

Satan and the Gospel

by Mariano Di Gangi

The Christian ministry centers in Christ, requires genuine integrity, encounters satanic opposition, and offers everlasting benefits.

Duration: 28:34

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 4:1-7, Ephesians 4:12

Topics: "Satan"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the integrity of the gospel ministry. He highlights the need for a plain proclamation of the truth, without deception or distortion. The preacher also discusses the opposition faced by Christian ministry from Satan, who blinds the minds of unbelievers. Lastly, he emphasizes that Christian ministry should focus on benefiting the body of Christ and serving the Lord, rather than seeking to please men. The sermon references the Bible, particularly the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of John and the prophet Isaiah.

Transcript

As the lengthy vacancy of the pulpit of Knox Church comes to a close, let me express here and now my own personal appreciation of the several opportunities for ministry in God's Word, which have been my privilege during these months. Lord willing, in just about a month from today, I expect to be ministering the Word of God in southern Italy, and thereafter by way of Damascus to Kabul, Afghanistan, to do mission survey, and beyond that to Lahore in Pakistan for a conference on the West Asia phase of the work of our mission, and thereafter to New Delhi itself, where we expect to hear reports of continued new opportunities for service in the needy nation of Bangladesh. It is most appropriate that the text chosen for today deals with the subject of the Christian ministry.

You have called a new minister. What is the ministry? Let us hear what is written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, at verse 1. 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, at verse 1. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What is the Apostle Paul saying in this text? What is he telling us concerning the nature and significance of the Christian ministry? Let me share with you some of the truths that I have found in this text of Holy Scripture.

The first thing that the Apostle Paul tells us here is that the Christian ministry centers in Christ. The Christian ministry centers in Christ. Notice the conglomerate of phrases that Paul uses to describe the message of the ministry.

In verse 2, for example, he speaks of the word of God. This word may come through Paul, this word may come through Peter, this word may be spoken through James or John or Joel or Jeremiah, but the message is not invented by men. The message comes from the heart and mind of God, and so it is called the word of God.

Men are merely the instruments. It is God who is the author of the message, and that is why the Christian message of the Old and New Testaments has such a tremendous authority, because it comes from a divine author. We are not dealing here with legends from the past.

We are dealing with a contemporary word that has a tremendous relevance that comes from God Himself. The ministry centers in the delivery of God's word. The Apostle Paul further describes the message of the ministry by saying that it not only has to do with the word of God, but that it also can be referred to as our gospel.

Not our gospel in the sense that we have concocted it, not our gospel in the sense that we have ransacked our minds and dug deep into our feelings and come forth with this program, but our gospel in the sense that Jesus Christ has entrusted it to us. We are aware of the fact that He has entrusted it to us. We have claimed it as our own, and we have personally experienced its power.

That is why we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for we know through personal experience which has made it ours that it is God's divine dynamic able to shatter the shackles of sin and to set men free and to make them saved. The message of the ministry is the word of God. The message of the ministry is the gospel that we have made our own personal possession through personal experience of its power.

And this gospel, this message is above all the glorious gospel of Christ, according to verse 4. Why is it called the glorious gospel of Christ? It's called the glorious gospel of Christ because through the gospel, through the message of the Christian ministry, the glory, the splendor, the wonder, the excellence of Jesus Christ is made known. It is in the gospel that we are offered Jesus the Messiah, the prophet who reveals to us God's will for our salvation, the priest who sacrificed himself on the altar of Calvary to atone for our sin and now is ever alive, making intercession for us at God's right hand, the king who will with his majesty and sovereignty and righteousness bring forth peace, subduing all his enemies and ours and bringing in a kingdom of everlasting righteousness. The burden of the ministry, the message of the ministry is to declare the word of God, is to announce a gospel that we have made our very own through personal experience of its power and is to reveal the glory of our prophet, our priest and our king.

For at the very center of the message of the ministry is Jesus Christ who is called the image of God. Whatever God is, Jesus Christ is and the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in him. For Jesus Christ makes known to us the invisible God and Christ himself can say, he that hath seen me hath seen the

Father.

And again in verse 5 Paul says, we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord. We preach this Christ who is the Messiah, prophet, priest and king. We preach this Jesus whose very name is a mini gospel because it signifies that he shall save his people from their sins.

We preach him who is the Lord, king of kings and lord of lords. The message of the ministry centers in this Jesus Christ. The second thing that the apostle Paul tells us about the Christian ministry is that it not only centers in Christ but that it requires genuine integrity.

The Christian ministry requires genuine integrity and the apostle Paul makes that plain by stressing a negative and emphasizing a positive. What's the negative? The hidden things of dishonesty, those shameful things that are covered in darkness lest their exposure should cause us much embarrassment. The walking in craftiness similar to the malice and guile of the devil who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden and caused their paradise to be lost.

Not walking in craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully, not distorting the word of God. When instead of presenting the gospel there is a parading of gimmicks. When instead of presenting the gospel there is the smokescreen of hypocrisy to advance under that cover partisan aims of jealousy and of envy.

When there is the distortion of the message through the elimination of certain elements of the message which may be unpalatable to the sin warped mind of modern man. When there is the exaggeration of some elements of the message resulting in the minimizing and distorting of the other elements of the message. When there is the adulteration of the message through the admixture of human error and contemporary fads and hoary traditions, then there is deceit and distortion.

And that manner of handling the message ensures that God's truth does not come through and Christ does not reach those for whom he died. The work of the ministry requires integrity, not deception, not distortion, but rather the plain positive manifestation of the truth. Recall the way Jesus made the truth plain in that third chapter of the gospel according to John.

With such a depth that the most profound theologian can never plummet and with such a simplicity that even a child could understand it. Jesus makes the truth manifest. Jesus proclaims the truth plainly.

Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, that man can't see the kingdom of God. God's soul of the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. He that believeth not on him the wrath of God continues to abide. A plain proclamation and manifestation of the truth is what is required in the integrity of the gospel ministry.

To hold forth the promises of God and also to let loose the thunder of the warnings against impenitence. To make known the wonder and the delightful taste of the honey of the gospel and the bitterness of a law that we break and will inevitably break us unless we repent and believe. The integrity of the gospel ministry, not deception, not distortion, but the plain proclamation of the truth, unpalatable as it may be, to man.

Paul says that the integrity of the gospel ministry involves an appeal to every man's conscience. What do you really look for in a minister? What are you expecting of God's servant, Glenn Owen? You should not expect of him that he will amuse you, though to have a sense of humor is not out of place in the heart of a minister. Nor should you expect that he will merely inform you with a veritable Niagara and a torrent of facts and statistics.

Nor should you merely expect of him that he should enthuse you and whip you up like a cheerleader would a crowd at a football game. The main work of the gospel ministry is neither to amuse nor infuse or to enthuse, but rather to speak to the conscience. For you and I are responsible moral beings.

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which God in his law clearly forbids. And there is no health in us, and therefore the word that the minister of God must initially bring must be a word that addresses itself to our conscience, causing us to recognize our sin, causing us to hate our sin, causing us to confess our sin, causing us to turn from our sin, causing us to hate our sin with such a holy hatred that nothing will satisfy our hunger and thirst but righteousness and a new obedience. It is this that we must expect.

It is this that we must seek. And when we do, God will abundantly bless us, speaking to every man's conscience as in the sight of God. The ultimate responsibility of a minister is not to the customers.

The ultimate responsibility of a minister is not to a board of trustees. The ultimate responsibility of a minister is not to a Kirk Session. The ultimate responsibility of a minister is not to the Presbytery of East Toronto.

The ultimate responsibility of a minister is not even to the venerable General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The ultimate accountability of him who engages in the sacred solemn office of the gospel ministry is to him who has called him and who shall at the last summon him before the throne of his great glory. Commending ourselves to man's conscience and serving as in God's presence.

For all things are naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do, ministers, managers or members. Our ultimate accountability is not to please men but to beware of displeasing him. The next thing that the Apostle Paul tells us after stressing that the Christian ministry centres in Christ and requires genuine integrity is that the Christian ministry encounters satanic opposition.

The God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not. Running right through all of scripture there's a note of realism. How does the prophet begin that 53rd chapter of Isaiah that speaks of the suffering servant of the Lord? Lord, who hath believed our report? Lord, who has accepted the message that we try to share? Lord, whose heart has really been opened to hear what you would speak? The note of realism.

Who hath believed our report? Though the gospel be ever so plainly manifested, ever so clearly demonstrated, there are those to whom it is ignored. There are those to whom it is unseen. There are those to whom it is hidden.

We hear these days of the tremendous results being achieved through the spread of the gospel in wildfire fashion in Korea. We hear of tremendous gains in membership being made in Latin America through evangelism in depth. We've heard of the after effects of the mighty revival and shaking in Indonesia.

The Bible and medical missionary fellowship with which I serve, laboring in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim context, has had the opposite experience of sowing the seed on soil that is hard or stony or shallow or infested with thorns. And therefore I can identify with the author of the gospel here when he says that there are times when our message is hid. It is hid to those who are on the way to perdition.

It is hid to those who refuse to believe. It is hid to those who have come under the spell of Satan. Now Satan has come back upon the scene these days.

They speak of the exorcist. They read of the exorcist. They twist and turn at the exploitation of the exorcist.

Satan worship has become commonplace on the edges of several campuses. It's associated with the subculture in drugs and promiscuous sex. But I say to you on the authority of God's word that for everyone who may be a Satan worshiper, there are a thousand who are under the influence of Satan and may not even be aware of it.

My Bible tells me that if they are blind to the wonder of Christ who is revealed in the gospel and if they have unseen eyes and have a darkened understanding and see nothing attractive about Jesus Christ, they are under Satanic influence. You get intellectuals like Professor John Allegro, late of Manchester University in England, interviewed at considerable length in one of our respectable papers of the City of Toronto in yesterday's edition. And incidentally they give a tremendous amount of play to Allegro's views, but they have never given even so much as a shred of print to an intellectual equal of Allegro's, Professor F.F. Bruce, who teaches on the same faculty and is one of the world's greatest experts in New Testament and Old Testament studies.

Well now, what does the so-called learned Professor Allegro say? With all his degrees and with all his knowledge and with all his research, the man shows himself to be a satanically influenced fool. For he denies that Jesus Christ ever existed and sees in the cross a mere phallic symbol and he reduces biblical Christianity to a crutch that is needed for the psychologically defective. The Bible tells me that if a man denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, that man is animated by Antichrist.

And the secret of human unbelief, whether you find it among the illiterate dropouts of Satan worship or the pseudo-sophisticated intellectuals, is to be found in satanic activity and opposition. It is the god of this world that is the prince of darkness masquerading as an angel of light. It is Satan who, appealing to man who will not be governed by God, who instigates and stimulates and agitates so that a man's spiritual sight is blinded and he can see nothing attractive about Jesus Christ.

And the wonder and the splendor of the gospel light never dawns on him. And therefore because we are up against satanic opposition to the gospel and therefore because unbelief is the outward evidence of the inward work of Satan, because we are not up against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spirits of evil in high places, let us understand that the strongholds of Satan can only be cast down by those who are mighty in prayer and who prevail in the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for Dr. Owen.

Pray for all who preach the gospel. Pray for all who would live a Christ-honoring life, that they may be used of the Lord to cast down the strongholds of Satan and to liberate those whom Satan, through unbelief, has taken captive at his will. The fourth and final thing that I would share to you from this text, which speaks so eloquently of Christian ministry, is that Christian ministry not only centers in Christ, it not only requires genuine integrity, it not only encounters satanic opposition, but it offers everlasting benefits.

It offers everlasting benefits. Paul says in verse 5, We preach not ourselves, but we exalt Christ Jesus the Lord, and we look upon ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. It is the work of the ministry to benefit the body of Christ by building it up in faith, building it up in hope, building it up in love.

It is a ministry, not a mastering. It is a serving of the Lord's heritage. It is not a lording it over the Lord's heritage.

It is a service, a service that is rendered to comfort, to teach, to exhort, to warn, to encourage. The minister is your servant to edify you in the things of God, but more than edification is involved. It is never enough to comfort the saints.

There must also be outreach to the community, leading to the conversion of those whom Satan has deceived and dominated. And that is why the apostle adds that the ministry is not only to serve you and advance your holiness and knowledge and righteousness, but that the ministry exists in order to enable others to receive the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the God who in the beginning spoke that creative word that brought light into the midst of darkness, order where there was chaos, beauty where there was only a formless void. That God of creation is the God who recreates and makes us into new people at the time of our regeneration and conversion when he again says, Let there be light, and the truth dawns upon our soul, and we see as never before in the dying form of Christ crucified, him who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

We see in him the one who is triumphant over death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. But our conversion, our enlightenment, our salvation are never an end in themselves. It is so that we might share it with others.

God has shined into our hearts, has converted and illumined us. Why? So that we might give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to others. The comforting of the saints is never enough.

There must be the conversion of those who should yet be transformed into saints, you and I then, and not alone the man whom you have called to occupy this pulpit. You and I as members of the body of Christ who have been enlightened by the Holy Ghost and seen the glory of God, you and I have been saved so that we may communicate the gospel to others, so that we may share with others and give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. How will we do this? We will do it by what we affirm.

For more than 150 years this pulpit has affirmed the fundamentals of the faith. We do it by affirming. We do it not only by our affirmations, but by our actions.

By what we do, by what we are, we give credibility to what we say. We do it by our attitudes. For we can affirm the thing that is true, and we can do the thing that is right, but if we speak the truth without the proper attitude, and if we perform the right action without the attitude that God requires, it is nothing worth in His eyes.

God has illumined us, not that we should put the light under the bushel, but that we should hold it aloft and introduce others to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God resplendent in the face of Jesus Christ. Let your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works as well as hearing your good words, may be led to glorify our Father who is in heaven.

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