

We've been working our way through Acts for quite a while now, and in today's reading, there's a distinct change in its flavour. We're still learning, not only the history of the early church, but the way that God is at work through His disciples, as they obediently follow Him, **making** that history.... But the main character who we've been following for a while now, Paul, takes a big change in his purpose and direction.

Up until now, he's been primarily focused on mission – alright, he's been on these missionary journeys, into Turkey and Greece, and Macedonia, and Cyprus – all over the place... And at this point, his missionary journeys have come to an end, and his journey to martyrdom, begins. (For those who don't know, a martyre is someone who suffers and dies, because they follow Jesus).

Alright, so he knows he's never going to get back to this place called "Asia" (what we call "Turkey") ever again. He's leaving them for good. And as you can imagine, it's a pretty emotional time.

But as Paul leaves, the final thing he needs to do, is to not only say, "Goodbye", but to encourage them on, in the faith that they were called to, **in the fullness of all of what that faith encompasses.**

I've heard a lot of testimonies of people sharing how they became a Christian, or how they came to know God, or how they were opened up to discovering a new truth, or a new experience of God they've never known before...

And there's a common theme in **some** of these testimonies that leave me a bit sad. They're the ones that go a little bit like this:

*I've been going to church all my life. But I only ever heard that I had to do better; try harder; be nicer; sinless; ... and I always felt, that I'd **never** be good enough to get to heaven. But then one day, a visiting preacher told me about grace, and he showed me in the Bible, how Jesus died, to save me,,,, by grace.... And so I gave my heart to Jesus, and for the first time, I experienced the joy of salvation...*

Why hadn't I ever been told this before? How could I go to church all those years, and never get told about grace???

Or they might sound a little bit like this:

I became a Christian when I was a teenager. But my life seemed to be always so powerless. Church was dead. I didn't seem to be able to do anything for God – I knew I was saved, but I just didn't feel close, or any great connection God.

*And then one day, a friend invited me along to **his** church. These people were alive. They were happy. They were filled with joy. They prayed for the sick, and some of them got better...*

And one of the elders came to visit me the next day, and we talked, and he told me about the Holy Spirit... And he asked me if I was filled with the Spirit, and I didn't know... And he laid hands on me, and he prayed for me.

There was no lightning flash, or earthquake or anything, but now for the first time, I know the Holy Spirit is inside of me. And He's strengthening me to have power over sin, And I've discovered about spiritual gifts, and I'm serving God, for the first time.

Why hadn't I ever been told this? How could I go to church for all those years, and never get taught about the Holy Spirit????

Have you picked up yet, on what I'm talking about? It's when people only get half the Gospel; deficient instruction; watered down teaching; or when the bible teacher reads his bible, with a pair of scissors in his hand, and cuts out the bits he doesn't like... And so even people in churches, can go through life, never hearing the full message of the gospel.

You see, testimonies like these, can only happen if the preacher hasn't been preaching the whole word of God, or if those who are listening, aren't taking **in** the whole word of God. There's either a problem with the transmission, or there's a problem with the reception. (We can't always put it on the preacher)

When Paul taught the word of God, he didn't hold anything back. In V20, he said: ²⁰.... *I did not shrink from declaring to you **anything** that was profitable....* In V27, he said, ²⁷.... *I did not shrink from declaring to you the **whole** counsel of God.*

Your preacher is responsible for teaching, not just whatever he feels like; not just one of his favourite hobby-horses, and not just whatever perfectly lines up with what he likes to think

about God. Your preacher, is responsible for teaching the **whole** counsel of God.

That's the reason **I** preach my way through whole books of the Bible, from different sections of the Bible. And so, I teach a particular topic, just as often as **God** likes to bring it up.

2 Timothy 3: ¹⁶ **All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,** ¹⁷ **that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.** And of course, when Paul wrote that to Timothy, he was talking about the Old Testament. And yet some preachers will never, ever venture **into** the Old Testament.

My job is to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (so that you can then believe it **and** do it)

- Some preachers will only teach about the love of God, and never touch on judgment.
- Some preachers concentrate on the commandments, and never offer grace.
- Some preachers centre on grace, and shy away from God's call to holiness.
- Some preachers – their only message is about “the Cross”, and neglect teaching about the narrow road of discipleship.
- Some preachers teach the physical and the **social** aspects of the Gospel, but are scared of talking about the Spiritual.
- Some preachers will stand for social Justice, almost every Sunday, but never warn against immorality....

- Some preachers will only ever preach from the Gospels (they call themselves ‘red letter’ Christians {because in some bibles, the words of Jesus are in red, and that’s all they ever preach on})
- Where as some will nearly always preach from the letters of Paul...
- Some preachers will always be talking about ‘end times’. And others will never touch on them.

If only we could get a good, balanced diet. And of course we can – by declaring the **whole** counsel of God.

What we preach in our churches, and what we study in our own personal Bible study, is **very** important. This is something that Paul admonished them about. I’ve talked to you about admonishment before... Keep on going. Keep on doing this... Keep on... He said, **for three years I did not cease, night or day, to admonish everyone with tears...** “Keep on with the whole counsel of God”...

And have a bit of a look at the language Paul uses here:

Firstly, he says “I did not shrink back from it” – he says that twice... Now, what this means is, even when the pressure came on, he didn’t back down. He didn’t step away from it. He didn’t ever retreat, from declaring everything, that God had to say...

Do you realise, there’s a lot of pressure on preachers today, to back away from the whole truth – there’s a lot of pressure to retreat, or to draw back from the **offense** of the gospel, because remember, the Gospel **is** an offence to many. The

way of discipleship, is a narrow road – it's a difficult road, and only a few will find it... And there's a lot of pressure on preachers today, to grow their churches, and so they make the Gospel sound that little bit easier. And of course, to do that, they fail to declare the whole counsel of God (you just leave a few little bits out).

And yes, Jesus did offer light, and love, and comfort... But he also offered a yoke, persecutions, a cross of nails, and a narrow road...

I've got a little video clip here – Francis Chan – I heard him speak once at an oxygen conference I went to in Sydney.

So, that's the first thing I want you to notice from the language: We're in a spiritual battle – It's a battle, in which we have to stand firm, and never retreat from: Proclaiming the **whole** of the Gospel, in all of its blessings, and in all of its persecutions, and in all of its costs... There **is** no middle road....

The second thing I want you to notice with the language, is the cost of **not** receiving the whole counsel of God.

V 26 says: **Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.**

Now, that sort of language indicates that if we **don't** accept the whole counsel of God, well it's not going to go well for us...

My job, is to preach the **whole** counsel of God. If I don't, the Lord will hold **me** to account. But if I do declare to you, the

whole counsel of God, then I am innocent. If you reject that word, **I'm** innocent, and your blood is on your hands – not mine... You won't be able to say, "Why has nobody ever told me this???"

And so, Paul then gives a warning... He's about to leave the district – he's never coming back again. He's appointed elders to look after the church in His absence. And he gives them this warning.

²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

The responsibility of an elder, is to be an overseer – to care for the flock – to watch over them. In this context, it is to make sure that they continue in the whole counsel of God.

Now, there's a lesson here (especially for the elders – the leaders of the church), but also for all of us: Pay careful attention to yourself – You make sure, you're getting fed, the whole counsel of God. Don't just read your favourite parts of the Bible – read the whole thing. And absorb it – let God speak to you through it... And also, watch out for your brother, or your sister, and keep urging them on, to stick to the whole counsel of God.

Because if we don't do this – if we don't continue to receive, and delight in the whole counsel of God, well that leaves room for Satan to come in and tear us away from the gospel.

He uses the term “fierce wolves”, to refer to “false teachers”. And of course, because Paul had declared to them the whole counsel of God, there was nothing new in this. He would have told them how Jesus had warned His disciples, to watch out for false teachers – they're wolves, disguised as sheep.

Have a look at that picture up on the screen: Which one is the wolf? They all look the same, don't they? But one of them's a wolf. And that's what makes a wolf in sheep's clothing, so hard to spot, and so dangerous. Paul has been like the shepherd of this church... And he knows, when **he's** out of the picture, not only outsiders, but even from the elders themselves, will come twisted teaching.

What is this twisted teaching he's warning them of?

You know, some of us are confident, we'll never be misled by a false teacher (a wolf in sheep's clothing), because they'll be obvious, hey... – you know, if during worship today, I said, “Right, let's do something a little bit different today – we're going to make a sacrifice to the Rainbow Serpent”, you'd probably have a pretty fair idea, that I was false teacher... - you know, we think a wolf's going to be that obvious... But the thing is, they're not..... Satan, looks like an angel of light... And that's what deception is about...

In the church, wolves are **not** that obvious. Jesus said “You'll know them by their fruit” – but sometimes it takes a while to

see their fruit – to see what they’re really like. But one of their fruit, is that they won’t declare the whole counsel of God.

Very clearly, the wolves that Paul’s warning us about here, are the bible teachers who say, “You don’t need to worry about that other stuff – you just focus on this bit”

- You just focus on the love of God
- You just focus on loving others
- You just focus on social justice
- Just come back to the cross – that’s all you need to know
- You just do good things.
- You just come to church and worship
- Or, you just have to believe – nothing else matters

Wolves are not obvious, but they will surely divert you from the whole counsel of God.

He said, “From your own number – from amongst the elders – **will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them**

Wolves, aren’t just outsiders – they’ll be someone who you respect... A wolf, is someone who looks like a sheep – a wolf (a false teacher) will usually be someone who holds a trusted position within the church... And the reason a wolf has such a good disguise, is because many wolves, don’t even know that they’re a wolf... They’re very sincere. They feel they’re doing God a service – they believe they’re on the right track...

But what’s their motivation???

There's another picture for you: – their satisfaction, is when people in the church, look up to them, and become **their** disciples, and defer to **them**... - it's a status thing. It's a bit of an ego trip... I hope none of you ever start following me – you keep following Jesus. And I hope that when you tell somebody what church you're going to, don't tell them you're going to Michael Brumpton's church – you tell them that you're going to the Bush Disciples Church, and there you're learning to be a disciple of Jesus.

The whole of the Scripture, is profitable... To leave bits out, is to twist it.

A Gospel, that is not the whole Gospel, is not the Gospel at all.

And if you're getting taught, “**This** truth about God's important, and that bit's not...” Beware... That sounds very much like the teaching of a wolf...

V³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

That's our task – to be alert, and always follow the whole counsel of God.

Questions..

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1 Corinthians 2:1–5 (ESV)

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

2 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of *God* with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ and him crucified*. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of *God*.

He's not talking about the content of the message – he's talking about the origin of the message. It's not from human wisdom, but from the power of God. He said, **I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified** ... But you're suggesting that he only knew the crucifixion... But to teach Jesus Christ, is to teach everything He said and did, including the crucifixion, but not limited to it.