

THE GOSPEL

preacher, or worse, from the false shepherd.

The problem at Colosse was caused by false teaching. We're not too sure what exactly the Colossian heresy was, but we do know how Paul dealt with it. He answered the heresy in a most positive and thrilling way—by exalting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's problems

Our churches today are plagued with problems. Sometimes they're caused by false teaching, sometimes by worldliness, and often by personality clashes. Whatever the cause, it needs to be faced and exposed. But the solution is rarely to use the big stick and beat the saints back into line. This approach doesn't work, and only serves to make some believers more stubborn and hard while others become discouraged. What we need today is something to melt the hearts of Christians, not to harden them.

Church problems consist of more than just believers being silly and awkward; behind every problem is the hand of Satan. It's true

that the Galatians were 'foolish', but that was because they'd been bewitched (Galatians 3:1) by the clever words of false teachers. When Paul calls them 'foolish', he is, says John MacArthur, 'not talking about the absence of intelligence; he is talking about the failure to use it'. The devil who had blinded their minds before they were saved was now trying the same trick again, and they were allowing him to get away with it.

To this kind of problem, Paul's answer is to exalt Christ. To the Colossians he says, 'This is the gospel' (1:23), and then shows them the loveliness and beauty of Jesus. He's writing to believers, but Christians need the gospel too, and pastors need to preach it regularly. Yes, the gospel is that which will save lost sinners; but it's also this alone that will restore backsliders and deepen the love of committed Christians for their Saviour. The warmth of the gospel is the greatest tool to make believers more useful in the life of the church.

The apostle Paul had never been to the city of Colosse. He had never preached to the church there, never prayed with those Christians, and never sat down with them and shared with them in the things of God. Yet, when he heard of a serious difficulty that was causing problems in the church at Colosse, he was deeply concerned and wrote his letter to the Colossians expressing his concern.

Some Christians may have been tempted to tell Paul to mind his own business. The Colossian church had nothing to do with him, and there were plenty of problems in the churches Paul had founded to keep him busy. This attitude would have been unacceptable to the great apostle. He tells us that he faced 'daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches' (2 Corinthians 11:28). This type of concern marks out the true servant of God from the career

Tell me the old, old story

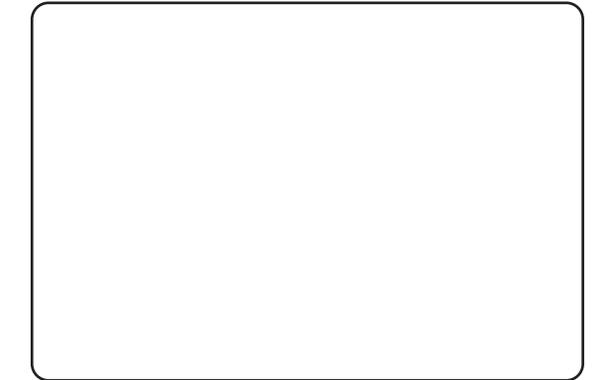
It's all too common today to hear Christians who attend evangelical churches complaining that they never hear sermons about the cross or the blood of Christ. This is because their pastors, in turn, have another complaint: it is that there are no unbelievers in their congregations. What's the use in preaching the gospel to the converted? So, instead they concentrate on sermons about holiness, prayer, family relationships, etc. These are indeed biblical and, therefore, necessary subjects that Christians need to hear, but they do also need to hear the gospel. To assume that sermons about the cross and the blood of Christ are only of value to unbelievers is a total fallacy.

Believers need the gospel as much as unbelievers. Whether we've been saved for two weeks or twenty years, we all need to hear regularly the message of the cross and the grace and love of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because everything else in the Christian life flows out of it and depends upon it for freshness and vitality. This is why there's nothing more thrilling to believers than to hear the gospel preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. It melts their hearts and stirs their souls, and may even cause them to want, if it were possible, to be converted all over again! If we lose sight of all that the New Testament teaches as to the meaning and significance of the gospel, we will soon be floundering spiritually. We might still go through the motions of Christian

activity, but we ourselves would become spiritually dry and barren. The gospel is crucial to a healthy Christian life—that's why Christians need the gospel.

Many pastors see this, and say that in every sermon they include a little of the gospel so that sinners are challenged and saints encouraged. But we need more than a *little* of the gospel in a sermon. We need sermons given entirely to exalting Christ as the Saviour. We need sermons full of the gospel and full of Jesus.

Spurgeon said to preachers, 'You must have a real desire for the good of the people if you are to have much influence over them.' There's no greater good a preacher can do than to tell the people, saints and sinners, about Jesus.



Text: Peter Jeffery
Illustrations: Bradley Goodwin

© DayOne Publications
www.dayone.co.uk