

## **The Wednesday Word, Dec. 7, 2011: The Gospel and Authentic New Testament Ministry, Part 8 - The Gospel and New Covenant Lifestyle**

For Paul, the gospel was no mere entry-level doctrine. In the mind of the apostle, the gospel actually determined and empowered New Covenant lifestyle. He writes to the Philippians,

*“Only let your manner of life be becoming to the gospel of Christ: ----(Phil 1:27)*

There is a newness of life, a gospel lifestyle which comes when we are saved. This is not, however, as some would have us believe, a lifestyle married to law and divorced from the gospel. It is, rather, something which actually gets its vitality from the very gospel itself.

The gospel teaches believers how to live the Christian life. It’s not only for evangelistic meetings. Paul tells the Romans,

*“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).*

Paul is saying, look what happened through the gospel, you were buried and raised with Christ, now walk in the newness of life which is already yours. Much of today’s preaching tries to get us to walk in newness of life, but since the preaching is usually devoid of gospel it cannot produce the desired results. Churches, therefore, who have made it their purpose to teach us how to live the Christian life are doomed to fail unless the gospel is on centre stage. To teach “how to” and not relate it to the gospel is merely to plunge the church back under law.

When Paul, for example, wanted to teach the saints how to live a lifestyle which would not offend others in the church, he didn’t bring them law he brought them to the gospel saying,

*“--Destroy not him with your food, for whom Christ died. (Rom 14:15).*

He doesn’t say, “Guys, you know it’s not the right thing to offend your brother with what you are eating. You are destroying him. Cut it out!” No, as an authentic New Testament minister he brings them to the gospel and then makes application. He tells them, Christ died for your brothers so don’t destroy someone for whom Christ died.

Paul didn’t teach ethics and lifestyle apart from the finished work. When he wanted his people to behave in a certain manner, he didn’t merely issue edicts and pronouncements, he employed his apostolic understanding and brought them back to the gospel. For Paul, there was no question that changed lives came by the power of God unto salvation---the gospel of Christ!

Take another example, when he wanted believers to learn not to please themselves he again brought them back to the gospel: he wrote,

*“--Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me” (Rom 15:1-3).*

In addition, when Paul wanted the church to be welcoming and friendly he tells them,

*“Receive one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).*

Paul here reminds his readers that as Christ received us, we should receive each other. But how did Christ receive us? He received us on terms of pure gospel grace. It was grace alone and not our righteousness that motivated Him. He didn't wait for us to straighten up, rather he received us apart from our performance. And that is how we are to receive each other. He does not bring us to the law saying, "We need to receive one another for you know that is the right thing and you need to do the right thing now you are saved." No! He once more brings us, back to the gospel to empower us to live the gospel lifestyle. That's authentic New Testament ministry!

Preaching the gospel and instructing believers how to live are not two separate and unrelated things. Mark it down, believers will not be empowered to live as Christians if there is no gospel ministered to them. Why not? Simply because the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation.

Then there's the matter of forgiveness. Have you ever heard a sermon on forgiveness? I wish I had a dollar for every sermon I've heard on that subject. However, merely telling people to walk in forgiveness does not make them walk in forgiveness. Why not? Again, it's because there is no gospel along with the exhortation. But here's how the Apostle Paul taught on this matter,

*"And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you Eph 4:32.*

*"--forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" Col 3:13.*

See how once more, to empower them to live the gospel lifestyle of forgiveness, he brings them back to the gospel. Paul points out that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. Did God forgive us just because He was kind? Did He forgive us because His wrath against sin had mellowed? No, God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. We therefore are to forgive in just the same way.

Another marvellous example of how Paul (if indeed Paul wrote the book) used the gospel to teach lifestyle is demonstrated all the way through the book of Hebrews. Remember, the goal of Hebrews was to dissuade some Jewish Christians from departing the faith and going back to Temple worship. These Hebrew Christians were suffering persecution, trials and hardships. Their faith was being shaken. As we read Paul's mighty exhortation to these believers, we notice that once more, he does not merely tell them what they should and should not do. If Paul was your average modern-day preacher, however, he would simply have said something like:

"Brothers, what else do you expect. It's a hard road and we all go through tough times. Now then lads, straighten up and fly right!"

However, although Hebrews is a strong exhortation to do just that, this is not how the great apostle approaches things. Paul rather, unfolds to them the glory of the very centre of the gospel, the great High Priest. He takes them to the Christ who was crucified. He tells them to "consider Him". He presents the cross, the blood and the identity and superiority of the Lord Jesus. He takes them to the heavenly sanctuary and shows them the very fruit of the gospel, how Christ Jesus is our representative and perfection and that in Him there is no more remembrance of sin. As he establishes the entire superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, he once more, like the true apostle he was, looses the power of the gospel of Christ upon his hearers.

And that's the Gospel Truth!