

Contending for the Gospel

Recovery of the Gospel is foundational to our society's revival and reformation. Every church and leader needs to be continually gripped and renewed by the good news of the Kingdom of God at hand. This is Jesus' central theme some 82 times in the four gospels. As the apostle Paul states in Romans 1:16, as a summary thesis of that whole book of the Bible, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first the Jew, then the Gentile."

So the gospel has implications of ultimate significance for every woman, man, and child on the planet. The gospel carries the power of God, our Almighty Creator and Savior, in verbal form into our earthly context. The gospel message of the Kingdom has exponential potential in it, according to the parable of the soils. (Mt. 13) If we want truly relevant, enduring, and powerful life-change in the ministries around us, we need to rediscover the Gospel in depth and breadth, as the height and width of the love of God.

On my heart is to engage the six chief elements of the Gospel story, the supernatural hinges of history, the pivot points for all people in all places.

Picture it perhaps as six connected doorways in the Grand Gospel Hallway, and look into the treasures in every room behind the doors. When the gospel is lacking, we have more of human effort and man-made wisdom in the churches than when the power of God is on the move, cascading and rippling salvation from the Lord Jesus out into all parts of human life. The gospel is the authority of God in action, built upon the actual life, death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and second coming of JESUS CHRIST, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18) Then you can make disciples and teach them all that the Lord has commanded you. Then we can see powerful, lasting, and missionally engaged Christianity reshape our churches and cities, backed by the authority of Jesus and the wind of the Holy Spirit in this age of reconciliation and grace. We want to see Christians full of the Holy Spirit and full of the Word at the same time, for gospel revival and reformation to break out.

Some Gospel implications/applications, connected to the...

- ❖ Life of Jesus: Acts 2:22
 - Incarnation preceded the crowds for Jesus, and this sets our incarnational ministry pattern as well (putting the "go" in the gospel before gathering).
 - Apprenticing in Kingdom proclamation and demonstration (Mt. 10:7-8) for healing, deliverance and empowered/authoritative ministry following Jesus' example.
 - Leadership multiplication strategies and stewardship under Christ as continuing high priorities of Kingdom ministry.

- ❖ Death of Jesus: Acts 2:23
 - Forgiveness of sins/new birth necessity (John 3:3; 16-17; Acts 2:38)
 - Reconciliation of a new humanity in Christ across all barriers and divisions, including the law being fulfilled (Col 1:20, 2:13; Eph. 1:14-15)
 - Triumph over evil angelic powers and principalities (Col. 1:13; 2:15)

- ❖ Resurrection of Jesus: Acts 2:24-32
 - Vindication of the atonement being accepted and the ultimate miracle confirming that the Gospel is true (1 Cor. 15: 12-19).
 - Firstfruits of our own future bodily transformation (1 Cor. 15:20-21).
 - Evidence of truth and supremacy over all other man-made world religions where the founder is deceased.

- ❖ Ascension of Jesus: Acts 2:33-34, 30
 - Our humanity represented permanently in heaven by Jesus on the throne.
 - Spiritual warfare victory ensured (Eph 1:20-22; Col. 1:16-18; Heb. 9:24).
 - Ascension gifts: equipping leaders called forth and sent to the Church in cascading, multiplying form (Eph. 4:10-14).

- ❖ Pouring out of the Holy Spirit through Jesus: Acts 2:33-34
 - Saving presence of God in the world now in the born-again saints to counteract the absence of God (sin's sway), through the Third Person of the Trinity. (John 14:16)
 - Continuation of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit for ministry formation and overflow today. (sanctification i.e. 1 Thess. 5:23, etc.)
 - Authority of Scripture through the Third Person of the Trinity's agency (2 Timothy 3:15-16; 2 Peter 1:16-21).

- ❖ Second coming of Jesus: Acts 2:34-35; Romans 2:16
 - Final judgment of all humanity by Jesus with reward for the redeemed and justice for the unrepentant sinner (including the devil and his angels into the lake of fire). (Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:7; Hebrews 10:27; Rev. 14:9-11)
 - Resurrection bodies for all the saints and permanence of all the wicked to endure punishment. (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:51-53)
 - New heavens and the new earth restoration of all things. (Acts 3:21; Rev. 21-22; 2 Peter 3:13)

Five Ways We Can Fumble the Gospel

Football championships (and everyday games) are won and lost on “ball control”. Turnovers are game-changers, momentum shifts that affect the outcome for all. In a metaphor of spiritual battle in the clash between the people of the Kingdom of God and the fallen angels of the kingdom of darkness (Eph. 6:12), the adversaries try to strip the gospel from the hands and hearts of the saints. We have this treasure in jars of clay...we are carriers of the gospel of God, which saves and forms us as a people through the power of God. (Romans 1:16) But the devil and his angels come against the people of God advancing by and with the Gospel, and try to pry it from our hands. Turnover, setback, slowdown...move us from offense against evil to defense again.

Here are five observations of how the adversary tries to strip the ball from us, to reduce the gospel in some way so the power of God is limited through the people of God. As Colossians 1:6 says: “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.” This gospel is founded on Jesus Christ, the one full of both grace and truth at the same time. (John 1:14)

5 Ways to Fumble the Gospel:

- 1.) Reduce the grace side of the gospel of God. De-emphasize the GOOD news of the Kingdom of God at hand by making legalistic additions to the gospel with man-made rules, or returning to human effort to try to accomplish God’s purposes independent of his love and guidance and power through the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 1:6-15; 2:11-21; 3:1-14; Romans 1:17, etc.)
- 2.) Reduce the truth side of the gospel of God. Minimize the righteousness, justice, and holiness nature of God and the Lord’s standards of right and wrong that flow from his character to all people, places and times. This is seeking to make the gospel a license for further sinning, instead of recognizing the genuine wrath and justice of God against sin and personal cost to the Son we follow. (Jude 3-4; James 2:18-22; 4:8; Galatians 5:13-18; 6:7-10; Romans 5:20-6:2; 6:6; 8:13, etc.)
- 3.) Reduce the NOW aspect of the gospel of the Kingdom of God at hand in favor of the NOT YET. The radical edge of the central message of Jesus about the Kingdom of God (some 82 times) is the fact it is already present in the person and ministry of Jesus. His words and deeds (healing and deliverance in over 75 passages of the four gospels, etc.) demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is already here, though of course not yet in the fullness it will be at the sixth hinge of history, the second coming of Jesus. This was the astonishing factor for the people of the first century encountering and following Jesus: the reign of God is here and now! All who believe this good news from God can be forgiven now, healed now, delivered now in extraordinary ways. To reduce the radical reality that the Kingdom of God is within reach now in favor of future forgiveness in heaven, future freedom, future transformation, is to

minimize the gospel by relegating it mainly to a future tense, instead of the present as well. Jesus reveals the Father best by showing the time is now, by establishing the saving presence of God on the planet now in astonishing ways. (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 9:33-10:8; 12:28; Luke 5:17-26, etc.)

4.) Reduce the complete gospel of Jesus Christ to a smaller emphasis of our own making. Sometimes called having a ‘canon within the canon’, we shrink the “yardstick” by being reductionistic in our view or practice of the gospel by tradition or ignorance or deliberate preference. Paul speaks of presenting the “full counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) and “fully proclaiming the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:19). While it is possible to enter the gospel message at any one of the six compelling pivot points, the hinges of history, we are not to stay limited to just one, two or three essential aspects of the gospel and make that our whole frame of reference. There are incarnational, atonement, and transformational realities to the six elements of the gospel as shown in Acts 2:22 and following. The Kingdom of God has upside-down, inside-out and downside-up dimensions. To make our life or church about mainly one or two of these is to “be-little” the actual life and works of the Son of God. (Acts 2:22-36; Romans 2:16) “Steps to Peace with God” or the “Four Spiritual Laws” are good entry points through one doorway of the Gospel (the cross), but do not encompass the gospel as a whole. There are five other doorways that may help others come to Christ first, and then learn the “rest of the story” from there.

5.) Reduce the supernatural reality of the gospel in favor of the natural realm. Jesus is Lord of both the visible and invisible realms, the physical and the spiritual dimensions of life. (Col. 1:15-20) It has been said that all other world religions, being manmade in their origin, could reduce any supernatural elements and not really lose anything of essence. But to take the supernatural out of any of the six elements of the gospel would be to utterly displace God’s gospel with another, which is no gospel at all. The incarnation and life and ministry of Jesus: full of the supernatural at its core. The cross of Jesus, where the very worst thing to happen in human history is turned by God into the very best, that is all about a supernatural transference of sin upon Him and righteousness upon us who believe. (atonement) The resurrection, ascension, pouring out the Holy Spirit and the second coming of Jesus all have such far-reaching transformational implications for human life: they are supernatural in essence, being all about God’s love and power that goes beyond what we can ask or think. To minimize the supernatural reality of the gospel in preference for a more comfortable “western” rationalistic worldview is a departure of a high order from the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Luke 1:34-37; John 3:2-3; 7:37-39; Acts 10:38; Col. 2:8