

The Fullness of the Gospel

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.—Rev. 14:6, 7.

ONCE upon a time I went into a bookstore and bought a book. It was nicely bound, and beautifully printed. I took it home and began to read and the subject matter was interesting and instructive. Then suddenly there came a break in the continuity of thought, and when I examined the book more carefully to see what was the matter, I found that somehow in the preparation of the book for binding, one whole section of sixty-four pages had been omitted. The part that remained was good; but I had paid for a whole book and I wanted the whole book. So I took it back to the bookseller, showed him the mistake, and got a complete book to replace the defective one. In these days of pocket digests and book condensations, we can be satisfied sometimes with partial books, if the condensations contain all the essentials. But when a book is highly important and significant you want all the book, not a part of it.

JESUS BROUGHT A FULL AND COMPLETE GOSPEL

Jesus came preaching a full and complete gospel, a gospel which was adequate to meet every need of man. He was

mindful of the physical needs of people, as is indicated by his miracles of the loaves and fishes, and turning the water to wine. He recognized their need of physical healing, as is evidenced by his many miracles of healing. He recognized the need of social readjustment, and he taught men how to order their lives so that there would be no friction or hatred or warfare between men or between nations. He recognized certain mental needs; he himself was familiar with the laws and books and the learning of his people; he taught his disciples, and he promised them a Holy Comforter which should teach them all things and guide them into all truth. He recognized man's need for deliverance from sin and from death which is the result of sin, and he therefore laid down certain laws and principles and ordinances by which men could find forgiveness of sin and hope of a resurrection of the body.

IMPLEMENTING THE COMPLETE GOSPEL

Jesus organized a church which was to be his instrument in implementing and carrying out the full and complete gospel which he preached. Not that the organization was completed during Jesus' lifetime! But it was begun, and the blueprints were laid down. Then under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, after Pentecost, the apostles carried out those plans, adding to them as they were directed by the Spirit of their Master, until a church existed which was complete, and adequate to teach and to carry into operation the fullness of the gospel which Jesus had preached.

You are entitled to a fullness of the gospel today. No condensation or simplification of it will do. All of it is necessary to complete salvation. Many churches today offer the gospel in part. Like the incomplete book which I bought, their doctrine is all right as far as it goes; their organization to implement that doctrine is all right as far as it goes. But something is always lacking, or the emphasis is too much on

one aspect of the gospel, while other equally essential parts are not emphasized or omitted entirely. Some preachers will tell you that all you have to do is to believe on Christ and be saved. That is partly true, but it is not all the truth. Some churches place most of their emphasis on ritual, ceremony, and ordinance. That is good, but it is not all. Some churches base almost their whole philosophy on a belief in and practice of spiritual and divine healing. Some emphasize diet, some Sabbath observance, some authoritarian government, some democracy in church government, some social service, some foreign mission, some education, some a belief in the survival of spirits. Perhaps we would not quarrel with any of these beliefs, but we might safely dispute with any man or any church which places stress on one to the exclusion of others, or omits even one essential portion of the gospel of Christ, and then purports to sell it as the fullness of the gospel.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Many churches purporting to be the church of Christ and to have the fullness of his gospel have pastors, but no deacons; elders, but no apostles; bishops, but no gifts of tongues or prophecy. The church which is entitled to call itself by the name of Christ will have a complete and fully adequate organization such as existed in the New Testament church. It will have authority to function and minister in the name of God. As a result of this authoritative ministry functioning through a complete and perfect organization certain signs or results will follow, not just one or two, but all of the spiritual gifts promised to the church and experienced by it during the period covered by the New Testament.

The church is Christ's body on earth, the instrument through which he gives his blessings and accomplishes his work. A church handicapped by inadequacy or lack any-

where cannot give a complete ministry or supply to its members a fullness of gospel teachings or gospel blessings.

The first or primary mission of the church is to bear witness for Christ, and to preach the fullness of his gospel to every creature. The fullness of that gospel, preached and witnessed and practiced by a church, will save men from sin and death. It will save them from the sins that bring sickness and disease and suffering. It will save them from the economic sins that bring want and poverty in the midst of plenty. It will save them from the social sins that divide men into classes and races and nations, and then sets them one against the other. It will save men from the personal sins of hatred, jealousy, selfishness, pride, and envy, which divide men from their neighbors. It will save men from the sins of worry, fear, and doubt, which obsess men's lives and haunt their minds. It will save men from their sins of impurity, of laziness, of ignorance, of intolerance.

It is interesting to note how Jesus refused to be drawn aside or tricked into putting undue emphasis on any *single* phase of his gospel. Some wanted him to concentrate on the political angle and overthrow Rome so that he could set up his own worldly kingdom. He contented himself with teaching principles that one day should overthrow not only Rome, but all other empires built on similar foundations. When two men came asking that he divide their inheritance between them, he refused to get involved in the particulars of such a task but laid down the principle, "Beware of covetousness." The Pharisees would have been better pleased had he placed more emphasis on the laws of diet and ceremonial cleanliness, but he ignored their narrow teachings to lay down the principle that it is what comes from inside a filthy heart that defiles a man, not what he puts into his mouth. He might have placed all his emphasis on keeping the Sabbath, but he said practically nothing about it.

The fullness of the gospel is well-balanced, well-

the gospel which we know, we shall be redeemed from death. We have faith that we will learn more completely how to live the fullness of the gospel we know, and when more men have been led to this perfection with us, much of the maladjustment and sin of the world will also be overcome.

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Good Will to Men

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she [Mary] should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.—Luke 2:6-14.

ALL over Christendom people gather on Sunday morning before Christmas to pay homage to the “Babe in the manger,” and to pray again for the coming of his reign of peace. We hear Luke’s story of the shepherds and the angels, and Matthew’s story of the wise men who came from the east to worship him. We perhaps hear again in song and sermon the promise given to him by Isaiah: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6, 7).