

2073 - THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL - 1 Cor 1:17

PRELIMS. The main work of the Church is to preach the gospel. But something has happened - it is **no longer** the **major** or **central** part of its proclamation in many churches. The gospel is too often **hidden** among all the other things the Church seems to be focussing on.

The PERIPHERIES

The Church **has** a lot of **peripheries** –ie, additional things to the central, core, kernel of its main message. Things which were **meant** to **assist** and **help** the gospel! Things that **are** good and proper and helpful in themselves and express the love/kindness of the Lord. Many of these things are now **programs, events, ministries**.

But these peripheries are supposed to be things ‘on the side-lines’, and **not fundamental** to the faith. Sadly, they can become **more important** than the gospel itself! What was happening in Corinth, was groups/parties were formed following their favourite preachers’ **uniqueness** and characteristics! That is why Paul was compelled to go straight to the subject in his opening words. It was because **issues** dominated the conversations and the interest of the believers. And the **issues** became more and more an important part of their fellowship.

Things have **not** changed - it is the same **today!** Hymns, Music, Versions, Sabbath-keeping, Order of Service, Baptism, etc, etc, have all become issues to **separate** over! Denominations are formed now over these types of issues! Paul couldn’t even remember who he baptised *I do **not know** whether I baptised any one else* [16]

Then he clearly comes out with it *Christ did **not** send me to baptise but to **preach** the **gospel*** [17]. There it is – the **gospel** is the **central** thing. Without the gospel there is **no Church!** The elevation of peripherals has happened by default! **Because** the gospel was so important, the Church began to ‘protect’ and support itself by **adding** things which **probably** did **need** to be discussed at the time, but was **not meant** to be **vital** and **central**. But as **time went on**, the ‘supporting programme’ became more important. In our desire to preserve the **institution of the Church**, we have forgotten and actually now in many places **neglect** the thing for which the Church

was **instituted for** – the gospel! That is why the general **public** just don't know what the Church really stands for - there is so much importance attached to social/political matters that the gospel is **lost** in the debris! The Church was instituted **for** the gospel - not vice versa! The **gospel needs** the Church so that the gospel can flourish!

It is **not only** the Church that has this problem – so does **politics** - Parties have changed the main characteristic of their foundational principles 'What has happened to Old Labour?' It has happened in the **social services** – the **patient** in hospital is no longer the vital and main consideration; as in **education** and **childcare**, its more **legislation** and **paper** work which in no way helps the child! All because of a desire to **preserve the institution**, rather than the thing for which it was instituted! The Church was instituted so that the **gospel** would be proclaimed loud/clear as **far** and **wide** as possible!

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS THE GOSPEL?

If I were to tell you tonight, that from **now on**, if you **never sinned again**, you would get to heaven – would that **excite** you? Would you feel you would make it? Is that an **attractive** offer? For me it is **not** 'Good News' but very **bad news** – for I can't stop sinning! I have a sinful **nature**. Just as it is **natural** for a dog to bark, a duck to quack, so it is natural for man to sin! The human mind *is **hostile to God**; for it does **not submit** to God's law; indeed it cannot [R8:7] *the natural person does **not accept** the things of the Spirit of God for they are **folly** to him; and he is not able to understand them [1C2:14]**

We may **try hard** to keep God's law – but we still can't manage. Paul said, *I know that **nothing good** dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but **not the ability** to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing* [R7:18] That is true of us all. So then, hearing, that from now on, if I do not sin again, I will get to heaven, is **not good news**, but bad news! But the gospel is **Good News** not bad!

So what is the **Good News**? First, let us **remember** what the **two biggest problems** are which **impede** our salvation. These problems are (1) the **exorbitant cost** of **paying** the debt of our sins and (2) having to **live** thereafter in **full obedience** to God's law. Ie, to pay the

price of Adam's sin and our personal sins; and then to live holy lives forever after - **in the same flesh!** These are the 2 great obstacles impeding our salvation. God must be satisfied about them! Now, not many people **think** about these 2 things! You will hardly ever hear such thing talked about or discussed - they are never on any TV programmes - but they **are real obstacles!** Its **amazing** that these things are **not** discussed because **all the evil in the world** (the bombings, killings, rapes, etc) would end if humanity accepted, received and believed the gospel (which means Good News!)

So what is the gospel then? It is the **announcement** that these 2 obstacles have been removed! It is the **proclamation** that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, has **gained victory** over Satan/sin/death/hell and the road to heaven is open. The gospel is the **announcement** of something has been accomplished that was not accomplished before. And that something is the removal of these 2 obstacles!

The Good News is that salvation **does not depend on us!** We cannot over-emphasise it - it is good **news!** So many people think salvation and the heart of religion is good **advice**, good **techniques**, good **programmes**, good **ideas**, good **support systems**, etc! But such things only drive us deeper into **ourselves!** We must get away from ourselves because we ourselves are the **problem!** The Good News is not a **task to fulfil**, or a mission to accomplish, or a game plan to follow with the help of coaches. Many people think the Church is for providing a list of rules how to be more loving, forgiving, patient, caring, generous and so on! No!! Yes, there are plenty instructions in the Bible regarding that - but that is **not** the Good News!

These lists of regulations are in the Bible as a revelation to us of God's **moral** will for us to **live** by, not a revelation of God's **saving** will. Yes, we are called to love our neighbour - but that is **not** the gospel! Christ did not die on the cross to let us know that we should be much better people than we are. These moral directions do not have the **power** to save us! When the Philippian Jailor asked Paul what he had to do to be **saved**, he did not give him a list of do's and don't's! He told him about the Lord Jesus Christ.

What was the **most important thing** for Paul? Listen to him telling

the Cors: *I delivered to you as of **first importance**...that Christ **died for our sins** in accordance with the Scriptures [1Cor 15:3]* And it should be of first importance in every Church/congregation. **That** is the *message of the **Cross*** that Paul speaks of – it was ‘**lost**’ among the debris of divisions and sectarianism in Corinth! Paul was really worried about this, that’s why he said *lest the **cross of Christ be emptied of its power*** [17c]. **APP** It’s the same today! The Cross of Christ is belittled and not the ‘be all, and end all’ of the Church. Satan is so **subtle**! He has successfully, under the ‘**guise**’ of ‘truth, love, faithfulness’, diverted Xns’ thoughts so the **Cross is concealed!**

Clever/sophisticated words and philosophies of *eloquent wisdom* are now, as in Paul’s day, side-tracking us, so the **gospel** is a *stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles* [23]. That is why Paul goes on to speak of the ‘wisdom of the world’ - philosophy seems good/popular among the intellectuals of the world. A great danger for **preachers** is to copy the **orators, poets, philosophers**, who have special skill in **communication** but the **essence** of the gospel is not there.

The ‘good news’ is that the ‘work’ of salvation for sinners is **done** and **completed!** All we have to do is **believe** it and follow the Lord.

A GREAT DANGER in HEARING the GOSPEL

It is to treat it as **just too simple** to be **true!** It is *folly to those who are perishing* [18]. Like the man crying ‘Free fish, free fish – the best of fish for nothing’, but no one came for no one believed it! You see, just believing/accepting salvation for nothing, being ‘**so easy**’, does **not appeal** to mankind, who is by nature **proud**. Man wants to **contribute** to his salvation. If he can **do** something it will make him **feel** far better! That’s a real/great danger in any generation.

That is **why not many** *wise according to worldly standards*, and not many **powerful**, and not many of **noble birth** were in the Corinthian Church or any Church since - but thankfully, although not many, there **are some**, and fine ones at that too. It is usually because their **station** and **rank** in the world make it hard for intellectuals to **stoop down** and **confess** their sins to a higher God than the one they daily worship (self). There is nothing to boast about - except boasting in what Jesus did for us. *Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*