salvation.

The gospel is a dynamic.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the *power of God* to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Rom.1:16)

The Greek word translated “power” is “*dynamis*”, pronounced “*dü'-nä-mēs*” and is the word from which comes our English word “dynamite.” The Greek word means: “That which has inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature.” The power of God to extract the sinner from sin is inherent in the gospel of Jesus Christ and resides in no other message. The gospel is God’s only salvational message.

The gospel is the message that meets the most complicated and intricate of life's problems, bringing order out of chaos; peace out of storm, rest from burden, relief from guilt. Quietly it penetrates the innermost recesses of the heart and there it faces mankind with the age-old question of sin and salvation. Wise is the messenger who, once he has imparted the message, leaves the issue with God, so that the divine content and power of that message may accomplish God’s intended purpose as the Holy Spirit broods over it as it lodges in the minds of the hearers.

It is now my intention to deal with some of the incontrovertibly essential questions that surround the gospel minister’s message. The messenger of God cannot succeed unless he has the message of God. It is a sad but true fact that many who call themselves Christian ministers do not know either by education or experience the “good news” they are expected to present. It may well be asked why they call themselves or are called by others the messengers of God, since they lack the message or have altered it so that now it is not God’s gospel? Any God-sent messenger will proclaim the message of the gospel of the grace of God which the Apostle Paul preached. To claim to be God’s messenger with God’s message, when the essence of the message has been changed to suit personal inclinations and points of view, is unethical, hypocritical and downright dishonest.

An additional statement about the messenger at this point: admittedly, there is much in the minister himself that lacks perfection, for at best, though saved, surrendered and Spirit led he may be, he is still human, and has in him the limitations and inconsistencies of the flesh. Thank God he is a vessel, and a vessel meet for the Master's use, but he is ever reminded that he is an earthen vessel. It is altogether another thing, however, with the message he bears.

Therefore, it is all the more necessary to stress the distinctiveness of the Word to be proclaimed. In order to do this, it will be needful to analyze the message and carefully study its constituent parts so as to leave no question as to its intrinsic worth, no doubt of its efficacy, and no ground for its compromise.

I. THE GOSPEL MINISTER’S MESSAGE IS UNIQUE.

The gospel message is unique in that it has in it no imperfections and no blemishes. It is both perfect and entire. When compared with the message of other religions, it is without parallel and supercedes all others. There is just no comparison. The message found in the ethnic religions are but expressions of the human mind in its vain groping after God, whereas the gospel message, instead of being a futile groping after God, has its origin in God Himself and is a revelation of the very life of God as it is offered to man.

Where can there be a comparison when there is such a profound difference between the messages of this world’s religious systems and the divine message of the gospel? The first

are of the earth, earthy, and transient. The second is of heaven, heavenly and eternal. Any comparison cannot be with a view to harmonize and equalize. It can only be to contrast and reveal the inferiority of the one as over against the superiority of the other.

This contrast is brought out by many scriptures, however, I will cite but two: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Prov.14:12) How strange and sadly different this is to the grand and glorious revelation: "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." (II Tim.1:7-11) How gospel ministers should thrill in the realization of so wondrous a message entrusted to their keeping! It is a message unequalled, unexcelled, and completely without parallel, a message to rejoice in and to ponder over, because of its unrivalled excellence.

II. THE GOSPEL MINISTER'S MESSAGE IS UNPARALLELED.

It is not simply a message among messages. It stands out as a message distinct from all other messages. It is not another gospel, but it is the one and only gospel. Paul warned against perverting it: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Gal.1:8-9)

This message is grand beyond description, for it presents not just a Christ but The Christ, not just a savior, but The Savior. It exhibits not a dead founder, but it declares the risen Lord! The Buddhist can point to the tomb of Buddha and within will be found his ashes. The Mohammedan has also the tomb of Mohammed, and the Confucionist the tomb of Confucious, and those who visit these shrines will find within them the remains of the prophet who once was alive and is now dead. But those who seek out the tomb of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, finds it empty! "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." (Mark 16:6)

In this great fact lies the difference between all ethnic religions and the gospel minister's message. Let him then, who is entrusted with the presentation of so glorious a message, remind himself of its superiority and let him not be guilty of so great a sin as to rob it of its unparalleled distinctiveness. His is no ordinary message. It is a message apart, a message sublime. It brings help to the helpless, hope to the hopeless, and life to the lifeless. It stands supreme and is the one message that satisfies. Therefore, the gospel minister needs but proclaim it.

III. THE GOSPEL MINISTER'S MESSAGE IS UNIVERSAL.

God's servant is the bearer of the message universal. With him there can be no color line, no cultural line, or any other line of demarcation and discrimination, since his message is to all men everywhere. He finds in his message a great equalizer, for it includes all under sin. He comes clearly to see, as he studies the message, that there is no respect of persons with God, and that as sin rests upon all mankind, even so free grace is offered to all. He finds

himself thrilling at the marvel of it, for his is that message which is to break down the middle wall of partition, and which is to give humankind common access to God.

His is a world outlook, and a world message. He catches the full significance of that with which he is faced in the Great Commission: "Go into all the world." He sees the world as his Lord sees it, not in its divisions of color and language but in its tragic lostness, with its common heritage of sin, and its crying need of salvation.

IV. THE GOSPEL MINISTER'S MESSAGE IS UNRESTRICTED.

The gospel preacher knows that his message is one of redemption offered to all men everywhere without human restrictions. It is this fact that gives him the urge and brings upon him that sense of compulsion to seek out the lost. He freely offers the message that can be freely received, to all.

His is a message unrestricted except upon the grounds of partaking by grace through faith. He leaves the stipulations with God and raises no man-made barriers. He is not the author of it, only the announcer of it; he did not produce it, but he must publish it. He must not limit those to whom he preaches it but liberally proclaims it to all, brown and yellow, black and white are equally in need of "so great salvation." He eagerly buys up his opportunities and earnestly stands ready to make any sacrifice that, if by so doing, he may herald this message to all within his sphere of influence, unrestricted by race, creed, color, nationality or gender, believing that some may be brought to the feet of Jesus. There is no limit to the scope of his message and but one barrier to its reception, and that is "unbelief."

V. THE GOSPEL MINISTER'S MESSAGE IS UNADULTERATED.

The God-given responsibility of the gospel minister is to declare the whole counsel of God. He has been given a message to deliver and he is responsible to present it in its entirety and not just that portion of it which he may think pleasing to the ears of man. He realizes he must ever guard himself against the danger of handling the entrusted message with subtlety or deceit, fearing unfavorable reactions that may result from the faithful presentation of the message from God which wounds man's pride.

It is not an unheard of thing for the herald of the gospel to be ensnared at this point. Many there are who have yielded to that insistent demand for a message pleasing to the natural man and not too rigid and demanding. Because of this pressure, they have sought to glamorize and to popularize their message, and have ended up in dangerous compromise. It is little wonder that the Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me." (2 Tim. 1:13) It must not be adulterated or it is not the authentic gospel. It does not matter what the mixture of truth and error may be, it is not God's message if it has been changed in the slightest degree.

It is a serious thing to either add to or take from that message which has been received by direct revelation from God Himself. The messenger has no authority to presume to have the right to cull or embellish that word which God intended for a divine proclamation. There must be no variation, no deviation, no attempt at cultural acclamation or social orientation. God has left no doubt as to the punishment of any who may alter the message:

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev.22:18,19)

True, these words apply specifically to the contents of the Book of Revelation, but in the more general sense, they may apply with equal force to any and every portion of God's Word. Let the minister who calls himself God's "sent one" take heed then that his is a message pure and unadulterated, "able to make men wise unto salvation." (2 Tim.3:15)

VI. THE GOSPEL MINISTER'S MESSAGE IS UNBOUND.

"The Word of God is not bound." (2 Tim.2:9) It is impossible to imprison or in any way to chain down truth. It goes where it will and finds persons just when they think they have effectively barricaded themselves against it. It can neither be permanently shut in or shut out. The message may be resisted, but it cannot be ignored; it may be denied but it cannot be destroyed. The gospel minister may well be elated with such a message, for it is that which assures him of ultimate victory. He need have absolutely no fear as to the outcome. His is a message infallible, since it contains the omniscience of God; his is a message impregnable, since it contains the omnipotence of God.

The message is unbound because God has made it so. "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) The messenger may fail, but the message fails not. The reason for this is that the one is human, the other is divine.

It is because of these facts, as they have been stated, that it is necessary to re-emphasize Paul's exhortation to Timothy: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Tim.4:2-4)

The gospel minister will find that he can well dispense with his own "think so," but that he can not afford to, at any time, set aside God's "say so." Let him remember that "the seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11) It is only as he faithfully sows this seed that he will come with rejoicing, bringing the sheaves with him. There can be no substitutes. If it is important to have the right messenger for the message, it is of utmost importance to have the unique, unparalleled, universal, unrestricted, unadulterated and unbound message for the messenger.

"I am set for the defense of the gospel."
(Phil. 1:17)

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