

1. The Gospel Belongs to the Church and She is to Cling to It
  - a. The Gospel of Grace Strengthens All the Churches
    - i. “passing through the cities” indicates a long journey through many cities
    - ii. Though there were a diversity of churches in a diversity of cities, there was a unifying centrality to them all: the gospel of grace and the law of love
      - 1) Each church in each city needed to hear the same announcement and command
    - iii. This also places the emphasis on the content of the Word, the letter’s explanation of God’s grace and the righteousness of Christ as the means of salvation and acceptance with God
      - 1) Rather than on the strength or persuasive “ability” of Paul, Silas, or Timothy
      - 2) That is, they didn’t stay long enough to be influential in each city: the Word did the work
        - a) It is always the Word which does the work of strengthening the church
        - b) The Protestant Reformation, the return to the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ, wasn’t the work of Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin, it was the work of the Word
      - 3) The reality is that it didn’t matter who carried the letter, it was the announcement of God’s acceptance by faith in Jesus which made the Church sing
        - a) If you think that you’re irreplaceable in the work of God’s kingdom, you are sorely wrong
        - b) God can speak through a donkey and rocks, so He doesn’t *need* you.
  - b. The Gospel Belongs to the Church
    - i. “they were handing over to them” – the letter, though addressed only to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, was for all churches everywhere
    - ii. The gospel of God’s grace *belonged* to them
      - 1) It was not merely a “delivery” to rule them, but rather a statement of the nature of the gospel and the principle of the Law of Love which belonged to them as they to it
    - iii. There is a dramatically different motivational force when something is “yours”, rather merely than something imposed upon you
      - 1) You keep what you treasure
      - 2) You guard what you treasure
      - 3) You “adhere” to what you treasure
    - iv. What’s the difference between reading a news article and a letter from your loved one with the same information?
  - c. The Gospel is to be Clung to
    - i. “To guard” or “to keep”
      - 1) Indicates both belonging and responsibility to hold onto
      - 2) The gospel is both for us and belongs to us as something which we are to adhere to and to guard from perversion or corruption
      - 3) It is to be passed down to others in its sure and certain form, unchanging, unaltered, convicting and encouraging
  - d. The Gospel is a Decree
    - i. Dogma – “a fixed and authoritative declaration”
      - 1) Rather than being simple “decree” of one person, we know that this was a “judgment” (hence the verb, judge, to describe the action of the council in Jerusalem)
      - 2) Thus, this was more of a resolution than a simple declaration
        - a) It came after much reasoning through the gospel and its relationship to the Law, as recorded in the previous chapter
    - ii. This word, however, bolsters the necessity of guarding it, of keeping it, of adhering to it
      - 1) This also bolsters its nature of unchangeableness – the gospel doesn’t change when it goes to differing cultures
      - 2) This is because it’s not a set of laws, but the announcement of God’s work in Christ Jesus within history and its implications for all Creation

- 3) Often today preachers and churches think the means to adding numbers to the church, to converting people to Christ, is to compromise on doctrine, rather than to adhere to it, to stick to it, to leave it standing alone
  - iii. By the apostles and elders in Jerusalem
    - 1) This is a church-wide agreement and decree, even by those of Judea, whom one would think may disagree concerning circumcision and the clean laws of Moses
    - 2) Everyone agrees that we are saved by the righteousness of Christ – both positively via His obedience, and negatively via His death – both for our sake and in our place as united to Him by faith alone
  - e. Why is this dogma of the gospel so significant? IT IS THE POWER OF GOD! (Rom 1:16)
    - i. The gospel, the good news of the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Holy Spirit – the unique historical events of this God-man, Jesus Christ
      - 1) All the implications of this event
      - 2) At the root of this is the two-fold work of redemption by faith alone:
        - a) Forgiveness of sins – by faith alone in Christ Jesus alone
        - b) Received Righteousness of God – by faith alone in Christ Jesus alone
          - i) My bounced checks and an immeasurable balance from Christ
    - ii. It is not a mere proclamation – it is the POWER OF GOD to all who believe
      - 1) 1 Thess 1:5 – gospel *comes* in the power of God with the Holy Spirit
      - 2) 2 Thess 2:14 – it is the *means* of God’s effectual calling (“called through our gospel proclamation”)
      - 3) 1 Pet 1:23 – it is the *source* of His regenerating work in those whom He has called, causing us to be born again to eternal life by repentant faith
  - f. If we want to see the power of God in our lives and in the lives of others, then it will only come through hearing the Good News of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and eternal reign to our own souls and to the souls of others
2. The Gospel is the Means of Strengthening and Growing the Church
- a. “Therefore” indicates that which occurred before, the proclamation of the letter and the command to guard its decree, resulted in the strengthening and growth of the Church
  - b. “The churches were being strengthened”
    - i. This word, “strengthened”, means to “make firm” or “set on firm ground”
      - 1) Thus, these unbending dogmatic doctrines of grace actually strengthened and firmed up the church, setting her on solid ground, so that she could set her feet firmly and immovable by the temptations of the flesh and the sufferings in the world
    - ii. They were growing in number daily
      - 1) This is Luke’s way of finalizing a section of the story (see 2:47; 6:7; 9:31)
  - c. The Gospel Brings and Grows Life (see Colossians 1:6)
    - i. God’s Word is a life-giving thing (bearing fruit and growing)
      - 1) Hopeless people, at a loss for life, need to hear about the Great King who died that they might live, renewed, forgiven, beloved by God
    - ii. The Gospel of this righteousness by faith bears fruit “as we understand it”
      - 1) This shows us that discipleship is understanding the gospel more and more
        - a) Hence, Luke’s reference to the sphere of the Church being strengthened: “in the faith”
      - 2) Paul and Barnabas’ original intention was to visit to see “how the churches are holding on”
        - a) Were they continuing to seize upon the truth that reconciliation with God comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone
      - 3) If we want to grow, it comes through seeing more and more of Jesus and His glorious gospel of God and its expansive application to all things
    - iii. The Gospel continues throughout our lives “as it has been doing since the day you heard...”
      - 1) We never stop “learning the gospel”

- 2) We are to be helping each other understand it better, apply it more precisely, and relying upon Christ fully, trusting in the promise that He who began this good work will be faithful to complete it (Phil 1:6) in the day of Jesus
  - iv. The way we grow (Gal 3:1-6)
    - 1) We are not made declared innocent by the Gospel and then sanctified (made to live right) by obedience of sheer will
    - 2) It is in humble dependence upon Jesus that is the power to endure every problem with hope, the key to every locked door, and the power over every barrier
    - 3) This is true for every culture, every nation, every human, for we were made for this like we were made to breathe air (exhale repentance, inhale dependence)
  - d. The decree of grace, of the righteousness of Christ received by faith alone, and not according our obedience to the works of the law, or of cultural conformation, resulted in a stronger church, not a weaker one
    - i. We fret when things look different than what we are accustomed
      - 1) We think that they will threaten us, or weaken us
      - 2) Yet, we find that the diversity of cultures under the unity of the one and only gospel actually produces strength
    - ii. How does it create unity in diversity? The Gospel Eliminates Competition
      - 1) The doctrine of the cross means that there is (1) the absolute necessity of atonement through only one Man, and (2) it is only to be received by faith in that one man
      - 2) This offends any who want to compare themselves to others:
        - a) “Are you telling me that those of us who have worked our entire lives to get out of the gutter are in the same place as those who are in the gutter? THOSE people?! How dare you!”
        - b) “Are you telling me that good people, genuinely moral people of other religions who have lived good lives, if they don’t believe in the cross of Christ, then they’re lost?! How dare you!”
      - 3) But for the broken, who have compared themselves only to God and found themselves completely wanting, “those who are being saved”, it is the deep inhale of God’s mercy, “You gave yourself for me?! Hallelujah!! For her?! Hallelujah!”
3. We are Strengthened in the Faith as the Gospel is Treasured as Our Hope (Col 1:23)
- a. All of our problems come from a failure to depend on the gospel with our hearts
  - b. We all, to differing degrees, live around the truth of the Gospel and don’t “get” it.
    - i. We grow, says Paul, by understanding all of its truth
    - ii. At the center of the Gospel is the Cross
      - 1) Your life will not be strengthened, transformed, built up, until you understand the doctrine of the Cross, the substitutionary exchange of the righteousness of Christ for the unrighteousness of sinners – ME!
      - 2) Luke 9:20-22 – When Jesus asked Peter who he thought He was, Peter’s response of “The Christ of God”
        - a) Jesus was pleased, but how did He respond?
        - b) “He forcefully commanded them not to tell this to anyone, <sup>22</sup> saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”
        - c) In other words, He talked about the cross: “My life for yours.”
    - iii. Any renewal or growth always comes through a deeper apprehension of an implication of what God has done through the cross of Christ
      - 1) Nothing humbles us more deeply than Jesus saying, “My life for yours.”
        - a) Knowing His holiness and my wickedness
      - 2) Nothing grants us a sense of being loved like Jesus saying, “My life for yours.”
        - a) Knowing His sovereignty and my futility
      - 3) Nothing frees us from fear like Jesus saying, “My life for yours.”
        - a) Knowing His resurrection and my fragility
  - c. Paul refers in Colossians 1:23 to “the *hope* of the gospel.”

- i. And there is no sweeter message of hope in all the world than to hear God announce that when you get up in the morning miserable and depressed with a sense of guilt and estrangement before a holy God, you can go to bed that very night—this very night—with a quiet and peaceful heart knowing that every sin you committed in heart, thought, or deed, is forgiven and you are reconciled to the Almighty *by the death of his Son*.
- ii. And every day, every hour, we are being called to hope in something, to be strengthened to obtain significance
  - 1) In the hope of self-attainment, which says to others “Your life for mine”
    - a) Frankly, we use people to make ourselves feel significant
    - b) Expecting people to love us perfectly, to do what is right by us, to honor and respect us
      - i) Our hope is that others will live for our goals and desires
    - c) But when they don’t, we lose hope
      - i) This, of course, leads to a lack of love, to bitterness, to despair, to rage, to envy, to immorality, to wickedness and death
  - 2) Or, we hope in the gospel, which is God for us, who has said to us, “My life for yours” at the Cross, so that we can say the same to others, “My life for yours.”
    - a) In which my hopes and fears are addressed with peace and joy and empower me, then, to lay down my life for others because I don’t need their life for mine because self-attainment and self-protection is not my hope
    - b) I then will truly love, which is to give my life for theirs
      - i) Romans 15:1-6
      - ii) Edify others *because the Scriptures give us hope*
      - iii) Romans 15:13 – God fills us with hope *through believing* so that we abound in hope.
        1. Faith in His Word, the Gospel of the Cross, is the means by which we hope
- iii. The Gospel of the God Who Gives His Life for Sinners Frees Us to Love Others:
  - 1) You were chosen by grace, so you don’t *need* to be that man’s choice, but can work for his good even at your own expense (Eph 1:4; John 15:16; 1 Cor 1:27-28)
  - 2) You were called by grace, so you don’t *need* to need to be recognized by her, but can work for her good even at your own expense (Gal 1:6; 2 Thess 2:14; 2 Tim 1:9)
  - 3) You were sanctified by grace, so you don’t *need* that man’s honor, so you can bear up their shaming looks and work for his good at your own expense (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13; Rom 6:22)
  - 4) You are being built up by grace, so you don’t *need* to have her approval, but can work for her good even when she points out how wrong you are (Col 2:7; Eph 3:17; John 15:16)
  - 5) You are being sustained through faith by grace (Rom 8:28-32; 1 Pet 1:5; John 10:28-30)
  - 6) You will be glorified by grace, so you don’t need to hear “well done!” from your boss, but can work for his flourishing and joy at your own expense, because you will hear “well done, good and faithful servant” from the Greatest and most Glorious Boss (Rom 8:21,30; John 17:22; 2 Thess 2:14)
  - 7) All of this grace for those who were hostile, foolish, blind, estranged sinners! (Rom 4:5; 1 Tim 1:15; Eph 2:1-7), so we don’t boast in anything but the cross (**Galatians 6:14**)
- d. Evangelism: WE BOAST OF WHAT WE HOPE IN
  - i. Our hope is what we place our confidence in – and we boast in what we believe gives us righteousness (Galatians 6 is regarding circumcision)
  - ii. We naturally “evangelize” or “preach” about whatever we place our hope upon
    - 1) A “boast” was a ritual motivational announcement before battle – a military term
      - a) It was a form of expressing hope as a motivation to rush into battle
        - i) “This story shall the good man teach his son;  
And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by,  
From this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be remembered-  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
 For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
 This day shall gentle his condition;  
 And gentlemen in England now a-bed  
 Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,  
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day." (Henry V)

1. Military brotherhood is our hope and glory – so we boast in our military prowess and “manhood”
- ii) “Sons of Scotland...I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You’ve come to fight as free men. And free men you are. What will you do with that freedom? Will you fight? Fight and you may die. Run and you’ll live, at least for awhile. And dying in your beds many years from now would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance, to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom?” (Braveheart)
  1. Freedom is our hope and glory – so in freedom we will boast.
- iii) “Hasta la vista, Baby!” (Terminator 2)
  1. My firepower is my hope and glory – so I boast in my military strength.
- iii. But a Christian boasts only in the cross, because we hope only in the cross (Galatians 6:14)
  - 1) “We are wicked and powerless and helpless. Our only hope is the Christ who loves us and gave Himself up for us on the cross and calls us His own beloved people, who was raised from the dead for us, who is our glory and only expectation of victory. They may take our freedom. They may take our lives. But they’ll never take our souls from Him. So, go love your enemy and lay down your lives for their sake! Aarrgggh!”
- iv. The gospel strengthens us because by it we know that God is for us in all things!
  - 1) Here is a boast to strengthen you to love others to lay your lives down for them:
  - 2) Romans 8:28-39

This gospel is being preached in all creation under heaven. The gospel is for everybody! It belongs to the very heart of the gospel that you don't have to be Jewish, or Anglo-Saxon, or free, or male, or even good in order to be rescued and transformed to new life by God through His gospel. It is a worldwide hope, bringing new life and flourishing joy throughout the entire world, and nothing else will satisfy the hearts of men in the end. It is the voice of the Lord that strips the forests bare. It is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:11–12). It is like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces (Jeremiah 23:29) and melts the heart of stone. It goes forth from his mouth and does not return empty, but accomplishes that for which he sent it (Isaiah 55:11). The grass will wither and the flowers fall but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

And therefore it will reach to every people and tongue and tribe and nation as the very power of God; the ransomed will be called; the full number of the redeemed will come in; the eyes of all true Israel will be opened; and the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The wheat and the tares will be divided. And those who have believed the gospel will shine like the Son in the kingdom of their Father. And they shall reign forever and ever in the kingdom of light.

This is the great global hope of the gospel! Let him who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires take the water of life without price. Let the humbled receive it. Drink it down. Hold it fast. There is no other hope than the Almighty God who has said, “My life for yours.” Amen!