

GOSPEL AND DOCTRINE AS RELATED TO UNITY

Although we garnish the tomb of Alexander Campbell, if he were here today, he would be unwelcome in most pulpits of the Church of Christ. Certainly, the guardians of the faith would denounce him for this statement:

"There was teaching, there was singing, there was praying, there was exhortation in the Christian church, but preaching in the church or to the church is not once mentioned in the Christian scriptures! Paul once, in his first letter to the church in Corinth, said he would declare to the Corinthians that gospel which he had preached to them, which also they had received and wherein they stood. We preach, or report, or proclaim news. But who teaches news? Who exhorts news? We preach the gospel to unbelievers, to aliens, but never to Christians, or those who have received it." (Millennial Harbinger, April 1862; copied from *The Twisted Scriptures*, p. 51, by Carl Ketcherside; many other thoughts are adapted from Carl's masterful essay also.)

The revealed word of God in the New Testament writings contains two kinds of messages to accomplish two different purposes. Campbell recognized this, but the distinction has been obscured to most of us in our time. That lack of understanding has added to our confusion and led us away from any practical basis for unity among those in Christ. If the entire New Testament is the gospel, since a person must know, believe, and obey the gospel in order to be saved, one must know, believe, and obey everything within the New Testament to be saved. Every point of teaching becomes a life-or-death matter. Belief in any error would be damning. If all are not in exact conformity, then someone is lost.

So, in view of our list of differences in Chapter One of *Free In Christ*, it looks hopeless for all of us, for who can be sure that he knows, believes, understands, and obeys all that is taught in the word of God? For example, many such instructions as, "*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*" (Eph. 4:30), "*Be filled with the Spirit*" (Eph. 5:18), and "*Pray in the Holy Spirit*" (Jude 20) become frightening, for I don't know if I am really understanding and doing those things. Are you sure about everything?

Then too, if I can know and obey all, I don't need grace; hence, I would make void the grace of Christ by my perfect obedience.

Although these two kinds of messages are not isolated into different paragraphs, books, or epistles, there is a valid distinction to be made. There is the gospel which brings us into life and the teachings which direct our lives. The gospel gets us on the road, and the apostolic teachings guide us to the goal. The gospel gets us on the Lord's work force, and the doctrine directs our life of service. The gospel brings us into fellowship while the doctrine/teaching guides those in fellowship. Doctrine is teachings.

The gospel is the good news but, as Campbell asks, who *teaches* good news? The gospel was fully preached on Pentecost but all the epistles came later. The gospel was *preached*

- *heralded, proclaimed, evangelized* - while the doctrine was imparted by *teaching, instruction, reproof, rebuke, and exhortation*. The gospel message was conveyed through evangelists, but prophets, pastors, and teachers edified through teaching.

The gospel is "the faith" which was already delivered (Jude 3), to which they were obedient (Acts 6:7), which Elymas resisted (Acts 13:8), in which the disciples should continue (Acts 14:22), which was the basis of unity (Eph 4:13). *The faith* is the basis of our salvation.

Differences of opinions, scruples, and convictions about the teachings were matters of faith. Please read Romans 14 for Paul's clear teaching on this point. One man had faith to eat all things while another was weak in faith with scruples (v. 1-2). The faith (convictions) you have keep between yourself and God (v. 22). One who violates his scruples or convictions does not act from faith; hence, he sins (v. 23).

Paul epitomizes the gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3). In a fuller definition, the gospel is the good news of the Sonship of Jesus, his atonement, his resurrection, his glorification, and his promise to give immortality. One cannot deny any element of this gospel and be saved for that would be a denial of the saving role of Jesus, not just a denial of facts. Facts have no saving power. Here is the basis of unity. But we can have differing understanding about texts, circumcision, keeping days, the nature of heaven and hell, prophecies, the conduct of assemblies, the work of the Holy Spirit, the role of elders, and a long list of other teachings/doctrines while still being united in the one body. Correct knowledge and practice of all such things are not the basis of our receiving grace. To contend otherwise is self-condemning – unless you can claim perfect understanding and practice!

The gospel was not preached to the church. There is no record of such, no instruction for it, and no need for it. Although the word *preach* is used over one hundred times in the new covenant writings, it is not used in reference to a believing assembly. It is the word for *evangelize*. The message was the gospel, the good news, the "evangel" while the one who proclaimed it was the preacher, the evangelist. An evangelist is not a "pulpit minister" who teaches the believers. Preaching is not discoursing from a pulpit!

Other verbs relate to the edification of the saints. For example, in First Corinthians 14, there are fifty uses of verbs of communication in the assembly, such as *speak, prophesy, utter, interpret, instruct, teach, declare, pray, sing, bless, and say*, but *preach* or *evangelize* is not used. Revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching are mentioned, but not preaching. Explaining a scriptural teaching is not preaching!

Prophecy is teaching, and Paul wrote that "*prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers*" (1 Cor. 14:22). "*When you come together,*" he instructs, "*let all things be done for edification*" (v. 26). In verse 4 he states, "*He who prophesies edifies the church.*" Tongue-speaking required interpreters "*so that the church may be edified*" (v. 5). *So prophecy was for the believers and preaching was for the unbelievers.*

Objectors to this distinction refer to various passages which are supposed to refute it. Let us consider them concisely.

Acts 20:7: Here it is written that Paul preached to the church at Troas. The word *preached* here as it is used in the KJV is from the root word for *dialogue*, not *evangelize* or *proclaim*. "*Paul talked with them*" is rightly translated in the RSV.

Romans 1:7: It is pointed out that this epistle was written to disciples and that Paul was eager to preach the gospel to them (1:15). Both MacKnight and Coffman agree that "*to all that are in Rome*" includes unbelieving Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 1:15: MacKnight, Coffman, and Batey (Living Word) agree that "*you that are in Rome*" is not restricted to disciples.

Romans 2:1-19 reveals that, although this epistle was written to the believers primarily, Paul also addressed some of it to unbelievers. Every Restoration commentator whose works are at hand agrees that Romans 2 is directed to unbelieving Jews. Undoubtedly, this chapter is addressed to, not just about, the unbelieving Jews in Rome. These Paul would seek to evangelize, desiring to "*reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles*" (1:13). Chapter 15:8-24 is a context for this.

1 Corinthians 15:1-2: Paul had preached the gospel to those in Corinth. He was the one who evangelized them, but it is absurd to contend that he continued that activity to those who were converted.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9: It is contended that this passage teaches that the Christian will be lost if he rejects the gospel, but the passage says nothing about a Christian's rejecting it. Those who obey not the gospel will be lost. The Christian has already obeyed it.

Matthew 28:18-20: Rather than denying the distinction between the gospel and the teachings, a proper rendering as in the RSV supports the distinction. It says to "*make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe...*" The non-Christian is not condemned for not keeping the doctrine for it was not addressed to him. He will be lost, however, if he rejects the gospel which is addressed to him.

It is through the gospel that salvation was brought. Nothing has been added to it since Pentecost. Paul "*fully preached the gospel of Christ*" from Jerusalem to Illyricum before Romans was written. Romans and the prison epistles could not have been a part of it. Nor were the writings of John. The unchanging gospel had already been preached when Paul wrote to the Galatians (Gal. 1:6-9).

This gospel message of *the faith* was "*once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3) before Jude was written, so it could not have included Jude. People were "*obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7) before any epistle was written. Peter speaks of persons who "*have been born anew... through the living and abiding word of God*" (1 Peter 1:23), then he identifies the

element of the word which initiated life as "*the good news which was preached to you*" (1:25). It was the gospel/evangel preached/evangelized.

If all of the New Testament writings are the gospel, then a sinner could not be saved without being taught it in its entirety, for he must believe the gospel before he can be saved (Mark 16:15f). He still would be unsaved until he obeyed all that is enjoined in the other writings. Thus, the quick conversion of those on Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, and the jailor could not have been accomplished, for a thorough course of indoctrination would have been necessary first. And who ever learns and obeys all of the teachings even in many years of sincere effort?

New creatures in Christ who are saved and in fellowship must be fed, confirmed, and matured so they will continue in fellowship and salvation. From the point of spiritual birth there will be diversity in disciples in knowledge, understanding, strength, ability, and maturity. Their justification is in being made right by an act of grace, not because they are right in all things. They are in the right because they are in Christ who is their righteousness, though they may not be right in all matters of faith. They are walking in the light, continually cleansed, and in fellowship (1 John 1:5-10). *There is unity in the faith but diversity in matters of faith.* Fellowship is not destroyed by failure to understand all the scriptures and to hold the perfect interpretation of them. But the believer should "*long for the spiritual milk... that you may grow*" (1 Peter 2:2), mature to eat solid food (Heb. 5:12f), and continue in the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).

Fellowship is established when that element of the word called *the gospel* is believed and obeyed. Fellowship is sustained with God and man by following, though imperfectly, the other *teachings* of the word. There is little hope for unity among us unless we can discern the difference in the gospel which brings salvation and the teachings/doctrines which guide us toward maturity.

If you are still not convinced on this subject, I plead with you to read Carl Ketcherside's revealing chapter in *The Twisted Scriptures*. This chapter, "Gospel and Doctrine," along with the book and his *The Death of the Custodian* were almost like a new revelation from heaven for me. These two books with priceless information can be yours for only \$12.50 postpaid. That is noticeably cheaper than a new pickup truck, and I can say confidently that what you learn from them can bring you a greater satisfaction than a new truck can on the road of life. []

(Cecil Hook: August 2005)

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