

GOSPEL AND GOSPEL WORK (III)

*Synopsis of Seminar Conducted by Pastor at the
Bible College of East Africa, Tanzania
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Text: 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

(III) Faithful in the Gospel Work (v17)

How then may we judge the success of a man in the gospel work? Not by numbers, nor by fame, nor by the money he receives from the gospel work, but by his faithfulness and integrity in the work. Verse 17 tells us that there are false workers who “*corrupt*” God’s Word. The term “*corrupt*” (*καπηλεύω, kapēleuō*) has the sense of engaging in shady business with greedy intentions. These are “preachers” who only “preach” for their bellies. “Less pay, less preach! No pay, no preach!” Not so, the Apostle Paul, who is true and sincere in the ministry of Christ.

Moreover, verse 17 tells us that there are **many** (not just a few) who corrupt the Word of God. It is not just “a few,” or “some,” but many handle the Word of God deceitfully! They twist and turn the Holy Scriptures to suit their nefarious ideas and practices, peddling the Word of God to make merchandise of God’s people. There is no concern whether the souls of men will perish due to their tainting of God’s Word. They will do what it takes to corrupt the truth so that their fleshly lusts may be fulfilled. Beware of such men and do not be like such men. “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*” (Rom. 16:17).

The Apostles often had to deal with perversions of the gospel during the time of the early church. We read of some of these attacks on the pure gospel of Christ in the Epistles:

1. In the Book of Galatians, Paul dealt with the attacks of the Judaizers who teach that circumcision is necessary for salvation.
2. In the Book of Colossians, Paul addressed a form of Jewish mysticism that influenced the church. This led to an unhealthy obsession with Sabbath observance and Jewish festivals, worship of angels, and Christians engaging in ascetic practices (such as fasting) in the false belief that these are required to draw near to God.
3. In the Book of 1 John, John dealt with the foul teachings of the Gnostics and the Docetists. The Gnostics teach that one needs secret knowledge to be saved, and this knowledge can only be obtained from within their closed group. From the Gnostics sprung forth the Docetists who teach that all flesh is evil.

Therefore, Christ did not come in the flesh but only in the spirit.

Perversions to the gospel are still abundant in Christianity today. One such perversion is the Health and Wealth Gospel movement which proclaims, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall have health and wealth." Masses attend churches not because they want to seek Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and salvation of their souls but to seek material prosperity and physical health. Thus we have a proliferation of "evangelists", "pastors", "prophets" or "apostles" who get the crowds fawning with holy handkerchiefs (from a perverted interpretation of Acts 19:12), holy water or holy oil. We also see the advancement of the Health and Wealth Gospel among Charismatic Churches which are obsess over the performing of signs and wonders.

The Christian lives by the Word of God (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). It is food to our souls. Thus, the Bible tells us that we should "desire the sincere milk of the word" that we may "grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). The word "sincere" in this verse refers to something that is pure and unadulterated. If we are to grow spiritually, then we must make sure we feed upon the pure Word of God. To do otherwise would be spiritually dangerous. It is not something that we should play a fool with.

Carl McIntire stated the severity of the issue well: "Experience warns us that the food for our bodies must be pure, and without poison. So, also, God's Word demands that the food for our souls be pure, and without poison. When physical food is poison, the body dies. When spiritual food is poison, the soul perishes." It is thus an "absolute requirement" that our food be pure. As preachers of the gospel, it is our responsibility to present the pure and unadulterated Word of Everlasting Life to men.

However, the gospel can also be perverted when we do not follow the pattern of gospel work which is taught in the Scriptures. A chief manual of how we ought to conduct the gospel work is found in the Book of Acts, which Rev. Timothy Tow described as the infallible pattern of church growth and missions. Thus Paul charged Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Howard Carlson wrote in the foreword to Timothy Tow's commentary on the Book of Acts: "Many US pastors have fallen into the trap of relying upon "modern techniques" and gimmicks rather than the working of the Holy Spirit. Many of the larger churches depend upon a non-biblical view of the Holy Spirit, with sensational signs and claims to increase their growth. Others of us organize our churches so carefully that we think we can get along quite well without the working of the Holy Spirit, and we might not even recognize His work if He did anything major in our churches. Dr Tow's emphasis is on better men, not better methods and programs. He stresses a close relationship to God, and serving Him diligently according to the Scriptural truths with a great sense of urgency. He points out that relying on 'modern techniques' leads to the increase of the destructive inclusivism, while relying upon the Holy Spirit leads to a forgotten purity. There is much here that we pastors need as we face the year 2000."

Timothy Tow adds in the preface: "In a certain Theological College in Singapore, I'm told by one of her students, tomes and tomes of the latest books by specialists and experts must be read, not the Bible!

"But it is the Bible that theological students and would be missionaries must study. And the Text Book for those who are giving their lives to the mission field is none other than the Acts of the Apostles. So often we miss the green woods for the stunted trees before our eyes."

Today, we have the perversion of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and Worship invading churches. Worship services are more like a concert rather than a time of sanctified worship with God as the object and center of our worship. These churches brought the world into the church thinking that it could attract people to the gospel. Through this they reveal how ashamed they are of the gospel and its power. Beware of CCM!

If we are not to pervert the gospel, we must preach the gospel in "*sincerity*" (i.e. with pure motives) just like Paul and his associates. They did so because they understood their accountability to God. The proof of their sincerity is seen in how they handled the Word of God. They preached faithfully according to the Word and refused to "sugar-coat" the scriptures to defraud God's people. They were committed to speaking the truth because they knew they were sent by God and thus were accountable to Him. Thus, they spoke the whole counsel of God even if it meant that it might not be well-received by some. They also lived out the Word of God. These are the marks of one who is truly called of God to be a messenger of His Word.

The problem of false messengers was not new. Israel was plagued with false prophets throughout her history before her dispersion. To boost their popularity and elicit gain, the prophets preached false messages of health, wealth and prosperity to the people. They refused to rebuke the people for their sin, neither did they warn of the judgments of God. Concerning these prophets, the Lord said, *“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.”* (Jeremiah 23:21)

Sadly, the nation of Israel did not reject such prophets but embraced them. Jeremiah 5:31 is a sad indictment of the Jews: *“The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?”* They loved food that was tainted with poison.

Similarly, the church at Corinth ought to have noticed the difference between the message of Paul and that of the false messengers. However, they allowed themselves to be swayed by the false messengers. That ought not to be. In application, if we are stringent with our physical food, we must be even more so with our spiritual food. We must guard our hearts that we may love to digest the truth and not that which is false.

However, the focus of this seminar involves preachers and pastors who profess a call to the ministry of the Word. Thus, we note the importance of sincerity in the gospel work. Why are we involved in the work of the gospel? Is it for fame? Or for money? To such who desire to use the work of the gospel to hunt for these things, the Bible says that the *“the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* (1 Timothy 6:10) Heed the warning which Peter gave to Simon the sorcerer who thought he can buy the power of the Holy Ghost from Peter with money, *“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”* (Acts 8:20-22)

There is only one way to serve Christ in the Gospel Work – to serve sincerely in truth constrained by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14). *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* (Philippians 1:21)

*Yours affectionately,
Pastor Clement Chew*