

Get Back in the Saddle

By Phillip G. Kayser · Acts 14:1-7 · 2007-7-15

My dad taught me not to be afraid of animals. I say he *taught* me, but I didn't learn very well. There were some animals I was scared to death of. For example, in Ethiopia the emperor had a breed of cattle that were absolutely huge. I may be remembering this wrong, but in ninth grade they seemed much taller than I was. Some of the bulls were 2000 pounds plus. Man, I was nervous around those creatures. But my dad seemed to know how to work with animals, and even when they would get ornery, he never let them get the upper hand. I remember one time that a bull had escaped and had chased over a dozen men and police officers up and over a fence, and no one wanted to try to catch the thing. My dad went in, but the bull would have none of it. He charged my dad who took him by the horns and in a matter of seconds had him on the ground where the others could tie the bull up. There's no way you would have caught me in that garden with that bull. No way. I didn't even like dealing with hogs. I admire people like the Dykstra family and Dave Denekas who know how to handle sows.

I don't know how it is with pigs, but my dad told me that animals could often sense if you were scared of them, and if they knew you were, they would not respect you. So dad taught me how to face down dogs successfully. He tried to teach me that bees can smell when you are afraid, and I tend to believe him because they would leave him alone for the most part and chase me half way around the compound.

But my dad did give me a lot more confidence in working with mules and horses. I would get bucked off, and he told me to show no fear and to jump right back on and show him who was boss. Apparently I fooled the horses because, even though my emotions were still sometimes racing, I got to the place where my horse respected me. He would chase others with bared teeth, but he knew he would get a slap across the nose if he did it to me. He would buck with others, but eventually he didn't bother to try to buck me off. So where I did not have a lot of success with some animals, my dad's lesson to get back in the saddle stuck with me as a metaphor for life. Don't give up, get back in the saddle.

And it may be that some of you have experienced a painful spiritual fall that has made you a bit "horse shy." You've tried obeying the Bible's injunction to exhort one another, and you had a painful fall when people didn't appreciate your loving words. Or you have tried to witness, and the person you tangled with made you look like an absolute fool; and it was embarrassing. Or you made the right ethical decision at work, but got fired for it. Doing what God calls you to do is sometimes like riding a horse. It can be exhilarating to have the wind in your hair when things are going great and you are galloping along, but it can be painful when you land on your shoulder after a metaphorical horse has bucked.

What they did (v. 1a)

They got back into the saddle (v. 1)

That was the situation with these apostles. We saw last week that they were bucked off a horse in chapter 13:50. It said, "but the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region." They were thrown out. But there are two ways that Paul and Barnabas got back into the saddle. The first is that they called on a power that was greater than these persecutors in verse 51. It says, "But they shook off the dust from their feet against them..." That's calling down God's judgment. They weren't passive. The second way can be seen in the next phrase, "and came to Iconium."

They stayed there because of opposition (v. 2-3)

But now in chapter 14, in Iconium they find the same kind of successes in verse 1 and the same kinds of opposition in verse 2 that they had in the previous chapter. The successes of verse 1 are exhilarating. It is as fun as riding a horse at a full gallop. "Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed." There is nothing quite so thrilling as seeing multitudes of people coming to Christ.

But then comes opposition in verse 2. "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren." They weren't quite being bucked off yet, but it is become a nasty ride. In light of that, I want you to notice the interesting word at the beginning of verse 3. "*Therefore* they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord..." What's the "therefore" pointing back to? It's pointing back to the opposition. When times get tough, it is all the more reason to stick with what God has called you to do. It is likely an evidence that you are making an impact and that Satan is upset – *all the more reason to stay put*. Yet how many times do we give up at the first resistance? We love the galloping, but aren't willing to face the occasional side step, bucking or other resistance. But Paul and Barnabas interpreted this resistance as evidence that they were making good progress and secondly, that the church was going to need all the grounding and help that it could get. They can't just leave it to face persecution without preparation.

This is their pattern

Bucked off in 13:50

And this was the normal pattern of Paul and Barnabas. If you look at the outline you will see that they are bucked off in chapter 13:50, get back in the saddle in the first four verses of our chapter. They are bucked off again in verses 5-6, and get right back into the saddle in verses 6-18. They are bucked off the horse in verses 19-20 where Paul is actually stoned to death (this was pretty serious). He was stoned to death and dragged outside the city as a corpse for the animals to eat. But what does he do in verses 21 and following. They go back to some of the same cities that they were kicked out of earlier. Verse 21 says, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and to Antioch."

This by the way is the reason why being kicked out of a country on a missions trip should not prevent a missionary from trying to get back in when he is able. You do try to

take some precautions. These men weren't suicidal – they waited for things to calm down. But they were willing to take risks for the sake of the Gospel.

And even though this passage is primarily going to be looking at the actions and message of the apostles, I think Roman numeral I is a worthwhile lesson for all of us to teach our children and for all of us to practice. Don't give up because of trouble. Get back in the saddle and try again.

Back in the saddle doing the same thing in 14:1-4

Bucked off in 14:5-6

Back in the saddle in 14:6-18

Bucked off in 14:19-20

Back in the saddle in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (14:21ff)

Etc.

What they preached

Something to be believed (v. 1b-2) – Those who do not see the Gospel as propositional truth (like the emergent church) have denied the Gospel. (See the propositional character of the Gospel in Gal. 2:5,14; Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:13; etc.)

So we have looked at what Paul and Barnabas *did*. Let's look next at what they preached and why that would be so controversial. I think this is a needed corrective to the evangelical church, which has in recent years been redefining the Gospel as being a relationship, or a feeling or an experience. Now certainly some feelings and unique experiences accompany the Gospel. I'm not denying that. But those must not be confused with the Gospel. Certainly the Gospel ushers us into a relationship with God, but the Gospel must not be confused with relationship. The Bible is quite clear that the Gospel is a verbal message from God that is communicated in propositions or meaningful sentences.

And most of you are probably thinking, "Duh! Of course it's a message. Why do you even need to say that, Phil? But I need to say this because you and I live in a post-modern world that no longer believes that propositional truth is important or even possible. We live in an age when the evangelical church no longer understands that the Gospel as being primarily propositional truth. For example, based on my research, a majority of churches in this city no longer preach the imputation of our sins to Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us based on His substitutionary atonement. In fact, I dare one or two of you to do this. I double dare you. Interview 100 pastors in this coming month and ask them either 1) "How do I get saved?" or 2) "What is the Gospel? And record their answers. My bet is that a majority of those that you interview will not give Paul's Gospel which is the Gospel of the Reformation. They will speak of an experience, a relationship, a reception of God's love. They will speak of forgiveness of sins, yes, but they will not know how to answer why God should forgive you. Salvation has been taken out of the courtroom (where it belongs) and into the living room where

it's more comfortable. But Biblically you can't get into the living room until you pass through the courtroom. I've talked to a number of evangelical pastors who deny that the courtroom has anything to do with the doctrine of justification. Many evangelicals do not see God as a fearful judge who cannot sweep sins under the carpet. In fact, Barna and other polls show that it is exceedingly rare for pastors to preach on God's judgments or hell. Church growth marketing says that it doesn't sell. Many of these people think justification is inviting Jesus into your heart. They don't see it as a legal declaration. All protestants used to.

In fact, here's an article by Michael Kelly from the Omaha World Herald on yesterday's and today's events here in Omaha. Whether he is misrepresenting Palau or accurately representing him, these words fit our culture. Kelly said, "the hellfire-and-brimstone preacher Billy Sunday once thundered in Omaha like a storm. [That was 100 years ago.] Luis Palau, by contrast, emits sunlight and a gentle breeze.... Old-time religion, in its fearful, hellish way, seemed designed to make you feel bad. Kinder, gentler religious revivals today apparently hope to make you feel good. If "H-E-double-hockey-sticks" is spoken at this weekend's Luis Palau Heartland Festival, it will be a [blank] of a surprise." Forget for a moment about whether this accurately reflects the Palau position, this is certainly the image that modern Christians are frequently trying to convey. We are trying to be nice for a change. The boldness of the message that verse 3 talks about is absent. We are living in a terrible age of apostasy, and it is critical that we be grounded in the Scripture. Let's quickly look at six things from this passage that stand in contrast to the new Gospels of the emerging so-called evangelical church.

It was a verbal message (vv. 1,3) with "words" that communicated the propositional truth of "the Word" (v. 3)

Point 1 is that the Gospel was a verbal message with words communicating the propositional truth of *the Word*. Many people nowadays quote Francis of Assisi's words, "Preach the Gospel always and if necessary use words," as if that was a good saying. But actually, that is a total capitulation to a false Gospel. Even in the context of the 1200's when he lived it was not the Gospel. The story goes that Francis told one of the young monks, "Let us go down into the town and preach [the Gospel]!" The novice was delighted to be singled out and he obeyed with enthusiasm. The two of them passed through the main streets, turned down many alleys, and after having walked through the town without having said a word, they returned to the monastery. The younger monk reminded Francis that they were supposed to be going to preach. And Francis said, "My son, we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behavior has been closely watched; it was thus that we have preached our morning sermon. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk." And then come the famous words, "Preach the Gospel always and if necessary use words." What he was implying is that the Gospel can be preached without any words; that words are an option. And that is absolutely false. The word gospel occurs 100 times in the New Testament, and it is consistently said to be preached, spoken, declared, confessed. It is called "the truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:5; 2:14) and as being "the word of truth" (Eph. 1:13) or "the word of the truth of the Gospel" (Col. 1:5). It is always propositional.

This means that you can't have the Gospel in the stars. Why? Because the stars don't communicate in propositions. There is no Gospel without sentence propositions. Romans 10:14-15 is quite clear on that. You can't get saved by looking at the stars like many evangelicals have claimed. They are hoping that vast numbers of pagans who have never heard the Gospel could get saved by reading the stars. Read Romans 10 and you will see that this is impossible. But you know what? The Reformers said that even the sacrament is not a sacrament without preaching. It has no meaning without being explained. Now this may seem like overkill to you, but the modern church has been rapidly abandoning the idea of objective truth.

The emergent church has become a major purveyor of this false Gospel because they deny that the Gospel even can be stated adequately in propositions or in words. They have borrowed a philosophy from the Wittgenstein that says all truth claims are just word games and have no objective meaning outside the person who made the statement. This is where the idea comes from that something can be true for you and something quite different can be true for me. But the gospel is not subjective. It is an objective truth communicated to us in the Bible.

Something rational - "believed" (v. 1)

Secondly, it is something that is to be believed. That's the last word of verse 1. They "believed." This is not talking about something that was felt. This was not something that was seen. This was not something that was simply acted out. It was propositional statements which had to be either true or false; accepted or rejected; believed or disbelieved. Now contrast that with several emerging church statements. Alan Jones said,

"Christianity as a set of beliefs doesn't work for me"^[1] [Of course, he says that in the context of a lot of stuff Christians would think sounds good. He is gently leading people to these rash conclusions. Later in the book he says:]

"I am no longer interested, in the first instance, in what a person believes. Most of the time it's so much clutter in the brain.... I wouldn't trust an inch many people who profess a belief in God. Others who do not or who doubt have won my trust. I want to know if joy, curiosity struggle, and compassion bubble up in a person's life. I'm interested in being fully alive. There is no objective authority...."^[2]

He says forthrightly what some people would cringe at. Yet these very same people are assuming the same things themselves - that their experience is more important than their belief. Let me tell you something - I've had experiences in my lifetime that seem to contradict the Bible. But I know how unreliable experience is. I've had false memories. I've been certain of things that I've been absolutely wrong on. And so, I just my experience on that back burner and say, "I've got to believe the Word of God." I had a charismatic pastor friend in town who said that he hates doctrine and has no room for it since doctrine divides and love unites. Ah!!! What a wonderful motto! "Doctrine divides, love unites." And I asked him how we can tell the difference between love and hate if we don't have doctrine of love from the Bible. And then I asked him, "How do you know

that division is bad?" Is it your doctrine that tells you so? But this man just wants to know if you love Jesus. "Do you love Jesus?" It's a subjective Gospel.

They sought to convince - "so spoke that [others] ... believed" (v. 1)

The third marker that we see in this passage is that Paul and Barnabas gave effort to convince people – to turn people's minds. Verse 1 says, "and *so spoke* that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed." The NASB translates it as, "spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed." The idea is that the way they spoke made a difference. They sought to speak convincingly, which is just another way of saying that they didn't make people turn of their minds when they became Christians. They reasoned with them. Elsewhere in the New Testament it speaks of Paul dialoguing with, arguing with, persuading, reasoning and convincing. That is just another indicator that Christianity was intended to be a rational religion, not an irrational one. Increasingly Christianity is heading in an irrational direction. Let me give you a quote from an evangelical church website said,

"we can no longer afford to lead with formulations [formulations are things like catechisms, confessions, systematic theologies, doctrinal statements, etc.]. people today are moved by their "experiences" of faith much more than by *rational* arguments or *doctrines* about faith..."^[3] Can you see the abandonment of the intellectual and of the verbal?

Dan Kimball, an emergent church pastor, said,

"Modern thinkers want things orderly and systematic because they learn in a logical and progressive manner. They prefer, generally, to sit and listen. Emerging post-Christian generations, on the other hand, long to *experience* a transcendent God during a worship gathering rather than simply learn about him."^[4]

Now, I have no problem with experience. I have had many wonderful experiences with God. But these people are not talking about experience built on the foundation of doctrine and judged by the Word. No. This is a wholesale move away from rational discourse and into emotive discourse in our generation. And evangelicals are buying it up like crazy. And again let me stress that I'm not against emotions. You've heard me preach on the importance of our emotions. But without the foundations that these apostles laid down, emotions become unanchored and easily manipulated.

They addressed the minds - "minds" (v. 2)

Another thing that we see in this passage is that Paul and the Judaizers addressed the minds of these people. It wasn't emotional manipulation. The Judaizers on the other hand did seek to use emotional manipulation. You can see that in the first words of verse 2: "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles ..." That's an emotional connotation – they were arousing their passions. But they too recognized that if they were going to compete, they had to capture the minds. And so it goes on to say, "and poisoned their minds against the brethren." This is ultimately a battle for the minds and souls of

people. And there are many ways that people's minds can be poisoned. It's not always through the use of passions, as here.

One church pastor, Spencer Burke, said, "A move away from intellectual Christianity is essential. We must move to the mystical."^[5] [The contemplative movement has moved many evangelicals to be mystics.]

Another emergent leader said,

"propositional truth is out and mysticism is in. [The boldness of these guys just takes my breath away. So he says, "propositional truth is out and mysticism is in] People are not necessarily put off by a religion that does not 'make sense' – they are more concerned with whether a religion can bring them into contact with God."^[6]

Can you see the danger there? He is saying that addressing the minds and making sense is no longer important to him. What is important is experience.

They were courageous - "bold words" (Greek of v. 3)

Another indicator that Paul's message was not a man-centered message is that it took courage to speak. That is implied in verse 3 where it says, "speaking boldly" or as the Greek could be rendered, "bold words." That is indicating that they spoke the kind of words that took boldness or courage to speak. We need courageous men who will stand against the world with their message just as Athanasius did, and like the Reformers Luther, Calvin and Zwingli did. The modern message of the church with no "H-E-double-hockey sticks" does not take boldness. It's an accommodation to the world. If we really take seriously the Bible's words, we will find them to be so antithetical to the world that it will require boldness to say them. Do we have the boldness, or are we apologetic about the Gospel and the rest of the Scriptures?

They appealed to an authority beyond our minds - "[God] was bearing witness to the word" (v. 3)

The last thing that I wanted to mention under Roman numeral II, point A is that they appealed to an authority beyond their own minds. It speaks of the "Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace..." The ultimate proposition that both God and the apostles pointed to was the Bible as the Word of God. Paul and Barnabas did not present themselves as the final authority. And God was not bearing witness to *them*. He was bearing witness to His own word. Even the miracles weren't the final authority. They all pointed to the Scripture as the final authority.

When Paul sought to convince people, he sought to do so with *Biblical* arguments. In Acts 17 Paul praised the Bereans for checking out everything he said from the Scripture. This is a caution and a balance to what we have said on this point. If the only appeal we make is to our own minds, we will end up with rationalism, another enemy to the true faith. You see, the opposite of irrationalism is not rationalism. Both are humanistic, man-centered systems. In contrast, the Bible tells us to think God's thoughts after him. The only way we can be rational or reasonable is if we are aligning our thinking with the

God who knows all things – thinking His thoughts after Him. His word is truth. And by the way, that expression in John 17 ("Your Word is Truth") is quite different than saying that His Word is true. There are evangelicals who are willing to say that His Word is true, but cannot truthfully say that they believe His word is truth. What's the difference. If we say, "You know, the Bible is true," it implies that our minds are the judges of truth, and if we have determined that the Bible is true, we have determined it based on some other standard. But God does not allow any other standard. On the other hand, when we say (as the Bible does in John 17:17), "Your Word is truth," we are affirming that it is the standard and measure of all truth. Nothing in man is the standard, whether that be emotions, experience, programs, our mind or anything else. God's Word is the ultimate standard.

A mandate from God

"unbelieving" (v. 2) = "disobedient"

Let's pick up a little speed – point B. The second thing we notice about their preaching was that it was a mandate from God. This was no polite Gospel. It was a call from God for rebels to lay down their arms. This is implied in two words: first, the Greek word for "unbelieving" in verse 2. I have sixteen Greek dictionaries, and all of them include willful disobedience in the definition, several giving that as the only definition in this word. If you translate it as unbelieving (which you can), you need to realize that it is a willful unbelieve; a refusal to believe. But there is a strong moral connotation of disobedience in the term.^[7]

And that fits with the actual message of the Gospel that we have seen several times in the book of Acts. It was not an invitation. It was not "if you please." It was a command of Almighty God for rebels to repent and believe the Gospel. God sends out ambassadors to the world that stands in rebellion to His son, and His message is "I demand unconditional surrender." That is why the phrase, "obey the gospel" occurs in Romans 10:16; 2 Thesalonians 1:8 and 1 Peter 4:17. The Gospel needs to be obeyed because it is a mandate. There isn't any "God loves you just the way you are" message. It is repent and believe the Gospel.

"apostles" (v. 4) = commissioned spokesmen

The second word which implies this mandate from God is the word "apostles." This word refers to an ambassador or envoy. The dictionary says that an apostle, "has full powers and is the personal representative of the one sending him, a close connection is established between the sender and the recipient" (NIDNTT). So when they spoke, they spoke with the authority of God. It wasn't "I think that this is true", or "God will probably do such and such." No, it was speaking with a certainty. They had the very Word of God. The call of the Gospel is a mandate from God. And we cannot present it as anything less. We have the very Word of God as well, and we should be unapologetic about it.

This stands in such contrast to the polite Gospel which some people proclaim. I was invited to do a joint TV advertisement with many local area pastors. And as usual I am

running behind schedule, so I hadn't read the ad ahead of time. I grabbed it and headed out of the door reading as I went. When I read it, I had to turn around. I don't remember the exact words, but we were supposed to shout out something to the effect, "Smile, God loves you the way you are." And that was it!! You've probably all read tracts that say, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." At least some of those tracts go on to talk about "H-E-double hockey sticks," which doesn't seem to be a wonderful plan to those who are unbelievers. But most people want a softer message than hell and judgment. If you have been tempted to buy into that kind of thinking, I urge you to read Ray Comfort's tract ("God Loves You") that is in your bulletins.^[8]

So we have seen that they preached 1) something to be believed, 2) secondly, a mandate from God.

A message of grace (v. 3). Why would men buck against such a wonderful message?

The third thing that we see about their message was that it was a message of grace. The middle of verse 3 says, "bearing witness to the word of His grace..." We have already seen in our series on Acts that the little word "grace" refers to God's undeserved favor, and all of the blessings that flow from God's favor. And I don't need to repeat what I have said there. What I want to address today is this question: "Why in the world would men buck against such a wonderful message? These men get bucked off the horse over and over precisely because they speak of grace. Why would people hate the message of the riches of God's grace so much that they would try to kill Paul? And a good follow-up question is, "Why do people not hate those who preach the modern watered down version?"

And the answer is fourfold:

Grace is humbling to man (unearned, undeserved) and shows our utter inability (Rom. 1-3; 9:6-29; Heb. 12:28; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5)

First, grace is humbling to man when it is properly preached. If there is one thing that will make a man fight you tooth and nail it is to hurt his pride. And yet that is exactly what the Gospel is designed to do. We see the wonderful benefits that flow out of grace, and we wonder, why do these people turn it down? It is their pride. James 4:6 says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Pride is the great enemy of grace before our conversion (that's James 4), and it continues to be the great enemy of grace after our conversion (1 Peter 5:5). And what is ironic is that the only way we can therefore have grace is if God breaks our pride by His grace, and if He does so without our permission. And that too is humbling. There is nothing for which we can take credit. Even faith and repentance is a gift.

Grace exposes our sin and points to our inadequacies (Rom. 1-3)

The second thing that makes unbelievers buck against the message of grace is that it exposes their sin. That's the whole point of Romans 1-3. He just pounds, and pounds

and pounds on the sinfulness of men. The problem with all unregenerate men is that apart from grace they don't realize how bad they are. They think they are pretty good. And God knows that people are in the best place to be helped when they first see the problem of sin for what it really is. And so grace opens their eyes to that. And yet even Christians still have some flesh, and so they sometimes buck against this aspect of grace and prefer a Gospel of Self-Esteem. I don't know how many times I have heard people parrot self-esteem phrases. And it's really destructive to truly growing in grace. Let me illustrate. Jay Adams tells the story of a counseling situation that he had. He said

June was a Christian girl some twenty years of age, quite stout and very depressed. On her Personal Data Inventory she had written, "I am disgusting, stupid, ugly, rotten, and a complete failure." Her mother immediately jumped in upon hearing this inventory read out loud in session, saying, "Don't believe her. She is a wonderful girl. She won the Sunday School contest, was able to go to camp for a week free," etc., etc., The counselor stopped her mother abruptly and said, "Now listen, June knows more about her life than you or I or anyone else but God, and if June says that she's disgusting, stupid, ugly, rotten and a complete failure, she must have some good reasons for saying so." Turning to June, the counselor continued, "June, tell us how disgusting you are. Tell us just how stupid you've been. Tell us what it is that makes you so ugly. Tell us about the rotten things you've been doing, and tell us also, June, something about the ways in which you've failed." June's head had been hanging down since she entered, but when the counselor said this, she looked up as if to say, "Is he for real?" She must have concluded that he meant it, because for the first time she began to talk freely and her story poured out."

Actually, her mother ended up being flabbergasted at the things her daughter had been doing. She had no idea. But then she watched in awe as her daughter gained joy and peace by finally dealing with the sins God was exposing, treating them as badly as they should be treated, and receiving grace to change. But the point I was making earlier is that people buck when God convicts us of sin, whether it's through the preaching of the Word or through some other means.

Grace cannot be controlled or manipulated (Rom. 3:24; 5:15; 2 Tim. 1:9)

The third reason why people hate *genuine* grace is that it cannot be controlled or manipulated. This is why the doctrine of election that I preached on last week is hated and reviled. We can't control it. God chooses freely when and where to bestow His grace. Grace should not be seen as an electric switch that we can turn on at will. The church can ask for God's grace to be ministered through Word and sacraments, but God alone can exercise it. This is why magic is popular and grace is not. Magic is an attempt to manipulate forces or gods through forms, words and actions. And yet many Christians act as if grace is like magic. You just say the right thing, and "boom!" God will come through for you.

Grace doesn't leave us in our sin (Tit. 2:11-14; Rom. 6:1-2,15-18)

The last reason genuine grace is resisted is that genuine grace doesn't leave us in our sin. Romans 6:15-18 says this:

Romans 6:15 ... Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

Romans 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's

slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness?
Romans 6:17 But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

Romans 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

That's where God's grace always leads – to holiness. And if you are an unbeliever, until your heart is changed, you won't like that. You see, the irony is that the very people who don't like to be told that they are sinful, also don't want to give up their sin. This is why legalism and antinomianism are not opposites. They are bed-fellows. Both make us comfortable without grace. Jesus accused the Pharisees of being both legalists and against God's law. It's inevitable. Every legalist will be an antinomian at some point. The moment you have legalism (like the Pharisees had), where they added to God's laws, you know there will be places where they deny God's law. Some of the greatest legalists I have met have been fundamentalists who don't believe in law. You try to teach them about the Sabbath, and they will reject it. But they will tell you that drinking, lipstick, earrings on women and many other Biblical things are morally wrong. Even the worst antinomians who live in immorality tend to be judgmental of someone who sleeps with their girlfriend, and they will make up rules for themselves that they can keep and that make them feel better. In contrast, turn to Titus 2:11-14.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

Titus 2:12 teaching us that, [here's what grace teaches us] denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

This is why grace is controversial both outside and inside the church. There are many people in the church that buck against the word of grace just as much because Titus 1:16 is true of them. It says, "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedience, and disqualified for every good work."

God's grace is such a wonderful message for those who receive it by faith. It is God's undeserved favor, and all of the blessings that flow from God's favor. But don't be surprised when you find yourself bucked off occasionally when you speak this word of grace. And ironically, within the church, the very ones who buck you off will say that they believe in grace.

The Gospel (v. 7)

Point D shows another remarkable thing. It says that "they were preaching the gospel..." The word "gospel" simply means good news. And again you might wonder, why would people resist the message when it is such good news? But it's for the same reasons as the word grace.

How they preached

Boldly (v. 3)

For time's sake I am not going to say much about Roman numeral III. How did they preach? They preached boldly, not timidly. They preached with authority.

With authority (v. 4 – "apostles")

What they produced

Faith (v. 1)

But let's quickly outline the things that their preaching produced within the lives of the hearers. Verse 1 says that their preaching produced faith. And this is why you need to sit under the preaching of the Word, and why you need to bring your children under the teaching of the Word. Verse 1 says that they "so spoke that a great multitude...believed." Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, says Romans 10:17. Luke 8:12 says that Satan tries to snatch the word out of our hearts as soon as we hear it lest we believe. There are many Scriptures which connect preaching with faith.

And if (as the Bible says) there is little faith (Matt. 14:31), growing faith (2 Thes. 1:3), great faith (Matt 8:10), and the difference between those is the degree to which we are in the Word, then our habits ought to change. Their preaching produced faith. That's all I'll say on that point.

Opposition (v. 2)

Emotional ("stirred up")

But it produced opposition as well. It is impossible to stay neutral to the Word of God. It will either draw us closer to the Lord or it will harden us. That's the downside to sitting under the preaching of the Word. If you are a rebel right now, and you are sitting under the preaching of the Word, you are getting worse week by week. In the case of verse 2, it made them emotionally and intellectually oppose Paul and Barnabas. The emotional opposition can be seen in the words "stirred up the Gentiles." And the intellectual opposition can be seen in the words, "poisoned their minds." But we should not be surprised that the same message can bring faith and joy to one person and hatred and opposition to another. Where grace is not at work, it will always produce this opposition.

Intellectual ("poisoned their minds")

Division (v. 4)

But this by definition leads to division. Verse 4 says, "But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews and part with the apostles." This too is unavoidable when there is faithful preaching. Some pastors do everything they can to avoid division. But Jesus *Himself* found His Word having this effect. In John 7:43 it says, "So there was a division among the people because of Him." It was because of Him. Wherever Jesus is, there will be division. And by the way, it is foolish to think (as some people do) that we can avoid trouble by avoiding people. But that's giving up on God's call. That's like

saying, "I'm not going to ride a horse, 'cause I might get bucked of," or "I will never get married because there might be some arguments." Or "I won't get any new friends because I might get betrayed again." Getting bucked off occasionally is unavoidable if we are following Jesus. In fact, He said that you can't be His disciple if you don't take up your cross and follow Him.

Persecution (v. 5-6)

This division produced enough enemies that eventually Paul and Barnabas were run out of town. Verses 5-6 show the end result of antipathy to the Gospel if it is unrestrained. "And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there." Anyone who says that such persecution could never happen in America simply does not understand the doctrine of total depravity. It could very easily happen.

But it is worth mentioning that Paul and Barnabas don't willingly make themselves martyrs. They will come back here, but they wait till things cool down. In the meantime, they are back in the saddle of ministry in another city in verse 7. So don't volunteer to be a martyr.

A church (v. 4)

And everywhere they went preaching, a church sprang up. Their preaching produced a church. In some places the church was small and struggling, and in other places it was large and strong. But God delights in letting the apostles have times when they are able to gallop like the wind.

What they enjoyed

Spirit anointed preaching (v. 3 – "in the Lord")

I want to end by outlining two other things that these servants of the Lord enjoyed when they stayed in the saddle. The first was Spirit anointed preaching. In verse 3 it says, "Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord..." Those words, "in the Lord" indicate an anointing or an empowering that comes from the Lord. I don't want to preach in my own fleshly strength and wisdom. I want to preach in the Lord. I want His blessing to rest upon the Word. The only way to gallop with the wind in your hair is to do everything you are doing in the Lord. Scripture calls us to obey our parents in the Lord, submit to husbands in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, labor in the Lord. Ephesians 6:10 says, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." We all need this anointing for the tasks that we do. 1 Cor 15:58 says "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." That should be our goal – to keep getting back in the saddle and immovable until we start experiencing what it means to labor in the Lord with His power. Pray that I would have this same Spirit anointed preaching.

Spirit empowered miracles (v. 3)

The second thing they enjoyed was Spirit empowered miracles. It says that God confirmed their message by **granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands**. That was not the Gospel, but it accompanied the Gospel. And what a blessing it is when God sovereignly gives those times of miracles. What an awesome thing it is to be used by God. It makes the times we get bucked off seem all worth while.

You may not like President Bush (and I didn't vote for him myself), but he made a great statement back on March 24, 2004. He said,

"My fellow Americans, you can see from the scratches on my nose that I'm a little banged up tonight. Took a spill on the 16th mile of a 17-mile ride at the ranch in Texas. Secret Service offered me a lift back to the house, but I got back in the saddle and rode home. Any long ride is bound to have spills, but the way we Americans have always handled them is to get back in the saddle." (March 24, 2004)

And I would say the same to you, my brothers and sisters. Do not let discouragements, abandonments and financial setbacks make you give up. Let's not allow losses and pains, opposition to the Gospel or ridicule of homeschooling make us quit. To substitute "DCC members" into President Bush's statement: any long ride is bound to have spills, but the way we members of DCC have always handled them is to get back in the saddle. Amen.

Children of God, I charge you to not fear your spiritual horses, but to get back in the saddle. As you do so, may the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:58 be yours. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

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1. Alan Jones, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit Without Disconnecting Your Mind* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), p. 31. [↗]
 2. Alan Jones, *Reimagining Christianity: Reconnect Your Spirit Without Disconnecting Your Mind* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), pp. 79,83. [↗]
 3. "Service and mission" page, *apostleschurch.org*, 24 Mar 2007 <http://apostleschurch.org/community_service.php>. [↗]
 4. Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 121. [↗]
 5. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 230. [↗]
 6. As quoted by R. Scott Smith in *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), p. 25 [↗]
 7. The range of definitions can be seen in the following: "to disbelieve (wilfully and perversely): — not believe, disobedient, obey not, unbelieving " (Strong's); "to be disobedient in, to refuse compliance in ...; to disobey ... to rebel" (LEH2), "to disobey; be an unbeliever" (UBS), "impersuasive, uncompliant, contumacious" (Thayer), disobedient (TDNT), disobedient (BDAG) [↗]

8. This can be purchased at

<http://www.livingwaters.com/Merchant2/merchant.mv?Screen=PROD&Product_Code=203>

