

STONE HARBOR

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Dear Readers,

What follows is one man's weekly attempt to know the truth of God's Word and bring it to His people for their good and ultimately for His glory. Please regard these only as notes belonging to a busy pastor uploaded as they stand (for better or for worse, complete or incomplete, almost always with grammatical errors, and always with room for refinement in content, structure, presentation...) to support the ongoing study of God's Word. I firmly believe that the community of faith which is the body of Christ can and should bring their gifts to bear for the good of the rest of the body and that any one teacher can be taught by the others with an understanding of the truth. Therefore, should you have insight that would sharpen any of the thinking expressed here, know that I would be pleased to receive it. Clearly, the input that is most welcome and most helpful is that which is more concise than verbose, Biblically grounded and expressed with the goal of displacing misunderstanding and apprehending the truth of God's Word. Your thoughts of that nature are most welcome, certainly appreciated and will be thoughtfully considered. You are invited to send those insights to me at johnny@stoneharborchurch.org.

In pursuit of truth and growing a shepherd's heart,

Johnny

Transformation Card

This page provides an overview of the message and resources for individual and group study.

Date: May 16, 2010
Series: The Church of God's Intention
Part: Part 1 – What God Intends the Church to Be
Section: The Church of the Gospel
Topic: The Gospel
Message Title: **God Intends the Church to be the Church of the Gospel**
Short Title: Which Gospel
Text: Various
Key Words:

Message Outline

The Church of the Gospel (Deb, use in sideways heading.)

“Which Gospel?” (Deb, use as heading of the Outline above the three points.)

- A. The Apostolic Gospel
- B. The Gospel According to the Scriptures

Related Scripture

1. Gen 3:15
2. 1 Cor 15:3-8

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What is the role of the Gospel in the Church?
2. What is the Gospel?
3. What is the Apostolic Gospel?
4. What do we need to do with the Gospel?

Memory and Meditation Verse

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” 1 Cor 15:3-5 (NASB)

D. God Intends the Church to Be the Church of the Gospel

God intends that church to be the church of the Gospel in the sense that the gospel is the good news of Jesus and as we have already seen, He is the builder, the owner, the Head and Lord of the Church.

If there had been no Jesus, there would be no Church. And to the degree that Jesus is not rightly understood as the head and the center and the foundation of the church, what we call the church is not the church according to God. But the Bible clearly testifies that Jesus is all that.

And yet Jesus Christ no longer lives amongst us as He once did incarnate in the Nazarene. He has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God.

We follow Him NOT by traveling the dusty roads of Israel in Galilee, Bethany, and Jerusalem as His first disciples did; rather our walk with Jesus is by faith, trusting in what our eyes can not see but what our regenerated spirits know to be true, i.e., that His Spirit lives within us and has given us the life God has intended us to have – the eternal life of intimate communion with God.

We can't run and get our friends and bring them into a room and introduce them to the flesh and blood Jesus like Andrew did in John 1 because Jesus is not here He is risen and ascended. What we have is not the physical Jesus but the Spirit of Jesus and **Gospel of Jesus**. The gospel is a message. It is truth – the life giving truth of Jesus.

The gospel has been revealed to each believer by the Holy Spirit via the Scriptures and the human instruments who cared enough to bring this treasure to us that we might live in peace and at rest with God. I have my sister and my wife to thank for bringing me the gospel that they had recently received from others who cared enough to bring it to them.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. [Romans 1:16](#) – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Wow! “...the power of God for salvation...”

Further, it has been entrusted to you. You have that which the Lord uses to bring about the salvation of others. You have what God chooses to use to bring life to those He calls into His family. I kid you not! I want to say, “No, I don't, I couldn't. That is too much power, I don't feel like I have that power. That is too much responsibility, I don't want that kind of responsibility. I really don't think I even know what the gospel message is. You must be mistaken. God has not given me that – has He?”

He has! You don't know it as well as you could, and probably for most of us don't know it as well as we should; but that does not change the fact that we have it – God has given us the Gospel of Jesus. We just need to look more carefully at it. We must not think of it like a gift that we received and then set on the shelf in our room to collect dust while we go about our lives. Love for God and man must constrain us to take it down and look intently at it until we know it as we know our very selves.

Brother's and sisters in Christ, would you look with me today at the Gospel – the power of God for salvation, that upon which Jesus is building His church and the message Jesus intends the church to know and share with the world that is dying without it?

3. Which Gospel?

That begs the question of which gospel I'm talking about. What is the content of this life giving message? I've heard several takes on the gospel. Well, it is not the gospel according to Johnny, or the gospel of Thomas, or the gospel according to Kit, or the gospel according to you; but...

a) **The Apostolic Gospel**

(6) The Gospel According to Jesus' Apostles

Take note of these facts:

(a) Jesus Hand Picked His Apostles

Lk 6:13; Mt 10:2; Mk 3:16

Lk 6:13 -- And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:

(b) They Spent Time with Him and Came to Know Him

(i) John 1 Example

(ii) Broad Summary of Gospels

- They saw His deeds
- They learned His lessons
- They slowly came to understand Him as God's Messiah, the One God had been promising throughout all history by His redemptive actions and through His prophets, the One who would come and turn creation right-side-up.
- This understanding of who Jesus was increased in the minds of His disciples and reached a new highpoint in Peter's confession of faith in Mat 16.

(iii) Peter's Understanding of Jesus

- Mat 16:13-19
- 16 -- "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

(iv) Jesus' Endorsement of the Importance of Peter's Confession

- Mat 16:17-19

- “Jesus made the confessing Peter a rock of foundation in his church.” (Clowney p. 73).
- This is evident in...

(v) Paul's Acknowledgment of the Foundational Nature of the Apostles in the Church of Christ

(a) *Eph 2:19-22 (esp. v.20)*

- 20 – “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone”
- Paul pictures Jesus apostles as a part of the **foundation** of the church.

(c) **Jesus' apostles were sent out to represent Him**

- Mt 10:5; 28:19-20
- They were so much a part of and an extension of Him that Jesus says... -- “**He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me**” (Mt 10:40).

(d) **They were NOT sent out to represent themselves or their own ideas apart from Him**

- The apostolic gospel is Gospel of Christ, i.e., the good news concerning Jesus who is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” as Jesus was and is.
- The apostolic gospel is not what any man misunderstands it to be, but what Jesus defined it to be and what His Spirit revealed it to be to His apostles.
- That's the test of gospel integrity. All understandings of “the gospel” must be held up against the gospel according to Jesus and His apostles.
- It is the apostolic gospel that is “...**the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...**”

(i) Not the apostolic gospel + (plus)

Speaking of the unique authority held by Jesus chosen apostles and the foundational role of their testimony of Jesus, i.e., their gospel, Edmond Clowney says, “The foundation of God's house does not run on indefinitely, like a roadbed, but it has been laid once for all. Jesus Christ gives this authority to those who are his original witnesses, and sends them in his name to declare his terms of entering the kingdom” (Clowney p. 73).

We dare not add to the gospel foundation that has already been laid in Christ and His apostles. And we stand at risk of doing this when we do not know the gospel and fill the

gaps in our understanding with guesses or assumptions. "I don't know what the complete gospel is. Maybe it is that we need to believe in Jesus and do good works so that we can merit forgiveness and salvation. Maybe it is that we need to believe in Jesus and be baptized and receive communion. Maybe we have to believe in Jesus and hold to the 5 points of Calvinism. Maybe it is that we have to believe in Jesus and tithe to the church. Maybe it is that we have to believe in Jesus and speak in tongues." All of these things we can do are additions to the Gospel which is about what Jesus has done.

(ii) Neither is it the apostolic gospel – (minus)

The biggest thing we subtract from the gospel that I am aware of is all of the OT. We tend to think of the gospel in terms of believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins so that we might be reconciled to God -- and it is about that, but not only that. The gospel does not begin with Jesus, rather it ends in Jesus. It begins in the very beginning even in the first book of the Bible.

(iii) In its broadest sense, the Gospel is the whole Bible – All of the Scriptures.

Although they certainly have a close referent to the Book of Revelation, I think we are right to apply John's warning at the end of the very last book of the Bible to the words of the whole Bible.

"...if anyone adds to them, God will add him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city which are written in this book" (Rev 22:18-19).

(e) Jesus' apostles were sent out to represent Jesus and His message and His message was His Father's message

(i) Jesus Life and Words Represented God the Father

Based on His unity with His Father, Jesus' life and words represented God the Father to the world. See Jn 7:16; 8:26, 38.

Thus, the gospel is the gospel of God.

Mark 1:14-15 – ¹⁴"Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.""

(ii) The Apostles Lives and Words Represented Jesus
Based on the apostle's unity with Jesus, their lives and words represented Jesus to the world.

Whose witnesses were Jesus apostles to be? In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to His apostles, "...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ... you shall be **My** witnesses..."

Again we visit Jesus words in Mat 10:40, "**He who receives you receives Me**, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

TRANS. So the gospel which is the power of God is the word of God as found in the life and words of Jesus and His apostles. Other than Peter's confession, the Apostle Paul gave us perhaps the most concise statement of the Gospel in 1 Cor 15:3-5 (see ctx.: 1-11).

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,
 that Christ died
 for our sins
 according to the Scriptures,
 4 and
 that He was buried,
 and
 that He was raised
 on the third day
 according to the Scriptures,
 5 and
 that He appeared
 to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Read this, memorize this, understand this. Most of it is straight forward. The gospel is that:

1. Christ died for our sins (3)
2. He was buried (4)
3. He was raised on the third day (4)

These events were verified by the fact that...

4. He appeared to Peter and His other apostles and many others

And Paul testifies that Christ's death, burial and resurrection all happened

5. "According to the Scriptures" (3-4)

And this is our second point. Which gospel is foundational to the Church? Which gospel is the power of God for salvation? We have seen it is the apostolic gospel and it is also...

b) The Gospel "According to the Scriptures"!

What "Scriptures" does Paul have in mind when he references them in his telling of the Gospel?

It might be better to ask what Scriptures He did NOT have in mind, for if there is one thing that we have seen in our Sacred Space study that we are completing this week, it is that all of the Scriptures ultimately point to Christ. He is the fulfillment of all God has promised.

(6) OT Scriptures

(a) Jesus is implicated in the very first verse of the Bible

(i) John 1 indicates that Jesus was present at creation.

(b) Gen 3:15 is called the Proto-evangelium: the First [telling of the] Gospel

(c) Gen 5-11 introduces Noah who pictured Christ

(d) Gen 12 introduces Abraham to whom God promised a descendent through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed – a promise that found it's ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

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And on and on we go though the entire OT which records God's redemptive activity in the world which culminated in Christ and His substitutionary atoning death for our sins as well as His burial and resurrection which secured for all those joined to Him both the first resurrection we now enjoy (the resurrection of our spirits) and the second resurrection (of our mortal bodies and the rest of creation) that we will enjoy at His second coming.

2 Corinthians 1:20

For **as many as** are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

Before any of the NT gospels were written Jesus came preaching the gospel of God" (Mark 1:14-15) and using the OT Scriptures to explain His death burial and resurrection (Luke 24).

Luke 24:25-27

- 25 And He said to them,
 "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe
 in all that the prophets have spoken!
- 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things
 and to enter into His glory?"
- 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets,
 He explained to them the things concerning Himself
 in all the Scriptures.

Which gospel is the power of God for salvation? The one according to the Scriptures. Which Scriptures? Both the OT and NT!

(7) NT Scriptures

The hand chosen apostles of Jesus who spent time with Him, were taught by Him and corrected by Him, who saw Him perform miracles of deliverance and healing, who were with Him when He was arrested and saw Him scourged, crucified and buried and then resurrected and who witnessed His ascension into heaven and received the Holy Spirit in such an unmistakably powerful way on the day of Pentecost when because of

the filling of the Holy Spirit they spoke, in languages unbeknownst to them, of the mighty deeds of God and then went on to do miraculous signs and wonders... this group of apostles were **uniquely qualified** to receive by revelation and then pen the NT Scriptures.

We have the same Holy Spirit, but we were not eye witnesses neither did we share the same direct discipleship that Jesus first century disciples did. The 12 apostles with Paul (Gal 1:1) are unique and uniquely qualified to record the apostolic Gospel of the NT Scriptures.

The NT Scripture contains:

(a) Spirit Revealed Truth in Spirit Inspired Writings

(i) Eph 2:1-7

- 1 For this reason I, Paul,
the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you
Gentiles--
- 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of
God's grace
which was given to me for you;
- 3 that **by revelation**
there was made known to me the mystery,
as I wrote before in brief.
- 4 By referring to this, when you read
you can understand my insight into the **mystery of**
Christ,
- 5 **which in other generations was not made known**
to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed
to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;
- 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs
and fellow members of the body,
and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus
through the gospel,
- 7 of which I was made a minister,
according to the gift of God's grace
which was given to me
according to the working of His power.

(b) Progressive Revelation

V. 5 indicates that what God revealed to Jesus' apostles had not previously been "made known to the sons of men"; but "...it has now been revealed to His holy apostles..."

We have, in the writings of the apostles in our NT Scriptures, a greater revelation of God's truth.

So to them we turn in addition to the OT to understand the gospel upon which and with which Jesus is building His church.

Therefore, should we seek to know the gospel, and we should, (we must!), we will turn to the NT Scriptures and hear in them the final authoritative gospel message revealed to Jesus' apostles by His Spirit.

“The church is not the source of the divine revelation given through the apostles... Rather, New Testament revelation is part of Christ's work through his Spirit; it is the apostolic foundation on which Christ builds his church” (Clowney, p. 75)

Which gospel? The gospel according to both the OT and NT Scriptures and...

(8) Nothing Else!

Many will want to add or subtract from the gospel according to the Scriptures. It will even be our own default tendency as we (out of laziness, confidence in our flesh, desire to spin truth to our advantage...) mishandle the gospel. Don't give in! Listen to Paul warning against such folly:

Gal 1:6-9

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him
who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;
7 which is really not another;
only there are some who are disturbing you
and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven,
should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached
to you,
he is to be accursed!
9 As we have said before, so I say again now,
if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you
received,
he is to be accursed!

TRANS. – The Scripture is our source of the apostolic gospel.

Conclusion

The gospel is Jesus.

The gospel is Jesus rightly understood.

The gospel is Jesus rightly understood as God has revealed Him in all the Scriptures.

The gospel is Jesus rightly understood as God has revealed Him in all the Scriptures beginning in Genesis 1 and ending in Revelation 22:21.

The gospel is Jesus rightly understood as God has revealed Him in all the Scriptures beginning in Genesis 1 and ending in Revelation 22:21 especially as:

- He is the promised Seed of the woman who crushes the head of the seed of the serpent and thereby reverses the curse that rightly fell upon mankind after their rebellion against God as described in the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden Eden.
- As He is portrayed in Noah
- As He was promised to Abraham
- As He was foreshadowed in Moses
- As He was sketched in the Nation of Israel
- As He was promised to David
- As He was prophesied to Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel and God's other prophets
- As He has come in the Son born to Mary, Immanuel, God with us.
- As He lived and died and was raised and ascended to heaven where He is now enthroned as the King of the Kingdom of God and from where He has sent His Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all whom God the Father has called into His kingdom and from where He will one day come again to consummate all things and bring to fullness all that He has inaugurated at His first coming.

You have looked with me today at the Gospel. Will you look with me tomorrow, and the next day and the next as well? Will you make it the pursuit of your life to know Jesus (Phil 3:8) and to effectively, lovingly communicate Him as He has been revealed in the apostolic gospel to your kids and your siblings and your parents and your friends and your co-workers and you neighbors and as many as the Lord God gives you opportunity to share it with?

If you will, you will be participating in the proclamation of the gospel that God has ordained to be the vehicle by which people come to know Him and be added to His church as living stones built alongside the apostles and the prophets who rest next to Jesus as the cornerstone of the household of God.

Take all the nice language out of this and reflect with me on our task in our community. We were saved by the gospel of Christ. We have that gospel. Others don't. You tell me! What shall we do about this that Jesus has already commissioned us to do and that has been the task of the POG from the beginning?

We must communicate the apostolic gospel according to the Scriptures to those God is calling into His kingdom in our day in this community!

How are we going to do that?

What did we learn last week. We must not rush to doing until we know. We must know Christ and the Gospel that He and His Spirit revealed to His apostles. Then we will not be able to help ourselves but to carry that gospel to the world. If we carry a gospel to the world that we have only carelessly received (not understanding it as well as we could, adding our own spin to it) then we are undermining the very foundation of the church. Knowing takes time but it can not be skipped.

Catholics add (merit to grace, works to faith, tradition to Scripture...), evangelicals subtract (sufficing a handful of proof texts for the Gospel of God in all the Scriptures). May we not fall into either trap. May we instead give ourselves to the careful pursuit of Christ in all the Scriptures and then not hold what He gives us freely to ourselves alone by share it with others that they may be saved by God through His gospel rightly understood and lovingly communicated.

I have a challenge: Prayerfully and in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, pursue knowing Christ in the pages of all the Scriptures paying special attention to the gospel. Write down the gospel in a sentence, then in a paragraph, then in a page, then in several pages. Not the gospel plus, nor the gospel minus, but the apostolic gospel found in all the Scriptures. Share your writings with me, then share them with others as an act of love for God and those you share them with.

As God leads, let's make sure that we are a church of the Gospel of Christ by knowing Christ of the gospel and sharing that gospel with those who have not experienced its power.

Let's pray!

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