



GUARD THE "S" OF THE GOSPEL

This week's text – 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Sermon ideas

1. The substance of the gospel must be guarded at all cost

Paul rebuked the church in Corinth of their wandering hearts and warned them to guard themselves from things that would distract them from the substance of the gospel. The gospel message is that:

1. We lost it all: when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and sin entered the world, all of humanity lost the following:
 - Intimacy with God
 - Accessibility to God
 - Purity before God
2. He did it all: Jesus lived a perfectly obedient life, so that he could die as a perfect, unblemished sacrifice. In so doing,
 - Jesus took the punishment for our rebellion against God
 - Jesus was able to give us his perfection, so that we could be in right standing before God
3. We get it all: in repenting from our sin and putting our faith in God, for all that Christ has done for us, we are forgiven and restored. We then get to experience the joy, freedom and peace that comes from a relationship with God.

With the simple gospel as glorious and spectacular as it is, it seems absurd that we, as the church, could get distracted from its core message. But we, like the Corinthians, could easily be persuaded by a message presenting a different and untrue version of Jesus, because the unbiblical version often suits our sin and our comfort. We must not be deluded; a different Jesus, is a different gospel, and it is not the one that saves. Therefore, the substance of the gospel must be guarded at all costs.

2. Guard against Satan

There were men teaching a different message about Jesus, who Paul called false apostles or deceitful workmen. Whether intentionally or ignorantly, Paul makes it clear that they are being used by Satan to do so. Satan is the author of the false gospels, which he uses to lead people away from Christ. Though Satan has many different weapons and strategies at his disposal, his primary aim is to lead us away from the substance of the gospel. Satan knows that he will be defeated in the end, and that his time and abilities are limited, so he works tirelessly, meticulously and ever so cleverly, sowing doubt, accusations and deceptions into our minds about the goodness of God.



As believers, who know the Bible and have the Spirit of God in us, we would likely detect obvious lies from Satan. Knowing this, he chooses a less obvious route and instead warps the truth so that it is more difficult to discern at first glance. He dilutes the gospel absolutes by changing the message from *we lost it all, He did it all, and we got it all* to:

- We lost “a lot”
- He did “a lot”
- We get “a lot”

In the garden, Satan tempted Eve to believe that there was room for interpretation of what God had said. This is similar to the way that Satan tempts us now. He changes the absolute truth and shifts it by degrees, so that we do not see it so clearly. Instead of the truth that Jesus has paid it all, he suggests that Jesus paid “a lot”. He dilutes the truth so that it has far less significance in our lives, and then he leads us to find solutions to the deficit. Satan tells us that we need to acquire satisfaction in places outside of Christ, because although he is good, he cannot fully satisfy our deepest longings. He also leads us to believe that we have to work hard and prove ourselves to God, because although Jesus paid the price for our sin, it did not cover every single sin. Thus, we fall prey to the partial truths that Satan exchanges for the life-changing transformative truths of the gospel.

3. Guard against adding “spice”

Though there would have been many personal benefits to accepting some financial compensation for preaching in Corinth, Paul refused to take it. He believed that it would compromise the message of the gospel, which he was not prepared to do. Had he taken the money, it is likely that he would have drawn a bigger crowd and drawn more people to hear the message, but he knew that he would then have been in the hands of his patrons, who may have expected him to say and do things that would have detracted from the substance of the gospel.

We can “spice up” the gospel or dilute it in several ways, but the one which we probably all fall prey to, at some level, is placing our deepest desires onto the gospel. We believe that the gospel *plus* the fulfilment of our desires will satisfy us, and we refuse to find contentment in God without those desires being fulfilled. Many people have walked away from the gospel when their desires/dreams have not been realised, because they have made the gospel more than what it is and as a result have been disappointed at their own unmet expectations.

4. Guard against overemphasising style

Corinthian culture prized eloquence and grandeur in their public speakers, and as Paul didn't measure up to the “style” of speaking that was respected in their day, he was criticised and shamed. Paul challenged the Corinthians on this, because when it comes to the gospel, it was the content that was important. The same applies

today.



Paul warned them strongly, not to get taken off-course by their desire for great entertainment, but that they should rather focus on the substance of the message. We have a similar issue in our day, and we should check our own motives from time to time. We too, are impressed, by how things look, sound and feel and we are far more likely to listen to someone that sounds impressive, has a dynamic personality and a large following, than to a person who speaks simply, doesn't have a dynamic stage presence or has few followers. We seldom weigh up the substance of the message and how biblically accurate it is, when it comes so well-packaged. Style certainly can be a helpful draw-card and a blessing, when delivering solid Biblical content, but it should never be in place of it. Preaching that has the true and solid substance of the gospel leaves us with a greater impression of, and a deeper appreciation for, Christ. That should be what we look forward to and savour when we meet to hear the word preached on a Sunday.

Discussion Questions:

1. As a group, briefly explain what the substance of the gospel is, using the 3 statements by Randy Pope: *We lost it all, He did it all, We got it all.*
2. Regardless of who presents the different versions of Jesus, we know that ultimately, Satan is behind their message. What is Satan's motive for bringing in different gospel messages and what impact do you think it has on the churches who blindly accept them?
3. In what ways have you been deceived into believing that the gospel is insufficient for your own life?
4. How do you think we can guard ourselves from messages that sound a lot like Jesus, but are actually not truly Biblical, and why is this so important?
5. In what ways do you think the modern-day church is guilty of adding "spice" to the gospel, and how do you think this is robbing the church?
6. In what ways do you personally add spice to the gospel, either in how you present it to others, or in what you believe?
7. How can we guard ourselves from adding spice to the gospel ourselves, or from listening to messages that have been spiced up to accommodate our sin?
8. In what way could our desire for great style work against us in the pursuit of the gospel, if we are not careful?
9. What things do you think the church, in general, has prioritized in terms of style rather than substance?
10. Having pondered this message, can you identify any style preferences that you are drawn to, that could be a barrier to you hearing solid, substance?

What is one big take-away that you feel God is asking you to deal with, in light of this week's message?