



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Bible Study Notes: Gospel Mistakes

FEBRUARY 10, 2010

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I recently asked a number of state legislators if they think working in politics changes people in a negative way. They all replied that they do not believe the job changes people, but it does put people in a position where their character is tested. Serving as a new legislator, they explained, is similar to going off to college for the first time. If a person is strong already, they will likely be fine. However, if someone has serious character weaknesses going into the situation, they may well stumble or fall. We've all seen this latter scenario, unfortunately.

One of my aims as I direct the weekly Bible studies is to provide an opportunity for legislators, staff members, lobbyists, and others in the Capitol community to be strengthened internally so that they can stand up to the pressures that are inherent to the political arena. As we carefully and prayerfully study God's word together, we are laying and improving upon a spiritual foundation that by God's grace will enable us to be "firmly established and steadfast" (Colossians 1:23).

INTRODUCTION

We continue today with our review of **Colossians 1**. In this chapter, the Apostle Paul speaks often of the "gospel." The gospel is a central theme in all of Paul's writings and the entire New Testament. Since it is so foundational to our remaining study through Colossians, and since there is much confusion about it these days, let us consider it more thoroughly before moving on. Today, we consider four mistakes people commonly make with regard to the gospel.

MISTAKE #1. NOT UNDERSTANDING IT

"The word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth..." (Colossians 1:6)

You may recall that the word *gospel* in our Bible is a transliteration of the Greek word *euangelion*, which means literally "good news." This word was commonly used in the first century in a non-religious sense to speak of any joyous announcement, such as the proclamation of a military victory.¹ The New Testament authors imbued this ordinary word with extraordinary significance by repeatedly utilizing it to refer to the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Despite what is preached in some churches today, the gospel is not the teaching that everyone is essentially good, or that God wants us all to be millionaires, or that everyone who is moral will go to heaven, or that the most important thing is what political party someone belongs to (none of which are true). Rather, the gospel is the truth that God has made a way for us to have all our sins forgiven through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we can be reconciled with Him and enjoy a fulfilling life with him now and forever (Colossians 1:19-23, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, John 10:10). Though we are sinners, "*hostile in mind*" towards Him (vs. 21), we can now be considered as "*blameless and beyond reproach.*" (vs. 22) This is exceedingly good news!

MISTAKE #2. NOT BELIEVING IT

"not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard." (Colossians 1:23)

It is not enough to simply understand the gospel. That is as ridiculous as saying to someone who is sick that they will get better if they have the proper medications in their medicine cabinet. The medicine must, of course, be taken in order for it to do its work. In the same way, God offers us forgiveness and a powerful connection with him, but this is only efficacious for those who truly put their trust in the work of Christ on the cross.² Have you asked God to forgive your sins through Jesus and Him alone? Are you trusting completely in the finished sacrifice of Christ on your behalf? Are you attempting to turn away from your sins and follow

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY/FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS

LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS @ 8:00 AM, ASSEMBLY RULES COMMITTEE ROOM
STAFF/LOBBYISTS/OTHERS: THURSDAYS @ 12:00 NOON, CAPITOL ROOM 125

California

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Him? If so, rejoice that your sins are forgiven and go forward learning from His word and following Him daily.

MISTAKE #3. NOT ENJOYING IT

“Joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” (Colossians 1:11b-12)

It is possible to understand the gospel and believe it but still miss out on the joy that should accompany it. Some people approach the Bible as if it were an academic textbook when it is in actuality more like a love letter. They know the words of the Scriptures (and might even have them memorized) and they are theologically astute, but at the same time they seem emotionally detached from the Author. I knew one pastor who casually admitted to being in this frightful condition ... shortly before his marriage and ministry disastrously imploded. Many of us can think of political leaders who have followed a similarly disastrous course.

I sometimes grow uneasy around Christians who speak enthusiastically about their church or their pastor or their favorite Christian author or historical figure or even some theological topic but appear to have little affection for Jesus Christ Himself. We all must remember that the gospel is the true story about our maker who loves us so passionately that he became a human physically in order to save us personally! He is still alive, and wants to move in our lives today. Those who fully appreciate this truth are captivated by the wonder of Jesus their savior and their hearts beat faster at the very sound of His name. Observe that Paul mentions Him thirty-five times in Colossians alone!

THE GOSPEL IS THE TRUE STORY ABOUT OUR MAKER WHO LOVES US SO PASSIONATELY THAT HE BECAME A HUMAN PHYSICALLY IN ORDER TO SAVE US PERSONALLY!

MISTAKE #4. NOT APPLYING IT

“The word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing” (Colossians 1:6)

Many people underestimate the influence the gospel should have in their daily lives. The gospel is not only something I believed once in order to ensure my future in heaven. We never outgrow it. As one pastor notes, “Martin Luther often employed the phrase *simul justus et peccator*—“simultaneously justified and sinful.” He understood that while he'd already been saved from sin's penalty, he was in daily need of salvation from sin's power. And since the gospel is the “power of God for salvation,” he knew that even for the most saintly of saints, the gospel is wholly relevant and vitally necessary. This means heralded preachers need the gospel just as much as hardened pagans.”³

Yes, this gospel is relevant for our lives today. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly.” (John 10:10) As we study and seek to apply His good news to every area of our lives, we will see God's transforming power at work more than we might think possible.⁴ As more and more of us in the Capitol Community follow this course, we may see our entire state improve as well. Yes, the gospel is even *that* powerful!

¹ “Col. 1:1-8,” *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*

² Romans 1:16-17, 1 John 1:9

³ Tullian Tchividjian, “*The Everyday Gospel*.”

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2010/winter/theeverydaygospel.html>

⁴ See Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change How People Change* (Greensboro, New Growth Press, 2008).