

DISTINCTIVE GOSPELS

Miles J. Stanford Source: <http://withchrist.org/MJS/distinctive.htm>

In this chapter Dr. Newell will share with us different aspects of the Gospel—actually, different Gospels:

The thirteen Epistles of Paul (Romans to Philemon) form a distinct body of truth; and this realm of truth is about us, the Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, as no other Scriptures are. And Paul is the Father’s special messenger to us.

The teaching that the choice of Matthias in Acts 1 was a blunder on Peter’s part has arisen from failure to recognize the character of Paul’s calling and work. And to fail to realize this is to miss the vital core of Paul’s whole teaching. Terrible loss! For when the Church lost this (as she early did) she had left no defense against Judaism and its law on the one hand and worldliness on the other. When we consider Paul’s teaching we soon see its special character; but it is plain, even before a study of his doctrine, that his apostleship was wholly distinct from and independent of that of the Twelve.

Israel was, and in God’s gracious purpose is yet to be, His earthly people. That is, their calling is to represent God on the earth, as the chief nation of the earth, dwelling in a special country, in an earthly order of things, with earthly hopes, rewards, etc. But the Church, the Body of Christ, into which, in the Father’s wondrous grace, we have been called, is heavenly. The Church has nothing to do with earth, except to witness in the name of the Lord, and then pass on into glory, into heaven, her eternal Home.

We will never be able to understand Scripture till we see sharply and clearly the distinction between Israel, the chosen earthly nation, and the Church, the Body of Christ. Paul is the Apostle of the latter. And, as such, he is the Apostle of a totally new thing. For Israel is constantly before us in the OT and in the Synoptic Gospels, but the Church is very rarely even referred to before we come to Acts.

At first thought these distinctions will not seem important; but then we remember that the right understanding of our exact relation as the Church is absolutely necessary. If we are to apprehend and enter into our full rights, privileges and responsibilities as Christians, their most careful study will be seen to be imperative.

It is in Acts 9:20 that the Lord Jesus is first proclaimed, by Paul, as the Son of God—and this is a distinct advance of truth concerning Him. [Acts 9 and 13 represent the unfolding of truth, not the advent of the Body of Christ as some erroneously teach.] Paul already stood in clearer light regarding the risen and glorified Lord than did the other Apostles, for they had known Him primarily in humiliation, and they were His messengers to Israel, of whom is Christ "as concerning the flesh" (Romans 9:5). But Paul’s first vision of the Lord Jesus was as the Glorified One, the Son of God, in resurrection glory.

We will examine the nature and scope of the Gospel preached during our Lord’s walk on the earth; and then the Gospel preached after His resurrection until the revelation given to the Apostle Paul. Actually we will look at three different Gospels.

[While each Gospel has the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ as central and common, each Gospel is not equal with regard to the progressive revelation of God’s love, grace, mercy, and purpose. Time is necessary for believers to be familiar enough with the NT to recognize these distinctions, but it is vital for genuine spiritual growth.]

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<p>NT: Matthew to Acts 2</p> <p>First we have the <u>Gospel of the Kingdom</u> that was offered to the Jews in the person of the Heir. "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15). "And it came to pass afterward, that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God; and the Twelve were with Him" (Luke 8:1).</p> <p>The effect of repenting and believ-</p>	<p>NT: Acts 2 to Acts 9</p> <p>This marks a new and wondrous era in the grace and mercy of God, and on the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Peter insists on this blessed truth, showing that the manifestation of the power of the Spirit was indicative of the time when it should be fulfilled—"It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be <u>saved</u>" (Acts 2:21). And further (v. 36), "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."</p>	<p>NT: Acts 9 to Philemon</p> <p>The <u>glorified</u> Lord Jesus Christ tells Saul, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast <u>seen</u>, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee." And what does Saul <u>see</u>? Not only Christ risen, but also Christ ascended in glory. Stephen has seen Him there, and had consigned his spirit to Him whom he had seen there; but Saul sees Him and is commissioned to be a minister and a witness of the things that he sees.</p> <p>Here, then, was the introduction of</p>

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ing this Gospel is set forth in the prayer that our Lord taught His disciples, who, as the faithful of that day, had accepted this Gospel. It was good tidings that God was offering men, His kingdom and His Son, the Heir of all. The disciples believed this, and hence our Lord teaches them a prayer expressive of the state of soul which they as believing in this Gospel should have.

The Disciple's Prayer - "And it came to pass that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil" (Luke 11:1-4).

If this prayer is suitable for the disciples at that time, before the Saviour's death, and before the gift of the Holy Spirit, it must be evident that it could not be suitable after they had known the blessings of redemption and their union with the risen Lord.

In this prayer there is a knowledge of the Father, because Christ was declaring Him on earth, but His will had not yet been done. Christ came to do His will, and now He has done it; so that we could not now pray for it to be done, though it was right for the disciples to pray that it might be done. Besides, there is no knowledge of the forgiveness of sins; it is looking for forgiveness on the ground of work rather than rejoicing in it through grace. It is a prayer regarding man in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.

Christ and the Spirit are in no way referred to in this prayer, and this is consistent, for Christ had not yet finished His work, and therefore He does not lead their souls into it; and as the Holy Spirit has not yet come He finds no place in it. The prayer

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Progressive Revelation - We can see where the Gospel then preached set souls. Saved was the great leading characteristic of those who had accepted the Gospel. And on earth they were in the unity of Christ's Body by the Holy Spirit, though that truth had not as yet been revealed. This Gospel, as one can see, does not present heaven before the soul, nor does it separate men from the earth.

True, it set men so in the power of the Spirit that selfishness has lost its influence and rule, for they "had all things in common." But a hope apart from and outside earth was not presented, nor were they regarded as no longer connected with men as men on earth. On the contrary, they were a beautiful expression of God's grace to man on earth; individual selfishness set aside in the power of the bond which united them, "they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46).

The Gospel that these had received was that Jesus was risen, and that He was appointed of God both Lord and Christ. And now in the power of the Holy Spirit they were in unity, but still as yet their hope was not apart from earth, nor did they regard themselves as apart from relation thereto, though they held that relation in view of their risen Lord, whose Return to it they announced.

Still Kingdom Level - There is a great necessity for thus tracing the history of the Gospel, for it will be found that most souls to the present have not progressed beyond the Gospel of Acts 2, though, alas! without arriving at the blessed results manifested there, which could not really be manifest now because the earthly connection has terminated.

Are there not saints now who, being assured of salvation, meet as saved ones to support an earthly order, which the breaking of bread indicates; who are thinking more of their relation to earth than of their

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the Gospel of God according to the fullness of His heart and purpose. Can anyone for a moment hesitate to accept the beautiful order of this wondrous Gospel, beginning and consummating in the bright, full circle of the Father's presence and glory?

We have already seen that salvation through a risen Saviour could be and was known, and the saints maintained, through the Holy Spirit here on earth, in one mind, one soul, remembering the death of the Lord in the breaking of bread. This was while they were still linked to earth and to the Temple services, and their hope entirely connected with the earth as waiting their Lord's return to establish His kingdom (Acts 1:6).

Church Gospel - But now that this hope could no longer be presented on account of Christ's rejection from the earth, God unfolds through Christ the deep, full counsel of His heart; and the scene where all this can be displayed is the glory into which Saul is now introduced; and seeing the Lord Jesus in the glory is the pivot and center of that Gospel which is now entrusted to him.

[Acts 13 represents an unfolding of the truth of the Mystery, not the advent of the Body of Christ as some erroneously teach. See quotation below.]

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:8, 9).

The nature and scope of this Gospel we shall best ascertain by tracing the lines of truth expounded in Paul's writings, which, like rays emanating from Christ, the Center and Source, lead the heart back to Himself and feed it with His excellency and glory. Saul's first sermon gives us a clear idea of the power and

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suiting the disciples, and it shows us where they were [in their experience]. If a soul now goes back to their state, then the prayer will suit them; but the soul using it intelligently must feel that he has neither forgiveness of sins nor the life of Christ, in which through the Spirit he is free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2).

Instead of growing up in Christ and reaching unto "perfection," this prayer is to get daily bread, to escape from temptation, and for deliverance from evil—all necessary in their place, but not occupying the individual with the higher realities of Christianity. If Christianity had a place in their prayer, it would manifestly have been suited to the disciples; and inasmuch as Christianity is left out, it cannot be a suitable prayer for members of the Body of Christ.

Limited Apprehension - And if I go further and note the manner and way of the apostles at this time, I see in them no moral power, no correct idea of the things of God, though they, to the joy and rest of their hearts, were in a surpassing way sheltered by Jesus in person. Would saints in the present day approve of being, or consent to be, no better in hope or intelligence than the apostles before the resurrection, who slept when asked to watch with Him, and who forsook Him and fled?

And "as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." Now these were believers in the Gospel of the Kingdom, and in the spirit of their minds they were according to this prayer in Luke 11, the so-called Lord's Prayer. Hence, when saints nowadays limit their standing to that prayer, they cannot practically rise above the apostles at that hour of prayer, hope or intelligence, and, sad as it is to say it, they literally do not!

Progression - Now on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the Gospel obtains a remarkable breadth and fullness not known before that great event. The Lord not only stands in their midst a risen One, assuring

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hope and position in heaven; and who regard the coming of the Lord in the light of His Return to the earth, more than in that of their meeting Him in the air? More earthly kingdom, than the heavenly Rapture?

Stephen Juncture - In Acts 3 the lame man was healed through Peter and John, and it was then that Peter preached to the gathered multitude of Israelites that "the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the age began." "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 3:19–21; 1:11).

They knew their Lord had gone to heaven, but they expected His Return; and they connected all their ideas of the place He went to prepare for them with His Return to earth. His promise to them in John 14 was that He would come again to receive them unto Himself, that where He was they should be also; but however they understood this, it is evident from Peter's sermon, as well as the testimony of the angels, that up to this moment His Return to earth was their great cardinal hope.

But soon the leaders of Israel began to reject the Gospel and persecute the apostles. And in Acts 6 and 7 we are told how both the people and the elders and the scribes came upon Stephen and caught him and brought him to the Council; and then deliberately, they not only rejected but stoned to death the witness of the Holy Spirit, by whom the Word of God appealed to their consciences not to resist Him.

Thus, as before in the death of John the Baptist, they have proclaimed their opposition to Him whom John presented; so now by the stoning of Stephen they openly unmask and expose the hatred and rebellion of

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greatness of the Gospel committed to him. "He preached Christ... that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

In the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul calls the Gospel "the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1), "the Gospel of His Son" (v. 9), and "my Gospel" (Rom. 16:25), the first characteristic we find of it is justification through faith, because God's righteousness is revealed in Christ. The righteousness of God is thus characteristic of Paul's Gospel.

Now the righteousness of God is established in the Cross of Christ—He bearing in Himself the judgment on man, so that there is an end of that which offended God. He was made to be sin for us, that we should be made the righteousness of God in Him. There is an end of man as man was (in the First Adam); the old man was crucified with Christ. Hence, with the righteousness of God there is another characteristic, namely, the end of man in the flesh.

Then comes eternal life: grace reigns "through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). A further characteristic is that "ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (8:9). It is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" which has "made me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2), and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (8:9).

Let the soul endeavor to embrace all that is conferred on it in this epistle by Paul's Gospel: righteousness—the righteousness of God established by Christ; the judicial ending of the old man; the gift of eternal life; the Spirit of Christ; so that Christ in me is the summing up, as well as the fullness, of blessing.

Paul's Gospel - Paul's Gospel produces, for those that believe, a new order of existence after another order of man. Christ lives in me. It is not that the old man has received additions and advantages as in a legal religion—a former Gospel—but that I am made anew of Him who is the Son of God, and that the old

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them of peace, but He breathes on them and says, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Now they are to realize that they not only believe in God, but also in Him.

And they received from Him the Commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16).

Here in precise and unmistakable language is declared to us the Gospel they were now to proclaim. The Gospel at that time was that everyone believing in Jesus risen, and taking his place in accordance with this fact on earth through baptism, should be saved. The Gospel then conveyed salvation and the power of the Spirit on earth, but nothing beyond this.

It is important to notice the nature and character of the Gospel presented, because according to it must be the consequent blessing; and if I, like Apollos, preach only the baptism of John, as he did at Ephesus, is it any wonder that the believers at Ephesus, as we see from Acts 19, knew nothing more and never heard that the Holy Spirit was now on earth? It is of all importance what Gospel is preached, for though God saves and secures blessing for me according to His love in Christ, still my sense of it, my joy and strength because of the blessing, must be determined by my knowledge and faith in the nature of the blessing.

Now if some have not advanced beyond the Gospel preached during our Lord's life here, many more think they have gained the heights of grace when they proclaim with much energy and faithfulness the truth that salvation follows, and is assured to the soul, on believing in a risen Christ. It is doubtless a truth of unspeakable magnitude that a lost sinner, at a distance from God and under fear of judgment, finds himself now through faith in Jesus Christ fully and finally saved by Him.

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their hearts to a glorified Christ. It is now declared that there is no acceptance of Him on earth by His own people, but on the contrary, there is an open avowal, "We will not have this man to reign over us!"

Hence it is easy to see that the hope of Christ's Return to earth to set up the kingdom, which was the hope of the Gospel preached by Peter and the apostles up to this time, can no longer be insisted on. Stephen is taken to glory with the Lord Jesus instead of waiting here for His Return to earth as its true and only King.

Disciples To Stephen To Paul -

Here we can see the transition, the point of juncture between the earthly Gospel preached by the Apostles and that which, consequent on the death of Stephen, was committed to Saul of Tarsus. Christ coming from heaven to earth has been deliberately, defiantly and outrageously refused. His witness, being stoned, has been taken to be with Him where He is; now comes the call of Saul of Tarsus; and the Gospel which is now revealed and committed to him sets forth how God in His grace and according to Himself will disclose the purpose and fullness of His heart.

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man has been superseded and judicially put an end to in His Cross. Being crucified with Christ, it has no longer any recognized existence before God; while I, in my new creation, am in Christ before the Father, and He lives in me. This is the very kernel of Paul's Gospel.

Thus we see how the "Gospel of His Son" positions the believer before God in relation to Him, and also in relation to the old Adamic man. This is very partially presented in the Gospel preached by Peter. He preached salvation, perfect and final, through a risen Saviour, and the present indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Great elements, it must be admitted; but they did not set aside man as entirely and judicially ended in the Cross of Christ, nor connect the individual with Christ as his Life and Head (as in the truth revealed to Paul), though the saints possessed it through the Holy Spirit. They [early saints] did not know who they were, and where they were, "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

William Kelly stated, "The evangelical 'revival,' whether of Wesley or Whitfield, was a pious reaction which insisted on the new birth and earnestness on behalf of lost souls, from the cold ethics and formality, if not deism, of the century before.

"But the heavenly calling and the inheritance of the saints, the purpose of God for His glory in Christ, never really dawned upon evangelical hearts, any more than of the Puritans, or even the Reformers who preceded."

"Acts 13 introduces the Spirit's testimony in Paul's mission, beginning formally at Antioch, based on the fact that the church, which is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23), was formed by the baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), at Pentecost, once for all. All added since that baptism in the Spirit receive the same "Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13; Luke 24:29; Acts 1:4; John 14:16,26, 16:7). Such are "in Christ" and so there were those "who also were in Christ before me" (Rom. 16:7). Paul's mission included the unfolding of the truth of the mystery of Christ and the church, as well as the gospel of the glory. As the Jews refused the Spirit's testimony to Christ in glory, so they refused the Spirit's testimony of grace to the Gentiles" RAH