

## God'S Powerful Gospel

The Gospel Reveals God's Way of Life

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 01-Sep-01; Sermon #518

I do not know why, but over the past two weeks I have come to realize how much I hate arguing. You will remember a while back that I gave a sermon on debate, but since then I have really come to hate arguing and debate. I have really come to see how much of our lives are spent in argument, dealing with people who are contradictory, just in various contentions. If you let it get to you, like I do, then it really wears on you. And you just hate it, because every time you turn around there is somebody arguing something, or debating something, or giving you their point of view when you really do not want it.

This must seem strange coming from a person whose basic living comes from presenting arguments. That is, one side of an argument—in sermons, articles, and whatnot that I have to do as a minister. But it has really gotten on me lately that there is so much arguing in the world. Have you ever noticed though that God does not argue—not in the way we argue. Humans argue and they end up getting in a fight, having bad feelings, being offended, or whatever. But His arguments (if you want to call them that) tend to come in the form of pronouncements from heaven. You know—from God's very throne. And there is not much leeway there.

He also tends to argue in terms of fire, disaster, floods, earthquakes, plagues, storms of one type of another, wars, famines, pestilence—and, I should say, on the other hand, blessing. He sometimes argues with blessing, and promotion, and prestige, and exaltation, and, eventually, He is going to argue most convincingly (especially towards those in Millennial times and afterwards) by our glorification. That is going to be a huge argument for the success and the goodness of following God's way.

Well, the way God argues is the same in the way He presents the gospel. He does not argue. He does not debate. He just states. He announces. He gives the hearer an opportunity to either accept what He says or to reject what He says. Remember what Jesus told His disciples when they were to go into a village or a city. They were to go there, find somebody who was amenable to them, and preach the gospel. But if they did not accept it, they were to shake the dust off their garments, and say, "I'm quit with you," and leave. There was no bickering. There was no "Ah, please. Won't you accept this?" There was just "Okay, you don't want it. Fine, I'll go to some place that does."

And, of course, He said that (on the other hand) if they are agreeable, then he was to stay there and preach until such time that he needed to move on. And that is what the

apostles did. Paul was very famous for this. We have his journeys throughout the book of Acts. He would go into a place and he would stay there as long as there were people still to hear—or until somebody stoned him, or kicked him out, or tried to make him leave on a rail, or something.

But that was the way that Jesus set up to preach the gospel. There was no cajoling, no whining, no wheeling. It was just set up as an announcement, and it was proclaimed. And then the person who heard had the opportunity either to accept that or to reject that. And it is still the same way today. We do not give people premiums. "Oh, if you'll just accept the gospel, we'll send you this nice booklet that will teach you everything. And we'll give you this pension fund (or something) so that you'll be happy." No, we do not do things like that. We do not give them a gift beyond preaching the gospel and giving them the message that God has told us, in the Bible to preach. So, it is not arguing really—although when it comes down to it, we end up having to do quite a bit of that.

But **the gospel** is non-negotiable. There is no compromise with the gospel. You cannot take certain parts out. You cannot put other things in. It comes as a package, and it is either accepted whole, or nothing—it is not accepted at all. So there can be no compromise, no alternative path. People are fond of saying that there are many paths to heaven, or the Kingdom of God, or whatever their idea of the afterlife happens to be. But God says, "No. There's only one way, and it is very straight and narrow. And very few go therein." So there is not an alternative path to the Kingdom of God.

So, in a way, echoing the very beginning of Ephesians 4, we can say that there is one gospel. In a way, it is even said there in Ephesians 4. That is, **one faith**—meaning one body of doctrine, one teaching. And then there is **one hope**. And this is not added in there, but it is certainly implied—**one goal**. So there is only one gospel and only one goal. All else is nothing in terms of what is really important.

I cannot emphasize enough how vital it is that we learn, believe, and **follow the correct gospel**. It is so important to get that right from the very beginning. It is a matter of eternal life or eternal death. That is how serious it is. And that is why the first words, that we know of, out of Jesus' mouth when He began preaching the gospel is, "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." That is in Mark 1:15. That is what He started with. That is what He continued with. That is what He ended with. That is what He is continuing to preach, through His servants. He never stops! That is His only message.

Now, the gospel that He preached (as it says there in Mark 1:14) is the gospel of the

God's Powerful Gospel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Kingdom of God. Why is it called "the gospel of the Kingdom of God"? It is kind of interesting to think about this, because we know that there is more in the gospel than just the Kingdom of God.

**Luke 4:42-43** Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent."

I want to key in on that phrase—"for this purpose I have been sent." Christ says here, very plainly, that He was sent to preach the Kingdom of God. But that is not the only time that He said that He was sent for a purpose. Let us go back to earlier in this chapter. This is the opening up of His ministry, as recorded in Luke's gospel.

**Luke 4:16-19** So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LoORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LoORD."

**Luke 4:21** And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

What is the purpose that He was sent for in these verses? You can kind of pick them off in each section of that passage that He was quoting here. It says that the Father sent Him to heal the brokenhearted, to deliver the captives, to set people free, to remove blindness, to open salvation. That is kind of what the idea of "preaching the acceptable year of the Lord" means. That now is an acceptable time. That now is a day of salvation. That is what He means there. That He inaugurates this part of the plan of salvation. And that is what He was sent to do.

So now, not only do we have preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God as the reason He was sent, but we also have healing, setting free, delivering, removing blindness, and opening salvation. Let us add some more.

**John 3:17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world though Him might be saved.

He also came to save the world. We can add that to the list. There are other places where He gives reasons why He was sent, and I am skipping over some of these. I have just picked four to give us a fairly well rounded idea of what Christ was sent to do.

**John 6:40** And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Here are some more reasons why He came. He was sent to witness, to testify of the truth. He was sent to produce belief. He was sent to give eternal life and to open the way for resurrection, so that He could raise people up at the last day.

These four passages that we just went through should show us that the gospel of the Kingdom of God—what it is that Jesus preached, why He came—includes far more than just the announcement that, in the future, the Kingdom of God will be brought back to this earth. There is a whole lot more to the gospel of the Kingdom of God than just merely the announcement or the proclamation that a kingdom is coming.

It is called "the gospel of the Kingdom of God," I think, because that is the goal. God always wants us focused on **the goal**. He wants it to come quickly to our minds that that is where we are headed. We have to know that it is coming, and that we have to prepare for it. And so He calls it by what it will end with, what it will produce—the goal, the result. But it includes all the preparatory material that we need to get there, as well as other things that may be helpful or background to those instructions.

So the gospel of the Kingdom of God is a very large umbrella under which come many things. But they all feed into this certain idea—the goal—that we can have salvation and one day be God's children in His Kingdom. And so they all feed into this one central idea—the Kingdom of God.

This is very easy to see in the Gospels. During His 3½ year ministry, did Jesus only preach the coming Kingdom? If you look in the Sermon on the Mount, you will see that the words "Kingdom of God" are only in there one time. That is where He said: "Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." But, what did He talk about? The Beatitudes, the law, not having two masters,

God's Powerful Gospel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

having the true eternal treasure, building upon a rock, etc. Those ideas all point to the Kingdom of God. They prepare us for the Kingdom of God.

And so the gospel message includes things like the Beatitudes, includes things like law and grace, includes things like loyalty and devotion to God, includes things like the foundation upon which we base our understanding. That is, those things which Paul later terms "the apostles and the prophets," and "Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone." It includes all of these things. It includes the history of Israel. It includes the creation. It includes everything that is contained in this Book. This is the good news!

That does broaden things out. We do not want to get away, though, from the idea that it is called "the gospel of the Kingdom of God." Every time we pull some of these supporting things out God's Word, we have to tie them in to how they help us in our journey towards the Kingdom. That is where **our focus** must be, all the time. We must be continually refocused on the Kingdom of God that is coming—and be ready when it does come. So it is called "the gospel of the Kingdom of God," but it includes so much more.

**The gospel** includes everything that is necessary to call, teach, correct, and motivate a person so that he can be saved and enter the Kingdom. ***It is the complete revelation of God to man.*** God decided, when He wrote this Book, what it is what man needed to know to complete or fulfill his part in the plan. And then He had to send His Son to open it up and reveal it to us—because He is the Revelator. And then, of course, we had to be baptized and receive God's Spirit, and have the help then to understand it.

But the Word of God is everything we know of Him. That is, everything that He chose to reveal to us of Him. And that is the gospel, or part of the gospel. And everything that feeds into that—that one idea of God reproducing Himself through men (that also is the Kingdom of God)—is found in this Book. And it is all part of the gospel. So it is the complete revelation of God to man. "The whole counsel of God," as Paul says in Acts 20:27.

I want to go through Romans 1:16-17 in some amount of detail, because I want to show how **powerful** the gospel is. We tend to think of it as words. And if we are not careful, we will tend to leave it there—that it is just words. In one place, Paul says that the gospel is not words but it is *power*. I want to use Romans 1:16-17 because I think that, in the entire Bible, this is the closest we get to a definition of *the gospel*.

**Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. . .

This is interesting because what Paul is actually doing here is using a negative in order to express almost the idea of pride. "I am **proud** of the gospel of Christ!"—meaning pleased, fulfilled, complete. He uses a negative so that it sounds like he is understating something and not showing his true feelings. But it is really saying, "I am proud of the gospel of Christ." And you can tell this by the way that he did his ministry. He poured his all into it. If he was not proud of it, if he was not willing to stand up for it in every facet, he would not have done the things that he did. He would not have endured the things that he endured. But he put his whole life into it; and he was happy, he was glad, to be one of God's messengers. But let us go on, because this is where the definition comes in.

**Romans 1:16 . . .** For it [the gospel] is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

He says here that the gospel is the power of God to salvation for the believer. In a way, because this is pretty much a word-for-word translation, it does not quite give us the full understanding of what this actually means—and particularly the word **power**. The word "power" alone in English does not get across the full understanding of what the Greek word that Paul uses here means. If I wanted to paraphrase it, I would do it this way: *The gospel is God's means to teach, motivate, and create salvation in one who believes*. That gives a little bit different meaning to the word *power*—giving it the meaning of **means** or **method**. And that is basically what it is.

But even that paraphrase does not include the idea of **power**, which needs to be there. So if you want to, you could stick in the word "powerful." *The gospel is God's powerful means to teach, motivate, and create salvation in one who believes*—because that idea of power must be there. The gospel has **great power!** And we often underestimate the power that is there. Like I said, we often think of it as just words; and it is not just words—because those words have power.

"Power" here, is a catchall term. It does not just mean "energy" to produce salvation. When we say "turn on the power" to something, we expect energy to flow and, let us say, a light to come on, or our stereo to play, or our computer to boot up, or what have you. But *power* here is not just energy to produce salvation but, as I mentioned before, the method as well—the contents of what is included in it, as well as the incentives and the disincentives that God uses to produce children in His image. It is a much larger idea than what we normally think of as "power."

Paul uses the Greek word *dunamis* for a reason. The image of this is **explosiveness**.

That is why I said that we cannot leave out this idea of *power* even though we understand that it talks about method, incentive, disincentive, and motivation, and all these other things that come into the gospel. This "explosiveness" is just like a stick of dynamite which, by the way, is where we get our word "dynamite"—from this Greek word *dunamis*.

If you have ever understood how dynamite is used, it can be used both constructively and destructively. Often times, in its constructive use, it destroys at the same time. When they want to put a road through a mountain (or, around a mountain), they often have to drill holes, stuff dynamite down inside them, and blast the side of the mountain off in order to make a clear space for a road. In that case, it does destroy a great amount of rock. But it also constructs the wall and the surface of where the road is going to go. So it is both *constructive* and *destructive* in its force.

Another aspect to this word *dunamis* is that some have defined it as **power in action**. This is different from latent power. A 300-pound man who has been working all his life with weights but who just sits there has *latent power*. He is not using it. But if he gets up and punches you in the nose, that is *active power*. It is doing something! Now that man could get up and, instead of destructively punching somebody in the nose, he could move a pile of bricks or stone or something where he is using the power in a constructive way. That is *dunamis*. It is that **power** that is there—ready and actively working. It is not just sitting there.

Put this back into the idea of *the gospel* being the power of God to create salvation. The gospel does not just sit there, latently waiting to use the power. The gospel is working all the time. As soon as we hear it, it begins to work.

Let us put **explosiveness** back in. It destroys! And it builds up. What does it destroy? Sin, and all those things that are not like God. What does it build? The new man, righteousness, holiness—all the good things that God wants to produce in us so that we are in His image. That is what the gospel is doing—destroying and constructing at the same time.

We see this in the Days of Unleavened Bread. What do we think of there? Getting rid of sin, and putting holiness in. It is the same process that is going on. And that is the Word of God, working in us—producing the vessel that He wants to produce, and to adorn His Kingdom. But it is this **power** that is in it—that is driving all of this.

It is **dynamic!** (That is another word that comes from *dunamis*.) Dynamic means active, working. If you have a dynamic personality, you just glow. And everybody knows it,

God's Powerful Gospel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

because you are so full of energy. A dynamo is something that produces a great deal of energy. Sometimes people are "dynamos," and you cannot stop them. But God's power in the gospel is not stored. It is not static. It is **working!** It is working even when you do not know it is working, because God always works. God is always aware. He does not sleep. He does not get weary. He works! And His power works for Him in the gospel. It gets things done.

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is living and powerful [There it is again.], and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Notice how Paul pictures the Word of God here. The "Word of God" is, in a way, a synonym for **the gospel**. If we say that the gospel includes everything that we need to bring us to the Kingdom of God, well the Word of God is that. So instead of saying "the Word of God" is living, let us just place the word "gospel" in there. "The gospel is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

This illustration says the same thing that the meaning of *dunamis* says. It is that explosive energy. When you say that somebody pierces you with a sword, and divides your joints, goes all the way into the marrow—that is pretty destructive, do you not think? That is like splitting somebody open and revealing everything inside. That is kind of the way that the gospel works. It pierces you. It gets into your every nook and cranny. And it starts to root out, to dig out, to burn out, to slash out anything that is not supposed to be there.

The other side of this is that, once everything is cut away, there is room for the other stuff to be put in. This illustration does not give you that idea. It is talking more about the destructive aspects in this particular illustration; but it is the same idea—living, powerful, able to go all the way into our deepest, darkest places where we have secreted evil. It is able to reach those things and cut them out. So the gospel is always piercing. It is discerning. It is prodding and poking. It is incising and excising. It cuts in, and it cuts out. (That is what incising and excising means.) It cuts into you, and it cuts out what is not supposed to be there. It does it with both edges, so that no one and no part of us is exempt from its work. IF we hear the gospel, and it begins its work in us, THEN it is digging in there and working to produce **God** in us.

Jesus says something similar:

**John 6:63** ". . . The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

That is what words are. We see words on a page, but they are really symbols. They stand for ideas. And these ideas are what God has used to transmit **what He is** to us. So when they get into our mind, they begin to do their work. As Paul says there in Hebrews 4, they are alive. They are living. That means that they are working. They are energetic. The proof that they are so energetic is what it produces. It produces **life**.

This is the more positive side of that dynamic, explosive, aspect of the gospel. Hebrews 4 showed the negative side, but this shows the more positive side. These words drag us—kicking and screaming—towards the spiritual, and towards eternal life. They are from the mind of God, and only discernable by the Spirit in us. They move us, slowing, surely, inexorably—if we are yielding to God in faith and love for Him, in that relationship—towards Him and being more like Him. This is the positive side. This gospel is so **powerful** that it has the authority, the means, to bring us to salvation. No other words can do that. No other message can do that. That is how powerful it is. It can bridge the gap between death and life—and that is powerful!

**Romans 1:17** For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "the just shall live by faith."

What is in **the gospel**? It is very plain. Paul puts it very simply here. God, in the gospel, reveals His righteousness. And what is righteousness? It is an old English term that means, "right wise-ness." And basically it means, "doing what is right." The Hebrew idea of **righteousness** had to do with being right in a sense of legal terminology. If the court ruled in your favor, then you were right. You were righteous. But if the court found you guilty, then you were unrighteous. You were out. Whereas, if you were righteous, you were in. The basic idea is **right doing**.

Probably the way that we think of it the most—probably the phrase that we use the most—is **God's way of life**. Is that not righteousness? Everything that God does is righteousness. So His way of life, how He does things, is **righteousness**. Does not that make sense? It is very simple.

So let us inject that back into the verse. "For in the gospel, God's way of life is revealed." Simple, is it not? Everything that encompasses God's way of life is revealed in the

gospel. Of course, I am simplifying things and sifting certain complexities away from this. But this is the basic understanding that I want everyone to come away from this sermon with. The gospel message includes everything we need to know to live God's way of life—to live like God does.

That is why it is so important—because that is, of course, **the goal**. The Kingdom of God is nothing more (pardon the simplification again) than everybody living God's way of life. So God's way of life is revealed to carnal mankind through the gospel. And this is foreign to man. Remember Romans 8:7. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." So God has to give it to us in a variety of forms, so that it starts to take. Some of us are hit with one aspect, and some of us are hit with another aspect. But eventually—once we begin to accept more and more of it and put it into our lives—it brings us to *the Kingdom of God*. It brings us to *living God's way of life*.

What God has done is package His gospel in a way that we can understand. Remember that idea in verse 16, that the power of God is also a method, a means. Well, God also packages it in terms of a method, a process, by which we can grow. So the gospel is not only *the announcement* of the Kingdom of God; but it is also *the process* by which we can reach the Kingdom of God. And because this does not all happen at once, this process is **a lifelong educational process**. It takes some of us a long time. It just depends upon how long God thinks that we need to develop and reach a point where He can trust us to do whatever it is that God does, in whatever situation.

This other part of it—"from faith to faith"—I explained in a Feast sermon a while ago. It says here that it is revealed **from faith to faith**. There are many ways to interpret "from faith to faith." Some think it means from faith to ever-increasing faith. And that is certainly true. We are not supposed to remain at the faith in which we started. We are supposed to be making it deeper and stronger all the time.

It could also mean that we go from a certain faith that we have at the very beginning (what maybe is the "hook") to the faith where we are **walking by faith**. Our goal is to walk by faith, and not by sight. So the aim of the gospel is always to increase our faith—to build upon the work that God has already done. God is never satisfied with us in the sense that there is not room for us to grow any more. There is always room for us to grow! What the gospel does is that it is always trying to add more to our faith. And we can also add the idea of this "dynamism." It is moving. It is never satisfied. It is always trying to build up into greater faith.

The overall idea of "from faith to faith" is that it is trying to produce a situation in us in which our every thought, word, and deed is motivated by our faith in God. So no matter

what all the different meanings of "from faith to faith" might be, the idea is that we are going towards a faith that is beyond what we could probably achieve, but we are always trying to get there. It is FROM the faith we have, TO this faith that only by the grace of God will we ever be able to have.

And then he says, "The just shall live by faith"—backing it up from Habakkuk 2. That is the way it works. It begins at justification upon baptism. It proceeds through sanctification, all the way to complete salvation and glorification in the Kingdom. ***The gospel never stops working in us.*** It never stops building. It never stops fulfilling and perfecting in us what God wants to produce. This gospel is like the waves of the ocean. It just keeps on coming. Repetitively, they never stop. It wears away the beach and is always active.

Let us go back to Acts 20. Believe it or not, I am going to begin to wrap this pseudo-series up. I think this chapter—in Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders—in a way summarizes what I have been trying to get across in some of these sermons that I have given over the past few months. It is kind of a synopsis of these sermons, all rolled into one.

What Paul is doing here, he is looking back over his ministry and reviewing it for them aloud, not in any specific detail, but more in general terms. And, in a way, he is giving himself a self-evaluation of the way that he has conducted himself. He also adds in a few warnings and a few exhortations of his own. But when it is all said and done, this is a very good summary of a godly minister's lifetime of work. I do not think Paul intended it that way. He probably meant it more as a way to give them a pep talk—to motivate them to do their own ministry. But the way it comes across to us today is a very succinct review of a godly minister's life.

**Acts 20:17** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Just to explain here—he did not want to stop in Ephesus. There were reasons that he had for doing this. So he sailed past Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, but he stopped in Miletus, which was not too far away. He stayed there for a while. And he sent someone to Ephesus to ask the elders that were there, in Ephesus, to come down to him in Miletus—where he could speak to them. Probably his going to Ephesus would have caused an uproar of some sort. He did not want to get involved with all that, because he was really in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost (as it says in verse 16). So he called, from Miletus, for the elders from Ephesus.

**Acts 20:18-21** And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul begins by recounting his manner of preaching and serving—mainly in Ephesus, although he includes the whole of Asia in there. "Asia" is what we today call Asia Minor—where Ephesus was—and where actually the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were located. All of those areas were first evangelized by Paul. And we can see, in the earlier chapters of ACTS, all the things that he went through there.

When he talks about tears and trials, he is really understating what happened in those places—stonings and being left for dead, being rejected and harassed. What is that one section that talks about all the times that he was beaten, and shipwrecked, and hungered, and thirsted, and all those other things? And Paul gave it his all through all those things. He never failed, as it says here, to give them what was helpful. He served them every way he could.

Thus, his manner of life—his **fruits**, we might say—showed (proved!) the authenticity of his apostleship. It not only showed in the sufferings that he went through and endured, but it also showed in the people that God called through him. That is, those who were brought to repentance, and those who were still hanging on to the faith. And also, the elders that he raised and the churches that he raised.

All those things, though he does not mention them here, were **proofs** (fruits) of his ministry—that God was working through him. Not to mention the miracles and other things that happened. There was one case where he probably was even raised from the dead. That is, he himself was raised from the dead—because God had work for him to do, still. All of these things showed the kind of minister that he was. A servant—true and faithful! So the Ephesian elders here had substantial proof, from their own witness of him, that his message was true. Namely, by how he conducted himself and preached and what it had produced.

In verse 21, it says that the essence of the message that Paul preached was **repentance** and **faith**. Is that not what Jesus says in Mark 1:15? He says, "Repent, and believe in the gospel." Was that not His message? What was John the Baptist's message? Was it

not repentance? He came preaching a gospel of repentance. It is very evident. And then when Jesus came, He says the same thing. Repentance and belief in the gospel—in God's Word, in the message that He brought.

So, *the gospel* always contains these two factors. First, **repenting**. Remember the cutting away, the getting rid of what is evil. And then, the adding of **faith**. That is, putting in those necessary things to become godly and holy. And so these two forces work together—*repentance* on the negative side, let us say, and *building faith*, on the positive side. That is always part of the gospel. If the gospel does not include repentance and faith, then it is not a true gospel—because it is not going to produce "***the new man***" in the Christian.

Like I just mentioned a few minutes ago, this **gospel**—the power of God—is tearing down and building up. It is working positively and negatively in its explosive way—to produce sons in God's image.

**Acts 20:22-25** "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more."

In this section here (and specifically in verse 24), he restates positively what we went over in the previous sermon where he says, in I Corinthians 9:16, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." Now he says, "No matter what is ahead of me...whether I am martyred or not, it doesn't matter. It doesn't move me. It doesn't motivate me. The trials that are coming up aren't discouraging me." He says, "All I want to do is to fulfill my ministry and to finish my race." That is what motivated Paul.

Paul was not motivated by the things that might come upon him; that is, his personal trials and tribulations. What motivated him was pleasing His Master—making God happy, fulfilling his commission. That is what every true minister should want to do. We should not have our focus on numbers, prestige, goods, fame, wealth, or whatever it happens to be, but upon doing the work. Getting the message out, fulfilling the calling and the ministry. So Paul's inner compulsion, as we mentioned (I believe it was last time), comes out. He had a **drive** to do this work—to preach the gospel. And he knew

that he would never stop, no matter what a prophet or someone else told him was going to happen to him. It did not matter. It did not move him.

**Acts 20:26-27** Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

He had done what he had been sent to do. What he is alluding to here is Ezekiel 33—the watchman chapter. As a watchman, he could not be blamed for whatever happened after he left. There was no blood on his hands, or on his head. He had done what God had told him to do. He had warned. He had counseled. He had given them everything that they needed. And his ministry to them was done. So he was not worried, for himself at least, that God would say that he had failed in his ministry to them at all. That is, that God would bring that back on his own head that he had not prepared them for what it was that was coming. He was satisfied that he had done the work that he needed to do.

So what he says is that he had committed to them ***the entire revelation of God.*** That is, all God wanted to be known pertaining to His purpose and their eternal salvation. He had given them the truth. He had preached to them for three years, as he says here a little later on. He felt that was enough time to give "the whole counsel of God." He must have been preaching a lot. And he was! Every day, probably. He said he was going house to house—meaning from house to house within the church, I think. (To those who were being called.) And they certainly got an earful from Paul. Knowing his compulsion to preach, he was doing it all the time. He felt that they knew the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Now the ball was in their court. (And that is a bad mixed metaphor in order to make a pun. Oh, well.)

**Acts 20:28** Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Remember that he is talking to ministers here. Those who are like him, those who needed to be doing the same things that he had done before them. So he advises them to follow his example, and to be very careful how they perform their ministry. The reason for this is because God's church—God's flock—is very ***precious and valuable.*** It is not precious and valuable because of any intrinsic worth of ourselves. But it is precious and valuable because of how it was redeemed.

It was precious and valuable because Jesus Christ's own blood was shed for it. And so it marked these people as very special to God. They were, as Mr. Armstrong often put it, **begotten** as His sons and daughters. That was what the first run of the Kingdom was going to be made of. And Christ had come and shed His blood for these people—to bring them to the point where they could be redeemed, justified, and sanctified.

So the ministry needs to be very careful how it treats the people, because to God they are precious cargo—a precious flock. This really helps to put the responsibility of a minister in proper perspective. And he does not want to trample upon the blood of Christ in any way, in the way he treats God's children.

**Acts 20:29-31** For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

I wonder if Paul had a prophetic understanding of what was going to happen there in Ephesus? I do not know, but he was certainly concerned about what was going to happen there in Ephesus after he left. And for three years, he did not fail to warn them night and day that there were going to be deceivers among them and false ministers. He highlights two major characteristics here. (1) They would pervert the gospel. "Speaking perverse things." And (2) that they would gather a following after themselves—which he calls here "draw away the disciples after themselves."

What this does is show a very sharp contrast to his own motivation. Remember that Paul's motivation was to please God, to fulfill his ministry. And the motivation of these false ministers would be very evident in contrast. They would pervert the gospel. He had always taught the truth. He had given them the whole counsel of God. But they would draw a following after themselves. And that was something that Paul was not worried about at all. Paul was going in and preaching the truth, and if God chose to call, that was fine. He was not worried about numbers.

So it says here that he harped on it for three years. He must have sounded like a broken record. But where have we heard that before? Apostles, it seems, tend to repeat things a lot—until we get sick of them, it seems. But it is true—**repetition is the best form of emphasis**. And, if we do not get it the first time, maybe we will get it the second time; and the third time, and the fourth time; and the twentieth time, and the hundredth time, and the thousandth time.

It is a tradition that, at the end of his life, the apostle John would go into the congregations and basically say (for however long he preached), "God is love. God is love. God is love. God is love." And tradition says that the people were tired of it—just like people got tired of hearing Mr. Armstrong talk about the two trees. So, evidently, this is a characteristic that comes out. At least, when they get old maybe. I do not know.

Paul says very plainly that he told them, and he told them, and he told them. He got tears in his eyes. He probably shouted at them and harangued them. Sometimes he probably whispered softly and showed them many proofs from the Scriptures. And he did it in whatever way he could. But he always warned them that bad things were coming—and particularly to that church.

Now, thankfully, the second chapter of Revelation says that they did fairly well in standing up to false apostles. Maybe it was because this man for three years railed on them about the coming deception. Remember that era is called "the Ephesian era." So Paul did his work and he was successful in it, for the most part. When he looks back upon that, in the resurrection, I think he will be happy with what happened and the fruits of his ministry. Of course, he will not be totally happy, because he will feel the loss of those who went astray. But I think he will feel, as he says here, that God did not ascribe failure to him at all. There is no blood on his head.

**Acts 20:32** "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

So in Paul's final words here—he does go on a little bit, but what he says later is basically a retelling of what he said in the first section—kind of to wrap everything together. Here, in these words, he entrusts them to God. And what else could he do? He was leaving. He had given them his all. And so he says, "I entrust you to God." He could not put them in better hands! He also said, "I entrust you to His Word." That was the revelation of God to them. That is where we find the gospel—in His Word.

Paul entrusted these people (these elders) to what he had given them in the Word of God, what he had taught them, what they had learned, and the ongoing working of God in their lives. It is by these things—God working with us, along with the engrafted word (as James calls it) working in us dynamically (tearing down and building up)—that is going to produce salvation and eternal life, and finally entrance into the Kingdom of God and an everlasting inheritance as God's children. It is where the rubber hits the road.

God's Powerful Gospel by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Once we have it, and we are entrusted with it—where do we take it? He says, "Go with God." ("Vaya con Dios," he says.)

These are the powers—God and His Word—that will enable us to be saved. And as much as lies within us, as ministers of this church of God, we will strive to emulate the apostle Paul in the work that he did—preaching the true and complete gospel of the Kingdom of God among you.