



2017 Q3 Lesson 13 – The Gospel and the Church

Any initial reactions when you hear or read that title? As frequently happens, I immediately went to definition questions - what is the Gospel...or which Gospel? Any scriptures come to mind?

Romans 1:16-17 (NIV) - 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, or in the Remedy: 16 I am not ashamed of spreading the good news about God and his character, methods and principles, as this is God's power which heals everyone who believes and trusts in him: firstly to the Jews—those initially called to assist in spreading the Remedy, and then to the Gentiles—those most recently called to help spread the Remedy. 17 For the good news is a revelation of God's true righteousness—character, methods and principles—that restores trust in God and results in re-creation of a righteous and Christlike character in humans, just as it is written: "The Christlike will live by choosing what is right in governance of themselves, and by trusting God with how things turn out."

One of the founders of our church adds to that by saying,

“...for the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, when it is interwoven with the practical life, when it is lived and practiced. The union of Christlike work for the body and Christlike work for the soul is the true interpretation of the gospel.” - {CME 7.3}

As you may know, at the time our denomination was founded Mrs. White encouraged the church to tightly couple the healing/health message with the gospel message...any idea why? This is what she said in a book called *Counsels on Health*,

“These lessons are for us. There are conditions to be observed by all who would preserve health. All should learn what these conditions are. The Lord is not pleased with ignorance in regard to His laws, either natural or spiritual. We are to be workers together with God for the restoration of health to the body as well as to the soul. {CH 31.1} And we should teach others how to preserve and to recover health. For the sick we should use the remedies which God has provided in nature, and we should point them to Him who alone can restore. It is our work to present the sick and suffering to Christ in the arms of our faith. We should teach them to believe in the Great Healer. We should lay hold on His promise and pray for the manifestation of His power. The very essence of the gospel is restoration, and the Saviour would have us bid the sick, the hopeless, and the afflicted take hold upon His strength. {CH 31.2} The power of love was in all Christ's healing, and only by partaking of that love, through faith, can we be



instruments for His work. If we neglect to link ourselves in divine connection with Christ, the current of life-giving energy cannot flow in rich streams from us to the people. There were places where the Saviour Himself could not do many mighty works because of their unbelief. So now unbelief separates the church from her divine Helper. Her hold upon eternal realities is weak. By her lack of faith, God is disappointed and robbed of His glory. {CH 31.3}

Romans 16:25 - Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the *revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past*

2 Corinthians 4:4 - The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. From the Remedy: Satan, the god of this pagan age, has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they don't see or comprehend the truth about God—his methods and principles as revealed in Christ, who is God's very thoughts made audible and visible.

Galatians 1:11 - I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. From the Remedy: Brothers, I want you to be perfectly clear on this, the good news that I proclaim—the message of healing and restoration—the truth about the character of God as revealed by Jesus, is not something fabricated or concocted by human beings.

Ephesians 3:6 - This is the *truth previously hidden and not understood*: God loves all humanity, and all humanity is included in God's plan to heal and restore, and—through the incredible good news of God as revealed in Christ—all humans are included in the promises given to Abraham, and are therefore heirs of the blessings of salvation which come through Christ Jesus.

One more quote that provides some amazing insight about the law and the gospel and truth that should be constantly unfolding.

“Christ in His teaching presented old truths of which He Himself was the originator, truths which He had spoken through patriarchs and prophets; but He now shed upon them a new light. How different appeared their meaning! A flood of light and spirituality was brought in by His explanation. And He promised that the Holy Spirit should enlighten the disciples, that the word of God should be ever unfolding to them. They would be able to present its truths in new beauty. {COL 127.2}

Ever since the first promise of redemption was spoken in Eden, the life, the character, and the



mediatorial work of Christ have been the study of human minds. Yet every mind through whom the Holy Spirit has worked has presented these themes in a light that is fresh and new. The truths of redemption are capable of constant development and expansion. Though old, they are ever new, constantly revealing to the seeker for truth a greater glory and a mightier power. {COL 127.3}

In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are all essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new... But it is the light which shines in the fresh unfolding of truth that glorifies the old. He who rejects or neglects the new does not really possess the old. For him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form...No man can rightly present the law of God without the gospel, or the gospel without the law. The law is the gospel embodied, and the gospel is the law unfolded. The law is the root, the gospel is the fragrant blossom and fruit which it bears. The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. Both present truths that will continually reveal new depths of meaning to the earnest seeker. Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. Not in this life shall we comprehend the mystery of God's love in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The work of our Redeemer on this earth is and ever will be a subject that will put to the stretch our highest imagination. Man may tax every mental power in the endeavor to fathom this mystery, but his mind will become faint and weary. The most diligent searcher will see before him a boundless, shoreless sea. The truth as it is in Jesus can be experienced, but never explained. Its height and breadth and depth pass our knowledge. We may task our imagination to the utmost, and then we shall see only dimly the outlines of a love that is unexplainable, that is as high as heaven, but that stooped to the earth to stamp the image of God on all mankind. {COL 129.1}

OK, we have defined "the Gospel"... now, what is "the Church"? How would you define that? Is it a building? We have a whole bunch of churches in this area...which one is THE church? Is it a specific denomination, set of doctrines, or beliefs?

I thought it might be beneficial to check with one of the founders of **our** church to see what she had to say about what "the Church" is...turns out she has quite a bit to say about it - enlightening, significant, sobering, weighty things:

The church is God's agency for the proclamation of truth, empowered by Him to do a special work... – {AA 600.2}



The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10. – {AA 9.1}

During ages of spiritual darkness the church of God has been as a city set on a hill. From age to age, through successive generations, the pure doctrines of heaven have been unfolding within its borders. Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts. – {AA 12.1}

The church is very precious in God's sight. He values it, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of the members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience. – {COL 298.1}

The real character of the church is measured, not by the high profession she makes, not by the names enrolled upon the church book, but by what she is actually doing for the Master, by the number of her persevering, faithful workers. Personal interest, and vigilant, individual effort will accomplish more for the cause of Christ than can be wrought by sermons or creeds.—The Review and Herald, September 6, 1881. – {ChS 12.1}

The present attitude of the church is not pleasing to God. **There has come in a self-confidence that has led them to feel no necessity for more truth and greater light.** We are living at a time when Satan is at work on the right hand and on the left, before and behind us; and yet as a people we are asleep. God wills that a voice shall be heard arousing His people to action.—Gospel Workers, 297-300 (1915). – {CW 41.3}

This is from the Teacher's Quarterly:

"God has commissioned the church as His transforming agent upon the earth. The omnipotent Savior might have bypassed humanity when reaching the lost world. What could sinful, weakened, vacillating humans contribute to this noble enterprise? Dispatch the sinless angelic host, mobilize the faithful creatures from other galaxies, or utilize divine remote controls: the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of the universe had these and thousands of additional options at His disposal. Nevertheless, He included the fellowship of redeemed individuals, the church,



as His distributing agency. *Care should be exercised in expressing this truth.* The church has the privilege and opportunity of sharing and modeling the gospel before fallen humanity. This sacred responsibility, however, is not proprietary. Humans do not possess franchise authority, and they cannot deny access to God. The Holy Spirit is God's primary disseminator of grace with the church, assuming the role of cooperating agency. **Rather than denying access to God, the church's work is to expand access.** What glorious opportunities! The church works hand in hand with God to evangelize and nurture fallen human beings. Miraculous transformation and reformation occur constantly within this divinely originated and ordained fellowship."

SUNDAY

Restoring the Fallen

Who are "the fallen?"

The quarterly asks – How should Christians respond when a fellow believer falls into sinful behavior?

Paul says, "we should restore that person gently." We have lots of different churches represented here...how do you think your churches do with this if you had to grade them? Should this response be any different with non-believers?

The terminology Paul uses in Galatians 6 refers to a mistake, a stumble, or a misstep - not a deliberate or defiant sin; and therefore, the proper response in such circumstances should not be punishment, condemnation, or disfellowship but restoration. When is that NOT the proper response?

The quarterly points out that the Greek word translated as "restore" is *katartizo*, and it means "to mend" or "to put in order." In the New Testament it is used to refer to the "mending" of fishnets (Matt. 4:21), and it is used as a medical term in Greek literature to describe the process of setting a broken bone. In the same way that we would not abandon a fellow believer who fell and broke a leg, as members of the body of Christ we should gently care for our brothers and sisters in Christ who may stumble and fall as we walk together on the path to God's kingdom.

This is also from the teacher's notes in the quarterly, and it's so well-said and kind of surprised me - in the best way:

"The church's constant objective is restoration, not condemnation. Many understand the terminology of church discipline punitively. Well-intentioned members, zealous to protect the church's reputation, declare that the erring must be separated in order to avoid contamination.



This is a very dangerous approach. The religious leadership of Christ's time was anxious about condemning the adulterous woman in John 8; but were they themselves sinless? Had they no need for forgiveness? Was there no divine condemnation for their hypocrisy? Perhaps the notion of protecting the church's reputation needs reexamination. Compare the work of a hospital. Hospitals exist for the purpose of physical healing and restoration. Does every patient leave the hospital alive? Obviously not. Does the presence of occasional casualties nullify the hospital's mission and purpose? Would your community declare that the local hospital should close because it lost a patient? Should hospitals limit their services to those with common colds and other easily curable diseases in order to enhance their track records and bolster their reputations, turning away trauma patients, cancer victims, and other difficult cases? Rather than dismissing difficult cases, physicians aggressively tackle them, researching new methodologies and techniques to affect healing. Disease is meticulously studied, new therapies are developed, and yesterday's death-sentence diseases become today's miraculous breakthroughs. Perhaps those who work with spiritual illness should adopt a similar attitude. Thus, discipline would become redemptive rather than punitive, and the church's reputation would rest upon the compassionate and aggressively creative way that believers fight the sin disease. Christians should forcefully battle sin, not sinners. Obviously, some will be lost. But should churches start limiting their ministry to good citizen types in order to bolster their success rate, their action would prove that they have forgotten their purpose. Discipline, in Paul's usage, refers to training in righteousness. It is a series of actions or behaviors whose objective is forming a more intimate relationship with God. Far from being punitive, Paul's discipline is restorative and positive. Like fine-tuned triage units, churches become centers for cooperation and accountability in achieving a common goal: the healing of sin-scarred hearts through the life-giving love of God."

WOW!! That is good stuff!

MONDAY

Beware of Temptation

Paul's appeal and counsel indicates a sense of urgency and genuine concern when he says to, "pay careful attention to" or "keep a careful eye on yourself", lest sin also take you by surprise. Can anyone else relate? Does your behavior or your reactions or responses sometimes catch you by surprise? Basically every. time. i. open. my. mouth. Even if Paul wasn't referring to any specific trespass or behavior, his words in Gal 5:26 against becoming "conceited" suggest that he is warning the Galatians (and us!) against feeling that they are in some way superior to those they are restoring.



The quarterly describes this sense of spiritual pride as one of the greatest dangers to the Christian walk...why? The lesson says it's because this spiritual pride makes us think we are somehow immune from committing certain types of sin...is that what makes it so dangerous? I believe the danger is much greater than that. Is it dangerous or damaging if a person has a terminal disease but doesn't know it...or is too proud to go to the doctor? Why? Because they will not seek help or partake of the remedy and be healed! That is why a sense of spiritual pride can be one of the greatest dangers to the Christian walk. The last paragraph in Monday's lesson says, "The sobering fact is that we all have the same sinful nature — a nature that is opposed to God." Yes! Our natural heart is at enmity toward God, it distrusts God - this is a terminal condition if left unremedied. Christ procured that heart-transplant remedy through His life, death, and resurrection and offers it as a free gift to all who are willing to receive it.

TUESDAY

Burden Bearing

Tuesday's lesson points out several practical spiritual insights related to Paul's instruction in Galatians 6:2, which says: "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ". What do you think that is? Wednesday's entire lesson is devoted to that question, so start thinking about what the law of Christ is and how bearing each other's burdens might fulfill it.

There are 3 spiritual insights defined in Tuesday's lesson

1. All Christians actually do have burdens to bear - shocking, right? Where does this misconception come from, that somehow if you are following Christ, and paying your tithe, and worshipping on the right day, and eating the right foods, and donating to the Samaritan Center, and checking all those right boxes...that somehow you should be exempt from the burdens and trials of this life? This view is not biblical, for Christ himself tells us that, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33) - it's guaranteed! But what...what is the rest of that text? "But take heart! I have overcome the world!" That promise of trouble is couched between two incredibly comforting and reassuring promises of hope - the first part is that He tells us, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace." He does not want us to be bewildered or caught by surprise, and He wants us to have God's peace—that is beyond words and human explanation and transcends our circumstance—to fill our minds and strengthen our hearts as we trust totally in Christ Jesus.
2. God does not intend for us to bear all our burdens alone. How many of us are far more willing to help others carry their burdens than we are to allow or ask others for help with our own? Paul condemns this attitude of self-sufficiency as human pride...to which I have to say, "ouch"! Think about this: when we refuse to admit that we have needs and weaknesses, we rob



ourselves of the comfort and support of others...AND we prevent others from fulfilling the ministry God has called them to do. Wow!

3. Finally, God calls us to bear each other's burdens because it is through OUR actions that God's comfort is made manifest (this sounds a lot like what we just discussed as the definition of "the church"). The quarterly quotes John Stott in his book, *The Message of Galatians*, "Human friendship, in which we bear one another's burdens, is part of the purpose of God for His people." God comforts us not so we can be comfortable, but so we can be comfort-able - e equips us to be able to comfort others.

WEDNESDAY

The Law of Christ

Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Our quarterly points out that Paul's use of the phrase "the law of Christ" is unique - it is used nowhere else in the entire Bible, which of course has led to a number of different interpretations of what he meant. What do you think he means? I don't remember a commandment about bearing each other's burdens, so I don't think he's talking about that law. Do we think it's related to Galatians 5:14, which says, "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself." What about Romans 13:10, which says, "Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." In Matthew 5:17, Christ even says He has not come to abolish the Law (capital L) or the prophets, but to fulfill them. This law of Christ is the law of Love.

The second part of Wednesday's lesson makes an interesting point about the two different terms Paul uses for the word "burden" in verses 2 and 5 of chapter 6 - 1 refers to a heavy load carried for a long distance, the other is interpreted as a ship's cargo, a soldier's backpack, or even a child in the womb. So, the first type of burden can be laid aside or shared, but the second type cannot. A pregnant mother must carry her own child, she can't hire that out. So, some burdens others can help us bear, but for others - a guilty conscience, illness, death - we must rely on God's help alone. Agree?

THURSDAY

Sowing and Reaping

Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." What do you think Paul means when he says, "God cannot be mocked"? The author of the quarterly believes Paul's point is that people may ignore God or even flout His commandments, but they cannot outwit God. He is the ultimate judge, and in the end they will have to pay the price for their actions.



The quarterly calls Paul's reference to sowing and reaping a metaphor...is it? Or is it a natural design law upon which our reality is built? This is what one of the founders of our church has to say about it:

“The Spirit of God keeps evil under the control of conscience. When man exalts himself above the influence of the Spirit, he reaps a harvest of iniquity. Over such a man the Spirit has less and less influence to restrain him from sowing seeds of disobedience. Warnings have less and less power over him. He gradually loses his fear of God. He sows to the flesh; he will reap corruption. The harvest of the seed that he himself has sown, is ripening. He has a contempt for God's holy commandments. His heart of flesh becomes a heart of stone. Resistance to truth confirms him in iniquity. It is because men sowed seeds of evil, that lawlessness, crime, and violence prevailed in the antediluvian world. “All should be intelligent in regard to the agency by which the soul is destroyed. It is not because of any decree that God has sent out against man. He does not make man spiritually blind. God gives sufficient light and evidence to enable man to distinguish truth from error. But He does not force man to receive truth. He leaves him free to choose the good or to choose the evil. If man resists evidence that is sufficient to guide his judgment in the right direction, and chooses evil once, he will do this more readily the second time. The third time he will still more eagerly withdraw himself from God and choose to stand on the side of Satan. And in this course he will continue until he is confirmed in evil, and believes the lie he has cherished as truth. His resistance has produced its harvest (MS 126, 1901).”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1112.