

What's Wrong With the Gospel?

Section 1: "The Missing Parts"

by
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Introduction

I know that the title of this article will possibly raise some worried eyebrows. At first glance, some might say to themselves, "Oh no, Keith has gone too far this time!" But let me quickly put those possible reactions to rest. To the question, "What's wrong with the Gospel?" I can easily answer, "Absolutely nothing!" That is, of course, if you're talking about the Gospel of the Bible - the very message that Jesus preached - what the apostles Peter, Paul, John, and the others devoted their very lives (and deaths) to. (*Phil. 1:20-21*)

No, there's nothing at all wrong with this message from heaven. But what about the stuff that's being preached today? Is it truly "gospel-preaching"? Are the evangelists that preach in churches and arenas, on radio and television - are they preaching what Jesus called the Gospel?¹ And what about the mountains of modern "gospel literature"? You know, the tracts, pamphlets, comic books, newspapers, etc. Do they really contain the same message - the whole message - about the salvation that Jesus offered? How are we answering the awesome question that people are still asking the Church, as they asked on the day of Pentecost, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?"²

Is Our Gospel The Gospel?

I believe with all my heart that Jesus would be ashamed of most of the "gospel" messages and sermons that are being preached today, mainly because they lack almost every major point He Himself preached on. (*Mark 8:38; Rom. 1:16; II Tim. 1:8*) How dare we try to change the Gospel. We remove most of its vital parts, and replace them with artificial limbs of our own. (*Gal. 1:6-7*)

Isn't Jesus the master evangelist? Shouldn't we judge our evangelism by His example?³ Was His message anything like what we're hearing today? It is my intention to try to briefly cover in Section 1 each of the major parts of the Gospel that have been "surgically" removed in most of today's preaching. And in Section 2, we will go over each of the "new additions" that have become a very part of our modern gospel.

The Removed Parts Of The Gospel

The Blood of Jesus. It's a fact that the very word **blood** scares people. It's also a fact that the blood of Christ scares the devil, because it is the only cleansing agent for a sin-sick soul.⁴ Can you imagine what the preaching and writings of Paul would have been like, if he had been as squeamish in

proclaiming the magnificent power and beauty of the blood of Jesus as our generation of preachers are? **What we have now is a bloodless gospel!**

Today, people are afraid to think and preachers are afraid to make them. The whole concept of Jesus being the Passover Lamb of the Old Testament⁵ has been lost - "It takes too much time and thought to explain," you will hear some say. (*Heb. 5:11-14*) "We need to simplify the Gospel so that we can reach the masses." Oh, what logic! Remove the blood from the preaching of the Gospel, and you remove the power to conquer the devil for the souls of men!

The Cross of Jesus. Paul said, "*I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*" (*I Cor. 2:2*) Nowadays it's "Jesus Christ and what He can do for you!" You cannot have more exact opposites than the Bible's Christ-centered Gospel,⁶ and our modern, cross-less, me-centered gospel.

Today, if anyone preaches self-denial as a condition of discipleship, you can hear the comments afterwards: "old-fashioned," "harsh," "legalistic." I dare say that our Lord would have as much trouble finding acceptance among our preachers as He had among the religious leaders of His own day.

Here's what A.W. Tozer says about the cross...

"The cross is the most revolutionary thing ever to appear among men. The cross of Roman times knew no compromise, it never made concessions. It won all its arguments by killing its opponent and silencing him for good. It spared not Christ, but slew Him the same as the rest. He was alive when they hung Him on that cross, and completely dead when they took Him off of it. That was the cross the first time it appeared in Christian history.

*"With perfect knowledge of all this, Christ said, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself take up his cross and follow Me.' So the cross not only brought Christ's life to an end, it also ends the first life, the old life of every one of His true followers...this and nothing less is true Christianity. We must do something about the cross, and there's only one of two things we can do - **flee it or die upon it!**"*

The Threat and Terrors of Hell, and the Guilt of Sinners. We often hear people say, "I'm tired of hell-fire and brimstone preaching!" "Well," I often reply, "when was the last time you heard any?" It is true, very few people preach on hell anymore - it is no longer in vogue. We shouldn't scare the poor sinners, no, that wouldn't do. They're just unfortunate, misguided souls, right? Wrong! The Bible clearly shows that they are rebels who have robbed and dishonored the living God, infinitely offending Him.⁷ They have no right to look at themselves in any other light.

But we, smart as we are, have decided to help God along. He doesn't understand our generation as well as we do. The things Jesus emphasized in His preaching were all right for the Jews, but our

generation needs a more gentle, loving tone. "Tell 'em about heaven!" We talk about heaven, about the "rewards of being born-again," but we completely neglect the other side of the "two-edged sword." (*Heb. 4:12*) What right do we have to remove things from the Gospel that Jesus Himself gave great place to in His own preaching?⁸

The Law of God Preached to Convict One of Sin. Pages could be written on this subject, but there is room for only one brief example. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he asked a very direct question: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Can you imagine what our preachers would answer him today? "Just admit you're a sinner, accept Jesus as your Personal Savior, go to church, pay your tithes, try to be good, and you're in!" But what was Jesus' answer? "You know the commandments... if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." (*Matt 19:17; Mark 10:19*) **The commandments??** Why they went out with Cecil B. DeMille! Isn't this the "age of grace"?

Well, the truth is Jesus wasn't preaching the commandments to him as the way of salvation, He was using the commandments to specifically convict him of his particular sin - greed. That rich boy loved the bucks, and Jesus knew just how to flush him out of the bushes - **preach the Law!** And that's exactly what the Law is for- "*For through the Law comes the knowledge of sin*" (*Rom. 3:20*), that's what Paul said. The Law must be preached - not as the way of salvation, but as a searchlight put on the sinner's heart, so he can see how utterly rotten he is, compared to the way God requires him to be. (*Gal. 3:24*)

But today again, we are wiser than God. Our preaching isn't filled with "dos and don'ts." No, we don't want to scare the "liberated generation" away. Why, if we said that fornication was wrong, or drugs, or abortion, or any other specific sin, people would feel all condemned and then how could they get saved? But that's just it, Jesus preached the Law to the rich young ruler so that, after feeling condemned about his greed, he could turn and obey Jesus and find true treasure in heaven. "*Go and sell all you possess and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.*" (*Mark 10:21*) Unless people are truly convicted of sin, if they do not fully see that they are totally condemned by the requirements of God's Law, then it is virtually impossible to show them the need for a savior. Why, what would they need to be saved from? **Fun?**

That is why our modern gospel must dwell on "all the good things God'll do for you if you'd just accept Him!" We can't convince a sinner that he needs a savior by just getting him to admit that, "Well, generally, yes, I am a sinner." He must see how the Law of God totally condemns him as a sinner,⁹ and then the beauty of the Gospel, the glory of the cross, the marvelous power of Christ's blood will be able to penetrate his anxious, waiting mind and heart. Only by the preaching of the Law can a man fully desire to be saved from his sin. For, "*I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.*" (*Rom. 7:7*)

The Fear of God and the Judgment Seat of Christ. Instead of the awesome majesty of Jehovah, today the Lord is presented as a sort of "ice cream man-Santa Claus." And the Church is the "candy store" where you can get "every goodie your heart desires." Jesus Himself is portrayed as "a sweetie pie," so good, so loving, so forgiving, and so gentle, that you can almost hear the preacher whisper, "Aw, He wouldn't hurt a fly..." But what happened to "*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (*Heb. 10:31*) or "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*"? (*Proverbs 9:10*)¹⁰

The wise, new editors of modern preaching rhetoric have conveniently wiped out every reference to the Almighty's severity while emphasizing only His kindness. This they do, ignoring the balanced, biblical view of Paul, "*Behold then the kindness and severity of God.*" (Rom. 11:22)

Repentance as Necessary for Forgiveness. It has always amazed me how the Church could have evolved to such a state as it is in now, with such clear, direct teaching from the Lord Jesus as to what is necessary to be right with God. Please read the first five verses of the 13th chapter of Luke. Here, Jesus is told the news about some Galileans who were executed by the Romans. He then says, "*Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*" Using another example, He then repeats the same exact sentence.

I cannot conceive of conversion without repentance. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles are full of commands to "repent and be saved!"¹¹ Repentance is not just "being sorry" - that is only conviction. Repentance is not merely a change of heart and a change of mind, it is a change of action! God requires that if we are sincerely convinced that sin is wrong, then we will turn from it to God, and commit ourselves to not take part in sinful deeds any longer. God blesses such decisions and commitments with abundant grace. And it is by that grace that we can fulfill the desires of the Spirit within us.

But because there is so little real conviction of sin brought about by the preaching of our modern gospel, we cannot truly require repentance anymore. If we did, no one would "come forward" at all. For repentance is easy to him who sees how ugly and horrible sin is, but repentance is impossible where the Law does not convince the sinner of his wicked heart, compelling him to turn from his sin into the arms of a waiting, compassionate God. You see, all these removed parts of the Gospel are connected. In God's wisdom, every aspect of the appointed way of salvation is irreplaceable.

It is true that without God loving us first, we could not be saved. He made the first move, He always does. But He will not do what He requires of the sinner himself to do - and that is to repent!

God's Sorrow and Broken Heart Over Sin. The picture of God as presented today by evangelists is that of an optimist - a positive-thinking good ole boy who lives in heaven, high above the trouble on earth, where everything is rosy, "and the skies are not cloudy all day." Why, how could anything bother the living God? He isn't really troubled by all the mess down here, He has **everything under control!**

But again, the Bible paints a different picture of our King. Just look at Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), or the pleadings of God with the nation of Israel through the prophets Isaiah or Ezekiel.¹² This God, the one in the Bible, is continually striving with men through His Spirit. It says in Proverbs, "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.*" (Proverbs 15:3) That means that God saw every rape committed today, He saw every murder, every person that starved to death, every pornographic film and book, every abused and battered child. **How can anyone believe that He sees this and does not grieve?** Of course God can grieve. Doesn't the Bible implore us not to "*grieve the Holy Spirit of God*"? (Eph. 4:30)

You see, God is the most hurt and dishonored being in the universe. He could stop all this mess, all the perversion and crime and corruption any time He wishes, but He doesn't! Why? Because He

waits for the souls of men and women. *"Regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation,"* Peter said. (II Peter 3:15) But the Church, which doesn't have one millionth of the compassion that God has, has turned around and created a god in its own image and likeness. A carefree, cheerful, above-it-all God. And then the Church has conveniently removed from the "gospel" it presents all reference to the pain and sorrow in God's heart. The Church doesn't want a God who's grieved with sin, because then this God would be grieved with them... (and He is!)¹³

The Necessity of Holiness to Please God. Hebrews says without holiness *"no one shall see the Lord."* (12:14) It is true that Jesus commands us to be perfect. (Matt. 5:48) It is also true that you most likely have never met a perfect person, nor do you probably ever expect to be perfect yourself. Nevertheless, we still have those uncomfortable words of the Lord, *"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!"*

Now, because of our dilemma in finding ourselves to be such numskulls, and seeing the demands of Jesus, we have invented some pretty interesting and *caraaazzeey* doctrines. Some Christians have said, "Well, when God looks at us, He doesn't really see us anymore, He sees Jesus instead. And when there's ever sin in our hearts, if God should happen to look at the wrong moment, He'll see a smiling face of Jesus there, instead of seeing our sin. So God sees me as holy - even though I'm not! But...I really am...er, well, you know what I mean!" (I don't happen to believe that God is that easily fooled, not even by Christians.)

Another stranger-than-truth doctrine is that blessed refuge of backsliders called "the carnal Christian." In this example of pretzel-logic, we are led to believe that any "believer" who isn't really "walking with the Lord" at the present time, and is indulging in the things of the world and the lusts of the flesh, can still be considered a "Christian," but not a Christian of the 1st class, no, a Christian of the 2nd class... a **carnal** Christian." Here we have a case of the "believer" who doesn't believe. Oh, he still "believes" that God is God, and that there is a heaven and hell, and so on (but don't forget, the devil believes all these things too!-James 2:19). He knows all the right things to say to convince granny, the pastor, and his Christian friends that he's still hanging in there. He even sort of believes it himself. Seems he's got everybody fooled - everybody that is, except God! The Bible is clear that *"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."* (I John 1:6)¹⁴

Today, possibly the greatest insult to the Gospel has been the almost total neglect of the preaching of holiness for the Christian. Jesus doesn't want to make believe that we're holy, He wants to impart His holiness to us by the Holy Spirit. But because people are not being driven to the cross, convicted by His Law to repentance and real rebirth, then we have to spend hours in our seminaries trying to find suitable, complicated ways to explain away the obvious meanings of Scripture.

To all this you might be saying, "But what about all those people getting saved by the efforts of good men and ministries out there? They're not preaching the way you say they should, and **they** still have converts!" Well, the immediate answer to that question is, "The people are not getting saved **because** of their messages, they're getting saved **in spite** of them." But unfortunately, many of the people who make "decisions for Christ" through large evangelistic crusades, do not even attend church regularly in the years that follow. (And as you probably well know, "attending church regularly" does not

guarantee that one is a true believer.) But let's take a closer look at what kind of "converts" today's gospel usually produces.

What's Specifically Wrong With Our Modern Gospel?

It's Me-Centered Instead of Christ-Centered. First and foremost, it is the gospel that appeals to the selfish. Instead of honoring God, it places the sinner at the center of God's love and plan. But the Bible places Jesus at the center of God's plan, **not** the sinner.

One of the most well-known phrases of modern evangelism is "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life!" But the sober, biblical truth that needs to be presented to the sinner's mind is "You have made yourself an enemy of God, and in your present state of rebellion there is absolutely no hope for you." In fact, God's "plan" for the sinner at this point in his life is to separate him from His presence forever, in hell. However unpopular or unlovely that may sound, it is the only truth and reality about anyone who is an enemy of God through sin.

The whole line of reasoning in our modern gospel continues on and on in this mistaken way. "Sin has separated you from God, 'and His wonderful plan for your life.' Jesus came and died on the cross, so that you may experience 'His wonderful plan for your life.' You must accept Jesus now, so that you will not miss out on 'His wonderful plan for your life!'" **You, you, you, you!!! It's all for YOU!** I'm not sorry to say this, but Jesus did it all in obedience, for His **Father's** glory. (*Phil. 2:8-12*) Of course, it infinitely benefits those who love, serve, and honor Him, but that was a secondary consideration, not the primary one. (Please read Ezek. 36:22-32.) If people come to Jesus mainly to **get** a blessing, or only to **get** forgiveness, they will ultimately be disappointed. But if they come to **give** Him their lives in honor and worship, then they will truly have forgiveness and joy - more than they could ever imagine! (*I Cor. 2:9*)

It's Shallow, Cheap, and Offered as a "Bargain." Our gospel reduces the good news to a "come and get it while you can" sale. We make every effort to take all the bones out - everything that might offend someone, might make them hesitate or put off their decision. Jesus didn't do this. He never lowered the requirements for anyone. One had to be completely sincere, totally humbled, having counted the cost, willing to leave everything, family and property, "count all things loss" so that they might "gain Christ." (*Phil 3:7-8*) When that same rich young ruler "*went away sad, for he had many possessions*" (*Matt. 19:22*), Jesus didn't go running after him shouting, "Hey, wait a minute! Let's talk this thing over, it isn't as bad as it might sound. Maybe I was a little too harsh!"

Maybe we're so eager to "see the converts," to publish "how many got saved at our last concert" in the bulletins to our supporters, that we'll do anything to rush someone into a "decision" before he's had a chance to really make one. The problem is, if you have to rush him into it, he probably will change his mind later anyway. For as a friend of mine says, "If somebody can talk them into it, somebody can talk them out of it!" (*I Cor. 1:17*)

Salvation is Shown as a Barter or Trade, Instead of the Result of Obedience by Faith. We offer forgiveness of sin like Monty Hall on "Let's Make a Deal." I've even heard, "You give Jesus your sin, and He'll give you salvation in return!" No one in the Bible ever thought so low of the grace of God to talk about the gift of eternal life like it was for trade. **It is a gift!** You can't earn it, or buy it,

or give anything in return for it. How it must offend the Holy Spirit to hear people talk of His Jesus so. (*Acts 8:18-23*)

It Produces Selfish, "Blessed," and Feelings-Oriented "Converts." Anyone who is made to believe he becomes a Christian under such preaching will seldom bring forth the true fruits of a real convert. He will remain just as selfish as he always was, only now his selfishness will take on a religious form. If he wants something for himself, he will say he "has a burden" for something, or he will say, "It is the desire of my heart," or some other religious-sounding phrase like that. He will pray selfishly, desiring blessings for himself, and even if he does pray for others, it usually will be for selfish reasons. After all, when he "accepted the Lord," he was told how much Jesus wanted to bless him and how much God had stored up for his account, and how the Bible was like "a checkbook full of promises, just waiting to be cashed!"

Such a person always seeks to "feel" good about himself, his own church, his own pastor, etc. His whole world is built on **feeling blessed**. He was never shown how he was created to bless God... God was not created to bless him. (*Psalms 149:4; Phil. 2:13*)

As you can see, the "converts" described above are not like those pictured in the book of Acts, when the Church was new and the fire was hot. Take a look at *Acts 2:41-47* and *4:31-35*, and you will see the tender spirit of love, and the mighty spirit of power that prevailed among the brethren in those early days. I believe that one of the great reasons that "*everyone kept feeling a sense of awe*" (*Acts 2:43*), was because "*they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to prayer.*" (*vs. 42*) I believe that Peter and the others made every effort to convey the whole message of the Gospel when they preached and taught, and that is why the Spirit of God could anoint and bless the new converts so powerfully- **God always anoints the truth!** (*Isaiah 55:11*)

1) Matt 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 3:16-18.

2) Luke 3:10,12,14; Acts 2:37,16:30

3) Eph. 5:1, I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6

4) Matt. 26:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25, 5:9; Eph. 1:7, 2:13; Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:14,22, 10:19, 13:12; I Peter 1:2; I John 1:7; Rev. 1:5, 5:9, 12:11, 19:13.

5) Exodus 12:23-24; Isaiah 53:7; Luke 22:15; John 1:29,36; I Cor. 5:7; I Peter 1:19; Rev. 5:6,12, 7:14, 22:1,3.

6) Matt 10:38; Luke 14:27; I Cor. 1:17-18; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:20; I Peter 2:24

7) John 8:44; Acts 13:9-11; I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 4:16; Eph. 2:1-3; James 4:4; II Peter 2:12-19.

8) Matt. 5:22; 8:12, 10:28, 13:41-42, 49-50, 22:11-14, 23:13,33, 24:48-51, 25:30,46; Luke 13:26-28.

9) Rom. 2:12,20, 3:20-21, 4:15, 5:13,20, 10:4; I Cor. 15:56; Gal. 2:16,19, 3:10-11; James 29:11.

10) See also Deut. 5:29, 10:12; Joshua 24:14; II Kings 17:39; Psalm 2:11, 15:4, 19:9, 25:14, 31:19, 33:18, 34:7,9,11, 52:6 60:4, 67:7, 72: 5, 85:9, 86:11, 103:11,13,17; 111:5, 112:1, 147:11; Proverbs 8:13, 10:27, 13:13, 14:26-27, 15:16, 16:6, 19:23, 23:17, 28:14, 31:30; Isaiah 8:13; Jer. 32:39-40; Malachi 3:16, 4:2; Matt. 10:28; Luke 1:50; Acts 10:35, 13:26; II Cor 7:1; Eph 5:21; Phil. 2:12, Heb. 12:29; I Peter 1:17; Rev. 14:7

11) Psalm 7:12; Isaiah 30:15; Ezek. 18:32; Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:5, 6:7,12; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 8:22, 17:30, 26:19-20; Rev. 2:5,16, 3:3,19

12) Isaiah 1:18, 54:7; Ezek. 18:23,32, 33:11; Hosea 11:8.

13) Psalm 78:40-41; Mark 3:5.

14) Here are only a few of the many Scriptures that say this over and over again, in the clearest possible terms: Psalm 5:4,6; Matt. 7:22; John 3:20-21;

II Cor. 6:14; I John 2:4,9-11, 3:10, 4:20