

BASIC CHRISTIANITY: PERVERTS, SIN, AND THE GOOD NEWS
(Galatians 1; Romans 1)

A Bible Study by Dr. Gene Scott

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I'm ashamed of those perverts, as Paul calls them, that have preached another gospel which is not "the gospel." "Gospel" is "good news." The religious mafia running around -- with Jimmy the Jerk over here and Jerry the Fat back there -- are part of those "other gospel" people. Paul calls them "perverts." Galatians 1:

"Paul, an apostle...unto the church...Grace...and peace."

"Grace" -- "charisma" is the word. "Charisma" -- "unmerited favor." That's what grace is. The perverts preach a "merit" gospel. In order to affirm their superiority over "us that are under them" (God, deliver me from ever being under one of them), this past week they were laying on us two standards. "Oh, we're preachers, we're leaders."

Do you remember the movie, "What's Up, Doc?" Poor Eunice was complaining because she wasn't being treated by her fiancee like other women. He said, "Well, Eunice, I never really considered you a woman."

I have news for these jerks: I've never really considered them leaders. They've offered no leadership to me. Paul calls them perverts. They set themselves up and say, "Well, now, there's a different standard for us than for the rest of you. You can be a Christian and sin, but we perfect ones can't."

What they are really saying is, "We may have needed grace at one time; we don't need it anymore. When we need grace, that puts us back down on the level with the rest of you."

Time magazine featured Reinhold Niebuhr a few months back and said that both the religious right and the religious left would do well to listen to him. He pointed out that sin, in essence, is finding a center short of God and His will for us.

The easiest sin for God to deal with is sensuality. The "self" of man, as he would call it -- that part of our nature that is bound to this house of clay, but can still float back through memory and ahead in vision and occupy both eternity and time; that self, that our religious faith says is destined to live throughout eternity; that self that is anchored to this fleshly crock of clay; that self, destined to find its fulfillment in God and His purposes for this self throughout eternity -- that self can make itself the slave of some little sensual urge -- a drunk, a sex fiend, a dope addict. That's the easiest sin to recognize; that's the easiest sin to deal with; that's the easiest sin to be delivered from. Even a dunce can figure out that whatever we are, ultimately we were made to be something higher than a slave of some sensual impulse in this decaying crock of clay. Yet, as Niebuhr pointed out, the church has spent 2,000 years beating on you for the simplest, easiest of sins to deal with.

The next level of sin is where we project something a little bigger than our "self" -- the family, the church, the city, the nation (Nazi Germany personified that to the worst) -- and we

define that as the kingdom of God. We pull God down from His throne, we identify Him with that little center, and we project ourselves up above it, because it is not so easy to live with yourself and worship yourself. If you find this higher cause or situation or group or entity, you then identify with that, pull God down, that becomes God, and then you sin against everybody in the name of that perverted, subordinated sinner. That's harder to free people from, because they've got themselves trapped in it by rationalization.

But then he points out -- quite rightly -- the sin of all sins: spiritual pride, where we literally identify our performance as God's performance. It's the one that God can't crack.

God in His book puts this sin of spiritual pride at the top of the list. Sensuality [at the bottom of the list] is the easiest one to deliver us from, but the church has inverted it all, setting spiritual pride free from the connotations of sin, because that's where they want to live. And they're beating all the rest of these poor people to death for their sensual shortcomings.

All you've got to do is listen to the news and watch these pompous jerks who have one of their kind caught under the sword of their perfectionist doctrine and they have no way out. They must swing that sword, and the Inquisition is born anew, or Phariseeism of Jesus' day is born anew, and the law is suddenly elevated. Instead of the stocks in the Puritan square of a New England city, it's the TV screen. And the world looks on, in the grip of its own self-rationalization -- because, as Niebuhr pointed out, we cannot persist in any kind of behavior without proving to ourselves that it is right. There is no such thing as a universal definition of sin, but there is a universal sense of "ought." Even a crook wants to be a good crook. God constituted us in such a way that we can't persist in any behavior without convincing ourselves that it is right.

So the world, which seeks its own, has to ultimately rationalize it and the way to rationalize it is, "Everybody does it." Jesus said, "If ye were of the world..." and He wasn't talking about geography, trees, dirt, sky, clouds, rain, snow. He used the Greek word, "cosmos," which is the frame of reference or world view that the world had. If you viewed things the way the world views it, "if you were of the world, the world would love its own, but you are not of the world, because I have chosen you out of the world; therefore, the world hateth you."

Each person ought to have the right to follow His Deliverer, which is Christ, his way, and if you gain enmity, it's because you have done what you've done to please your view of your God, not because you're a man-pleaser, having to please a bunch of jerks that tell you that theirs is the only way you can do it.

Therefore, the world is loving the opportunity to throw stones at their condemners, and I don't blame them. These Jesus jerks have been looking down on the world, trying to save the world, telling all the sinners that they can only be accepted by God when they first matriculate through the acceptance of these pea-brained jerks. Now, when they get caught with their tail in their own crack, what can they expect from the world but to have them pick up the stones that they have been casting at the sinner and say, "Hot dog, here they come back!"

All I'm mad about is why in the hell do I have to be caught in the middle? That makes me mad! I've neither been condemning the world nor supporting the jerks. I've just been saying there is a message that is Christian -- not this perverted message, "Thou

shalt not," "Do do this and don't do that." How long have I been telling you? We've got a song about it. It's my theme song. Most of traditional Christianity is either a bunch of "do do" or nothing. Isn't that what I've been telling you? Who wants to make their life out on "do do" or nothing? You don't have to. I'm ashamed of all that crap and mad that I have to be caught in the middle. I've spent 11 years trying to extricate us from that pile of nonsense.

So, with that introduction, I'll start over today, hoping that a single voice can be heard that has been dimmed for 2,000 years. In every century they've tried to dim it.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel." I'm ashamed of all this other crap. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is good news." Romans 1. (Page 186, if you've got a Bible like mine.)

"I am not ashamed of the good news of Christ."

What is "Christ"? It is the Greek word for "Messiah," which means "Deliverer." They always referred to Jesus as "the Christ," because there could be deliverers other than "the Christ." "I am not ashamed," Paul says, "of the good news of the Deliverer."

You see, these perverts preach a gospel that requires no deliverance. Once you get in, they want to deliver you.

The good news is that there's a Deliverer. "For it..." "It" is what? "The good news, it is the power..." What is that word? "Dunamis." What do we get from "dunamis"? Dynamite.

"For it is the power of God unto salvation."

God proved throughout the Old Testament that He could hold the whip and save nobody. You can't save people with a whip. But now, let me try it again. Sit on a stick of dynamite, light the fuse, and sing, "I shall not be, I shall not be moved." "For it is the dynamite...."

Oh, but Jimmy the Jerk, and Jerry the Fat, they want to get under you and goose you. Do you copy me? Am I saying anything I haven't been saying for how many years? Eleven. I don't want to be part of their weightlifting exercises.

"I am not ashamed of the good news of the Deliverer, for it, that good news of the Deliverer, is the power -- dynamite."

They don't believe it. They really don't. I am becoming more and more convinced that I am the only preacher on television that truly believes in the born-again experience. The born-again experience is simply the statement that from God comes a deposit of His substance -- "hypostasis" is the Greek word -- that enters us and has the power to change us.

Paul said, "If there be no resurrection, then our faith is vain." I lost my faith because I couldn't believe those things. I spent three years studying the resurrection and I ultimately became convinced there was no other explanation, and if I could believe that Christ came out of that tomb, through that rock, through a locked door, sailed off in the blue, I'm out in left field anyway.

My Bible says, "This same power that raised up Christ from the dead shall also dwell in you." We can replace the molecules I can't see and get an explosion. The Bible says Christ, as the agent of God, spoke and everything was formed. Once I can cross

that mental hurdle and believe that a God exists Who raised up Christ from the dead, I have no difficulty crossing the next step, that God can place a literal, living, invisible substance in us that can change us.

Now, Galatians 5 says there is warfare when that happens. The old nature is dug in for trench warfare, the new nature is there, and these two are contrary. I can explain with my mouth and conceive with my mind that if you hold radioactive material and you hold it long enough, you are going to change your cell structure, though I don't see what is causing it to happen. The concept of the born-again experience is saying that that substance of God's life in us, if it stays, will change our nature.

Have I ever asked a person in this congregation to change in order to come to this church? Yet, I warned you, if you start doing it God's way, having faith in His promises, God will put His nature in you, and -- look out -- you're going to change. Not the way I want you to change. You and God are going to work it out. But you're going to have changes occur in your life. That is God working to do His will and good pleasure in you. That is the good news.

Every other method to change man, to save man, to get him on God's right side, fails. All the law can do -- the old law, or the one conceived by Jimmy the Jerk or Jerry the Fat -- all it can do is condemn you. Like a mirror or a schoolmaster, it tells you you are shortfallen, and it can't bend to redeem without compromising itself.

You are seeing Romans 7 all over again on television. These modern legalists cannot bend to redeem without compromising themselves. When Ted Koppel says, "Have you ever committed a moral sin," the answer didn't sound very convincing, but he says, "No, I haven't." Jesus would have said to him, as he said to the Pharisee, "You have heard it said, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But, behold, I say unto you that if you lust in your heart, you've committed adultery already." It puts them in a position as legalists that they can't help you without holding themselves above you and not bending. That's all law can ever do. That's why Paul is ashamed of it as a saving instrument because it is ineffective; there is no life in it, no power in it.

But he says, "I am not ashamed of the good news of a Deliverer, for it..." -- the good news of a Deliverer -- "...is the dynamite of God unto salvation."

"Soterion" is the word in the Greek. "Soterion" is one of the hardest words to translate in the world. You need to read the book written by Wycliffe Bible Translators of their difficulty in trying to find a word in primitive languages to translate this. It embraces health; it embraces knowledge; it embraces completion; it embraces destiny. In a sentence, it means, "If there was a purpose in man's creation, it is the fulfillment of all of those purposes."

Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the good news of a Deliverer, for it, that good news of a Deliverer, is the dynamite of God unto soterion." It will get the job done.

I repeat: Sit on a stick of dynamite, light the fuse, and sing, "I Shall Not Be Moved." You're gonna be moved!

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the dynamite of God unto salvation, to everyone...."

Everyone! It pains me considerably, but even the jerks! Everyone! I'm carnal, and I know God can save me, so I get away with this: I take comfort in the fact that some of these jerks are so spiritually proud that my Bible gives them a low probability of making it in. But "everyone" that what? Doesn't ding in a motel six years ago? "Everyone" that doesn't smoke a cigar and say "damn" and "hell"? "Everyone" -- even someone that sings as badly as Tammy! "Everyone." Damn it, I hate it, really I don't like it, but even Jimmy the Jerk and Jerry the Fat.

"Everyone that..." -- "pisteo" is the word -- "...faitheth." That word in the Greek is an action word. I'm returning you today to basic Christianity. Somebody has got to say it again. What is the A-B-C of faith? What does this word embrace? ACTION, based upon BELIEF, sustained by CONFIDENCE. It's not enough to believe. "Pisteo" is an act, based upon belief, sustained by confidence.

How many times in 11 years have I said, "Do you want to know what God wants from you?" Ask yourself what you want from your kids. Do you want perfection -- or do you want trust? What do you want, perfection or trust, from your kids? Oh, I know, when you get mad you wish they were a little "perfecter." But when the chips are down, what do you want from your kids? Trust or perfection? If you get trust, you can lead them toward perfection -- probably an inadequate concept of it -- but trust.

What does God want from us? Trust. Why is this good news? Because law cannot save; all law can do is measure and condemn. That's why I've been saying I don't ever as a preacher want you to take my life as your example. If anything, be amazed that God is saving even me! I can't be perfect, you can't be perfect, and damn these people who tell us we have to be! You can't be. But you can take a promise of God -- "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

"Well, now, I'm in a wheelchair and I've been believing God for healing for years and I'm still in the chair."

That's right. God is sovereign, and as a pastor I have to deal with those lives that have been ruined by the evangelists that create a second-class citizenry for those that aren't healed instantly. But you can still claim the promise sitting in a wheelchair. You can claim the promise every day, get up every morning and say, "One of God's names is 'I am the Lord that healeth thee.' Today could be the day." You may finish the day in the wheelchair, but you start and finish the day with trust. If you die in that wheelchair with faith on your lips, you wake up in a land where there are no wheelchairs. Though the horizontal results may or may not be there, vertically, that trusting grip on God's promise says, "Today's wheelchair is not the last chapter of my life and God has said, forever settled in heaven, I am the Lord that healeth thee." That faith grip causes the implant of God's nature to come into you, with the dynamite that is the power of God unto salvation, and that faith act anybody can do.

"Well, I'm going bankrupt tomorrow," you may say.

God's Word says, "I am the Lord that provides." No matter how dark it is, there is a promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." The God that gets to the corner before we get there is our refuge. In failure, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Except Jimmy the Jerk, and Jerry the Fat -- they'd pull them out.

There is a difference between "Thou shalt do this and thou shalt not do that" and "I am the Lord that healeth thee," or "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Even a dunce can figure the

difference between a promise of God's goodness and a command for perfection.

Paul had had it with the legalists. But he could go to Rome, the center of the world, and say, "I am not ashamed of the good news of Christ, for it is the dynamite of God unto soterion," and I can have that life in me by simply trusting.

Let's finish it.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, the good news of the Deliverer, for it is the dynamite of God unto salvation to everyone that faitheth, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Christ died believing God's promise to raise Him up and give Him a name that was above every name and a kingdom that He could share. His faith, linked to my faith in what God has said -- that "Whosoever will may come," and "this power of God is available to everyone that faitheth" -- that chain-link fence of faith, to connect His faith to my faith, reveals a righteousness of God that bypasses the legalists. I don't have to go through the scrutiny of Jimmy the Jerk or Jerry the Fat. There is good news! There is a way into God's righteousness that is His gift -- unmerited favor, that He puts His life in me. But it's one of those paradoxes. Jesus said, "You live by dying, you go up by going down, you're first by being last, you get righteous by not trying to be." Huh?

That which has killed the church is Christians trying to be "Christians." That which has killed the church is Christians letting non-Christians tell them they've got to be "Christians." All God says is, "You trust me. You go this way, faithing, and I will surprise you with my life." You get busy faithing and all of a sudden you will find people saying, "What happened to this guy? He's different!"

How many of you that never expected to change simply started faithing? I didn't tell you to stop smoking, stop dancing, stop breathing, stop procreating -- did I? I just said, "Trust God's promises and quit letting these jerks beat you to death." Isn't that what I said? How many of you have been changed? See, try as I will to keep you from changing, you change!

"I'm not ashamed of the gospel, the good news of the Deliverer, for it is the dynamite of God unto salvation to everyone that faitheth, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."

My message hasn't changed. The jerks come and go. The good news of the gospel remains. As our ad said, "Hope is alive and faith presses on." Thank God that He gave us the good sense to trust Him and move us under the covering of Christ, so we don't have to be part of "Jerkland U.S.A."