

It's more than once, that I've heard said that when it comes to sharing the Gospel, Christians can learn a lot from Amway...

Now, I'm not too sure how I feel about that... The point they were making, was that Amway sales-people are 'true believers'...

- *They know their product;*
- *they love their product;*
- *They believe that Amway makes the best cleaning products; and*
- *everybody should have them...*
- *They believe that if only **you** could experience Amway, you'd be a true convert too –because “why wouldn't everybody love this stuff”*

And I get the point they're making... Some Amway folk love Amway more than some Christians seem to love Jesus (or at least it appears that way)... You meet them at a party, and that's all they want to talk about... “Oh dear, you spilt some tomato sauce on your blouse – let me tell you about Amway's new stain remover... - It's just amazing. I don't know how I'd live without it...” BTW, I don't even know if Amway have a stain-remover – do they???

And I don't want to make it too 'crass', but many people think of evangelism as an exercise in sales... For them, they see Christianity, and getting someone to become a Christian, is a matter of 'sales', and if we're not making the sales, then we haven't got the right technique...

We've got a product to sell... It's a free product – faith in Jesus Christ – eternal life is on offer, and it's free.... Who

wouldn't jump at that bargain? We just have to let people know about this wonderful free product, and their life will be changed...

And if they **don't** take the bait, then there must be something wrong with our sales technique, or there must be something wrong with our sales staff, or with our sales department...

Do you hear what I'm saying???

And most Christians would be very quick to deny this, but in practice, that **is** how a lot of us think...

We have friends; we have family; we have children; we have neighbours — those special people we have been praying for, and we **desperately** want to see them come to faith and give their heart to Jesus,,,,, but they remain unmoved...

- We pluck up the courage to share our faith with them,,, and
- maybe they politely listen; maybe they don't,,
- but still, they remain unmoved; And
- so we feel that we've failed...

- Maybe we'd better hand the job over to a professional; and so
- we invite them to church...
- Maybe they come; Maybe they don't. And
- the Pastor preaches the simple Gospel,
- but they remain unmoved...

What can I try next???

- Let's try a different pastor;
- Let's try a different church...
- We need to do whatever we can, to get these people saved...

Do you know what we've done??? We see it as a sales problem – we see it as a marketing problem... If only there was a better salesman (insert the word “preacher” OR “evangelist”) –

- I'm not good enough at sharing my faith; or
- If only we had a better preacher; or
- If only we had a better evangelist...

Then this person would hear the Gospel and receive it and be saved...

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, a lot of us have felt like this, or at least we think like this at times... My loved one hasn't responded to the Gospel because

- I'm inadequate to share my faith; or
- Because the preacher is inadequate; or
- Because they need the right sort of person to preach the Gospel to them...

And so we try another option...

Now, I've searched the New Testament for these sorts of examples – examples of instances of where people failed to respond to the Gospel because the person delivering the message was:

- inadequate; or
- not cool; or
- because they're not the right sort of person,,,,

And then:

- the right person;
- the cool person;
- the popular person

gets up and shares the Gospel, and that made all the difference...

And so I searched the New Testament, and I've collated all these instances, and here they are: Do those examples resonate with you? What examples? Well, there are none... I can't find anywhere in the New Testament, where someone rejects the gospel message when it's preached faithfully, but then they receive it when it's preached by another 'more gifted' or 'more on-fire' or 'more with-it' preacher....

Now, we find this hard to accept, because we don't want to face the truth about our loved-ones — their hearts are hard...

Paul tells us here, and we're told many times through the New Testament, **why** people don't respond positively to the Gospel — We read it last week in V14 & 15 — their minds are hardened... the Gospel is veiled to them — they just don't see it...

It's **not your fault**... (Well, if you haven't shared your faith with them yet, maybe it is your fault), but if you **have** shared your faith with them, and you **have** told them the Gospel

message, if they reject it, it's not an indictment on you – that you're not good enough...

And it's not your pastor's fault (Well, if your Pastor or minister **isn't** preaching the simple, unadulterated Gospel message, then it **is** his fault), but if your Pastor or minister **is** preaching the simple, unadulterated Gospel message, the fact that some people aren't responding to this message **isn't their fault**... In fact, the normal course of events is, that whenever the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, most people will **not** respond to that Gospel...

[some of you might be getting a bit annoyed right now “Oh, he's saying all these negative words... Stop speaking negative words...”... No, I'm not speaking negative words – I'm speaking truth and wisdom.] And here's why:

Paul says:

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

You see, that's the way it is... The truth is, the Gospel is veiled. Not everybody **is** going to 'get it'... In fact, very few will get it... So, don't lose heart...

Alright, so maybe you've worked really hard, to 'pluck-up' enough courage to simply share the Gospel with someone,, and it's failed... Maybe they've said “Yeah, that's fine for you, but I'm not interested.” Or maybe they didn't say anything at all, and now you're worried that you've offended

them... Or maybe they were outright hostile to the Gospel... and you just feel like it's been a complete disaster...

You know what??? When that happens, the natural human reaction, is to give up... But **don't** give up... *You know, if you fall off a horse, what do you do? You get straight back on...*

In the first verse of today's reading, Paul says "**We do not lose heart**", or some other manuscripts say "**We are not derelict in duty**"... And he tells us why, they **persist** in preaching the Gospel... Even though many people reject it – Even though many people's eyes, **have** been blinded by Satan, they persist.... Why???

He grounds their persistence of preaching the Gospel, in what we learned last week (about the glory of God). "**Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God...**" Now the word "Therefore" doesn't mean a lot, apart from the fact that it links back to what we learned about last week...

We were learning about the glory of God... We were learning that we are being transformed (metamorphosised), from one degree of glory to another. We are being transformed into the very image of Christ... And we talked about how this transformation isn't really anything much to do with shininess... He's changing our hearts; character; the very person that we are...

And He's doing this, not because we are so marvellous, but because of the mercy of God...

Therefore (Because in the mercy of God, He is transforming us and changing us),,, Because by the mercy of God, we have this ministry and this **duty** of sharing the Gospel, let us not lose heart... Let us **not** be derelict in our duty...

You know, it's terribly unfashionable (these days) in the Christian church (because we love talking about grace & free gifts & mercy), it's terribly unfashionable, for us to talk about things like "duty", because we see "duty" as the nemesis (arch-rival / opponent) of grace... And yet the most reliable of the original Greek Transcripts say "**We do not neglect our duty**"...

God calls us (not just me)... God calls you and I, to ministry... Not because we deserve it, and not because we are such excellent people and such great communicators... He calls us because of His mercy. **In spite** of who we are, God chooses us to be saved. And thus, we become the ones who share the truth of the Gospel (to the world)...

And that's why we don't give up... When that next person rejects Jesus, don't give up... And when the one after that rejects Jesus, don't give up... And when the 99th person rejects Jesus, trust God that the 100th might be the one who says to "Thank you for never giving up. Thank you for not being derelict in your duty."

In Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, Paul reveals a bit about the lengths that he would go to, preach the Gospel and to help people in different cultures, to understand the Gospel...

1 Corinthians 9:19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. **20** To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. **21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. **22** To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

Alright, in his 1st letter, he's revealing the lengths that he will go to, to help people in different cultures, to understand the Gospel... But today, he tells us 2 things that he will **not** do...

He says:

We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word

He calls these “disgraceful, underhanded ways”... He's renounced these things – he will not do them...

You see (as we've already said), when the true Gospel is preached, only a few will receive it... Of the others: **the god**

of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing

But sadly, to try and make the gospel relevant, or to try and land a few more converts, it's quite common practice, to do the 2 things that Paul refused to do... **to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word**

One of these, is to do with the character / the integrity of the preacher , and the method that they use... and the other is to do with the content of the message that they preach...

The Greek word , πανουργία (panourgia)(cunning), literally means “would do anything” – it's about craftiness / cunning...

Now, in the context, where Paul's writing to this Corinthian church, we know that there's these false-teachers – these people that Paul sarcastically refers to as “super-apostles”... And they've weaselled their way in. They've lied and they've manipulated, and maligned Paul (all to elevate themselves & their own status)...

There is something rotten in the church, when church leaders; or preachers; or pastors lie / or tell half-truths... When they tell one person what they want to hear, and they tell another person what they want to hear, but it's the exact opposite...

As a pastor, I wish I could give you better news than this, but I can't. The sad reality is, some church leaders, who appear to be very nice and charming & genuine people, are people who:

- stretch the truth to tell people what they want to hear;
- run with the foxes & hunt with the hounds; and
- manipulate people and circumstances,

to their own ends, and to try and build their church..

They are crafty – they practice cunning... And **that's** one of the disgraceful and underhanded ways that Paul renounces...

And the second thing that he refuses to do, is to change the **content** of the message that is preached. He says "We refuse to ... tamper with God's word"

Some of the fastest growing churches today, are growing so quickly because the Gospel they preach, isn't the Gospel... Mind you, some of the fastest shrinking churches are shrinking because they've tampered with God's word too...

And God's word gets tampered with, in **many** ways (to try and make the Gospel more appealing), but today, I'm just going to give you a few examples, and these are just examples...

The first example (I can't ignore it), because it's been such a big issue in our country at the moment, and once again, it's been in the news this very week (national & local)...

Some preachers; teachers; churches, **tamper with God's word** to revise Gods moral and ethical standard for his people (**especially** to do with the way that people express their sexuality)... And I'm not going to try and talk-my-way-around this: I'm just going to come straight out and say it:

God's design for sexual intimacy, is for it to be between one man and one woman, who are married to each other (at the exclusion of all others). That's God's design for sexual intimacy. Anything else, is a rejection of God. Anything else, is sexual immorality, which is not fitting for God's people...

- sex before marriage, is sin, and it's a rebellion against God
- living together with your boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage, is sin, and rebellion against God.
- Same Sex Marriage, is sin, and rebellion against God..

And yet some churches now teach that it's ok for a minister to be a practicing homosexual, and some churches take this even further, and marry same-sex couples, and they celebrate this as a 'gift of God'...

They blatantly tamper with God's word, in the hope that it's going to make the gospel more relevant for a culture who are increasingly accepting this as 'the norm'...

How has this happened??? Well, I'm going to digress for a little bit now, and some of you probably wish that I don't, but I do feel I need to, because I know there are individuals, and there are families (podcast, video, present here today) who are struggling with this issue... They have a family member (brother; sister; son; daughter; cousin; friend) who are

struggling with such a temptation, and they desperately want them to find a home in the church...

And to tamper with God's word, is a very real temptation for some people...

We are **all** tempted by something, and some people are tempted by same-sex-attraction... And when they embrace it as a life-style, they are affirming "This is who I am – It's not just what I do – it's who I am."... And they try to explain to us, that for **this** reason, **this** sin is different from any other sin...

But anybody who's convinced by that argument, completely misunderstands what sin actually is...

You see, this is the predicament of **all** humanity... Sin (in **all** of us) goes to the very personhood, of who we are... The **world** would have us believe, that we're all born basically good, and it's external factors that make us do naughty things...

But that's not at all, the way it is. Sin **isn't** just a few things that we do wrong - things that we can easily dispense with; and put aside; and become sinless... Sin (for **all** of us) – sin (for me) and sin (for you), is a tightly-bound part of who we are... it's so much a part of who we are, that Jesus says "You have to be born again"... The person that you are, is so utterly sinful, that you have to be born again...

Paul talks about putting to death the old, sinful man, and raising up the new...

I was so corrupt; my sin was so ingrained, the person that I was (to the core of my being), was so vile, that I couldn't make a few amendments to my lifestyle – I had to be born again... And so do you. And so does the homosexual...

And in the church, there's 2 types of people that we're dealing with on this issue: well-meaning folk; and activists... And well-meaning folk who don't understand just how radical being born again is, have bought the lie of the activists that God isn't able to change these people. They've bought the lie, that they **can't** be renewed; they **can't** be transformed; and metamorphosised...

And well-meaning people, feel that the best way for them to love their child / brother / sister, is to tamper with God's word, and to encourage them to embrace the very sin that prevents them from being born again...

They're well-meaning, but they've played right into the devil's hands... That's why Paul refers to tampering with God's word as being **disgraceful and underhanded**... The very ones we want to include and we want to help, are lost, because activists and 'well-meaning' folk, encourage them to go on sinning, and so they don't repent, and they're not born again... They're not being changed from glory to glory – they've embraced sin (instead of Christ)...

I find the words of Jesus very sobering:

Mark 9:42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

Don't be deceived. You might be well-meaning, but don't be deceived... Don't cause one of the little ones Jesus died for, to fall into sin, because you've tampered with God's word...

Anyway, that took longer than I intended. That's an obvious tampering of God's word. For a second example, we're going to look at something which is a bit more seductive:

The prosperity gospel. It's that very popular message that:

- Jesus wants you to be rich.
- He wants to bless you;
- Healthy;
- Wealthy;
- Prosperous;
- Popular;
- Great leader;
- Person of influence...

Come to Jesus, and you'll have all these things...

And to bring out this very enticing and popular message, they tamper with God's word... Jesus told us we'd have troubles in this life... He never promised us a bed of roses, but he certainly did promise us a cross of nails...

And a third example of tampering with God's word, is what's become known as "Easy-believism" (People who follow Easy-believism teaching don't call it that (BTW))...

What's Easy-believism? It's the easy, quick, no cost gospel that says "Just believe in Jesus & the job's done"...

Some church leaders noticed that some of the biggest and fastest growing churches, were filling up with people who believed they were saved, but they weren't being changed; being transformed; becoming more Christ-like...

- *Men & women within the congregation were having pre-marital sex with one another, and they didn't see it as a problem;*
- *They'd even commit to living together, and they didn't believe that was incompatible with their Christian faith;*
- *Their ethics at work were low (lie; cheat; steal)*
- *Very materialistic (accumulating wealth, and not caring for the poor; sick; widow & orphan)*

Their behaviour never changed. They just believed they were saved because they believed in Jesus...

Why was this? The gospel that was being preached, had changed the definition of repentance... To repent means to turn away from sin – **stop doing it...** But they'd changed the definition of repentance to "Change your mind about who Jesus is..." And so people weren't being told to stop sinning. They weren't being told, to be God's holy people...

Now, I've chosen that example because I think that might be a bit of what was going on in that church in Corinth...

But these are things that Paul says he **refuses** to do: ²

We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with

God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Do you know how to tell if someone's a good and faithful preacher?

When the simple, unadulterated truth is preached, that's the evidence of an anointed preacher... The number of people who respond to the message isn't the proof of the pudding – **the message that is preached**, is the proof of the pudding..

In V5, Paul says:

⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord

If you'd like to have at your finger-tips, the shortest, most accurate description of the Gospel, there it is, right there: Jesus Christ is Lord...

And that's what we need to be proclaiming. We don't proclaim ourselves, **but Jesus Christ as Lord.**

Way too often (in churches), it all becomes about the cult of the personality...

When I was in Bible college, I went with a few ministers to a few 'mega-churches', to see what they do and how they

function... And we went to this one particular church, and we were going to be meeting with the 'senior pastor', but he just hadn't come in yet, his personal assistant was showing us around, and I don't know if it was just me, but I found it almost sickening the way she almost worshipped this senior pastor... Everything was all about him, and how wonderful he was...

There's no room for self in preaching. The message I have to give, isn't about me... I have nothing to proclaim, but **Jesus Christ as Lord.**

And this gospel is powerful... Even though the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ

God uses the most unlikely people – those who are willing to be servants. He uses those who are willing to preach (for the sake of Jesus), to cut through the blindness, and to make His light shine...

God is so powerful... Satan is doing his darndest to stop the Gospel from getting through, but our God is greater than the Devil...

And Paul uses 2 examples of the power of God to save: The example of creation, and the example of his own salvation...

We don't need to tamper with the word of God. We don't need to practice cunning, to get people to believe us, or to make the church grow...

When God created the world, God spoke. He said **"Let light shine out of darkness,"** . If God can create light, in the midst of darkness, it is God who can soften a heart, and shine the light of the Gospel into the heart of an unbeliever...

And Paul gives us the example of how God did that for him.... Paul hated Christ. And he hated Christians... He was on his way to Damascus to hunt down Christians, and to arrest them, and to put them on trial... And there on that road to Damascus, God literally blinded him with a bright light, and there he met Jesus...

Don't give up...

- OK, so you've shared your faith with someone and they've turned you down...
- Don't give up. Share it with someone else.
- So you've invited someone to come to church to hear the Gospel, and they've said "No thanks"...
- Don't give up. Invite someone else...

So the person you love, hasn't yet repented of sin and made Jesus their Lord... Don't give up on them. Don't tamper with God's word – that'll just lead them to death...

The Lord our God has the power to shine the light of His Gospel, and He will.

Our task, is to faithfully proclaim the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ... And keep doing it... That's all..

ⁱ Barrett CK. Black's New Testament Commentaries – The second epistle to the Corinthians. A&C Black: London. 1973.

“Many, but inferior Manuscripts have instead of “neglect our duty”, “grow weary”. P.126