Gospel Order

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Gospel Order

Today we will study gospel order. I can see that in the past, our focus has been in the wrong direction. If you were to ask most believers what gospel order is, they would usually tell you that it means the message is preached through one messenger. That is what stuck in the mind—one messenger only!

It is true that God has used one messenger in the past, most of the time— but not always. As we know there were 12 apostles, then there were Waggoner and Jones in 1888, and we expect even more messengers at the end, in the time of the latter rain. But mostly God did use one primary messenger and gospel order explained to us why and so forth. However, that is not the focus. The messenger himself can change. At one time we have this messenger, at another time another messenger—I am speaking here of primary messengers. In fact, everyone is actually a messenger.

If there are one or more primary messengers it does not matter, but what does matter is if it is the same message! That is the point. The real point of gospel order is not one-man-messengership, but one message—not many different messages often contradicting each other.

When you look at our history, how often can you see efforts to change the message a little here and a little there, and how people came up with their different ideas. Even while the message was going forward powerfully, people would come and say, “Hey, I have an idea here or there.”

God has one message at one time—this point is true of all ages. Whether this is in the time of the apostles, the time of Waggoner and Jones, at the time of the latter rain, or any time in between, God has a specific message. At the time of the reformation, there was also one message, but it was even preached in different locations. Often the messenger standing up in one location had no connection with another in a different location, and yet they gave the same message. That is the major point—the same message.

What is the message?

But what is *the* message?

Many people think that this is simply a presentation from the Bible, such as a presentation of justification by faith, or the resurrection, or any other doctrine. But we have a far too limited concept of what *the* message really is. It is much more.

A message can be an **experience**. For example, the experience of Job when he suffered the attacks of Satan was a message for his time. It was a very powerful message too, which stretches beyond his time to give us enlightenment even today. That was not a theoretical dissertation about some Bible text. It was an experience. When you look at Bible stories, they are all experiences. And they are messages. Experiences are messages.

Also, a **work** can be a message. For instance, when Noah built the ark, he preached a powerful message without speaking a word. Every stroke of the hammer, each time timber was sawn, this was a message in itself.[[1]](#footnote-2) And the message was that this world will be drowned by a flood. Of course, it was also accompanied by words that Noah spoke, but the work which he did was in itself a very powerful message—more powerful than his words could be. We need to understand this.

A message is not just words, not just dissertations, sermons, and so on—in fact that is by far the smaller part. Without a doubt, the more important part is the work that we are doing and the experience that we are going through—these are the message.

Whatever it is—a word spoken, or an experience, or work performed—in every case it is a presentation of God's character. And this is the message in its various forms. When we think of one message, then think not only of words spoken. Think also of experiences, of work done. And there is one message on which God wants us to focus. He wants us to focus on a specific message at a particular time.

What does it mean to practice gospel order? When do we practice gospel order?

It means to live the message in word and action. In other words, to speak about it and to practice it. If we do not practice present light—if we do not live up to the light that God has given—then we are not practicing gospel order. I think we understand this.

What distractions are there?

Now the problem that Satan throws in the way, to prevent us from practicing gospel order, is that he distracts us from the one message God has for us. Satan wants to distract us from this one theme.

How are we distracted?

• We can be distracted by some favored sin, some cherished sin that we practice openly, or not so openly.

• It can be the demands of the family which distract us. It can be unbelieving parents, children, spouses—they want this, that, or the other.

• It could be some profession that I have.

In general, you could say that what distracts us is private matters! Matters of a private nature. Every private thing in our life is a distraction from gospel order, or a distraction from the one theme—the one message God wants us to dwell upon.

Let us read some of these messages.

“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'” *Luke* 9:57, 58.

What was Jesus saying here? “You must count the cost before you make such a vow, or such an oath. Count the cost carefully.”

“Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.' But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'..*Luke* 9:59.

What is this? A distraction from gospel order. A distraction from the one theme that was important for this man here. What was the one theme, the one message at that time? “Follow Me”—follow Jesus. But he wanted to be distracted. “Let me go first and bury my father.” That would have been such a distraction as to have prevented him from following Jesus.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.'” *Luke* 9:60.

If you wanted to take this legalistically, you would construe this to mean that you should never conduct a burial anymore. But I think you can well understand that it would have been a distraction for this man. “Other people can do this job very well for you, but you are to follow gospel order.”

This reminds me of a song that we sang many years ago in America. “I'm going to follow gospel order” to the melody “Down by the Riverside.” Unfortunately, most of those who sang it at that time, then left us because of gospel order. That is very sad. When we are going to follow gospel order, we cannot allow ourselves to be distracted. What distracted them? Why did they not follow gospel order anymore? Mostly for family reasons. When you look at the cases of those who sang that song, they left because of the family.

*Audience*: This happened when the reforms and other messages came too.

*Andreas*: Let's read on.

**“**And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.'” *Luke* 9:61.

Again, the family! What does this mean? Distraction!

If he had gone and bidden farewell, his family would have said, “Oh, stay with us, you can't go. You know we have little children here and you can't leave them alone. And this and that and the other.” The family would have found many good reasons to distract him from following the Lord. So, what did Jesus say to him?

“But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'” *Luke* 9:62.

These are some examples of distractions from gospel order. Let's look at some other examples.

“But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'” *Luke* 14:18-20.

You see that these are all distractions from gospel order.

The first said, “I have bought a piece of ground and you know it was very expensive. I can't just leave it now, or I will suffer a great loss. Such a loss would mean that I can't give to the work anymore. So, let me go and look after my property and multiply it, and then I can give something to the work.” This is a distraction. Another had bought the oxen, which are similarly a possession. And finally, the one who married said, “After all this is over, I will come and follow the Lord.”

All these things which are mentioned here are private matters. Private matters cannot be the work of God—they can never be gospel order—that must be very clear.

Let us turn to the epistle of Peter. . knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” *2 Peter* 1:20.

Private matters play no role in the message of God—ever! As soon as you start to mingle your private things into the work of God, then it is not the work of God anymore. That must be very clear. Private things and the kingdom of God are contrasting matters.

What is God's cause?

Let us now see how the kingdom of God is described.

**“**Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.” *Acts* 4: 32.

What is the difference between ideal communism[[2]](#footnote-3) and the experience of the early church?

In the early church they had all things in common.

*Reinhard*: God brought everything together and made it common. In communism, the policy says everything is in common, but often at the cost of others.

*Andreas:* Even if there were ideal communism, it would be different. Even if every person was equal and everybody had enough to eat, and so forth—even if this were so, it would still be different. The difference is that in communism, the things they have in common are their private things. Whereas what we have in common in God's church, is God's kingdom. That is the difference. In other words, in communism, everyone still pursues their private matters. Whereas in the church, everybody pursues the matters of God.

Let me describe this in the case of the early church. There was great persecution, and as a result, many lost their possessions. There were people in real need. As a result of having things in common, the need was met. In other words, nobody needed to starve because of this. But the point was that through distributing goods to one another as they had a need, they showed God's character. They showed the character of giving, by nobody claiming that anything belonged to them. No, they gave. In contrast to this was the spirit of Ananias and Sapphira. They also gave part of their possessions to the Lord, but of the rest, they said, “That is my private thing.” They had promised it all already—according to the leading of the Spirit of God—but even if they had not promised and clung to their own possessions, it would have been an expression of greed, or selfishness. As such, it would have been totally in disharmony with the gospel message— gospel order—with God's character.

What is God's cause? This is the question now.

Gospel order means to follow the message, but what is the message at a given time? Is it this message of this person, or is it that message of that person?

We have several invitations from the world. One says, “Come here,” while another says, “Come here.” Some say, “Christ is here,” and another says, “Christ is there.” One says, “My house is now the center where everybody should participate,” or “My office, my work is the center.” Another says, “No, *my* work is the center, and everybody should come here.”

How shall we, as the people of God, know what the cause of God is at the present time? Which experience is God's cause?

There are many experiences. Everybody has experiences, all the time. But which is the cause of God? Which is the one message that we should follow?

First of all, it is not a private matter. And the cause of God is where God leads. Let us take an example from *Exodus*.

“So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness.

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.” *Exodus* 13:20-22.

It is very clear that the message was where the cloud led. You had to follow that cloud! It was very clear that this was the message for that time. “Follow it!” Whether it was given through Moses, or through Joshua, or anybody else, that does not matter. But, “Follow the cloud!” That is the important point.

The work of God could clearly be seen when they went through the Red Sea. There was no question about it—that was the work of God.

So, “Go through, go into the water.” When they were given the manna, that was also very clear. When the early Christian church could care for their persecuted brothers and sisters, that was the work of God at that time. The experience of Job was the work of God. We know that in the last days it will be medical missionary work. We know this from Ellen White's statements. It could be agricultural work, which is a part of this medical missionary work, and it could be in different places, and different works.

Now I want to come back to the video of the flocks of birds that we saw at the beginning. The focal point changes from time to time. Sometimes the focus is in one area, sometimes in another, but there is always a focal point all the time. And wherever this focal point is, is where we see the greatest concentration of birds. They move from one country to another, travelling many, many miles in this way. But they follow a certain pattern—and that is gospel order. Even though the focal point changes. At one time it was the Red Sea, at another time it was the care of the brothers and sisters, another time it was the experience of Job, medical missionary work, and so on. It could be different focal points at different times. But there is a common purpose. They had all things in common.

What did they have in common? Following where God led.

How to identify and distinguish?

How do we distinguish better between private matters and the cause of God?

How do we know that the cloud is the cause of God?

It seems to be a simple matter. Such a wonderful thing like a cloud that moves, shade by day, fire by night, and so forth. It is a marvelous thing, isn't it? It seems to be a simple matter, but it is not as simple as you think.

It could be a natural phenomenon. Let's read about this.

“After leaving the wilderness of Sin, the Israelites encamped in Rephidim. Here there was no water, and again they distrusted the providence of God. In their blindness and presumption the people came to Moses with the demand, ‘Give us water that we may drink.' But his patience failed not. ‘Why chide ye with me?' he said; ‘wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?' They cried in anger, ‘Wherefore is this, that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?' When they had been so abundantly supplied with food, they remembered with shame their unbelief and murmurings, and promised to trust the Lord in the future; but they soon forgot their promise, and failed at the first trial of their faith. The pillar of cloud that was leading them seemed to veil a fearful mystery. And Moses—who was he? they questioned, and what could be his object in bringing them from Egypt? Suspicion and distrust filled their hearts, and they boldly accused him of designing to kill them and their children by privations and hardships that he might enrich himself with their possessions. In the tumult of rage and indignation they were about to stone him.” *Patriarchs and Prophets,* 297.3.

What was the cloud? Was it so clear? It “seemed to veil a fearful mystery.” It was a strange phenomenon of nature. It was as though you were looking at the birds that we saw in the video and say, “Well, that is a strange phenomenon, but how shall I see God's leading in it?”

A fearful mystery. And Moses, who was he? To see the difference between the message and a private matter seems to be not so clear—at least not to the Israelites then.

Let's turn to another statement. “Many have in a great measure failed to receive the former rain. They have not obtained all the benefits that God has thus provided for them. They expect that the lack will be supplied by the latter rain. When the richest abundance of grace shall be bestowed, they intend to open their hearts to receive it. They are making a terrible mistake. The work that God has begun in the human heart in giving His light and knowledge must be continually going forward. Every individual must realize his own necessity. The heart must be emptied of every defilement and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God, that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now. Then the human agent had only to ask for the blessing, and wait for the Lord to perfect the work concerning him. It is God who began the work, and He will finish His work, making man complete in Jesus Christ. But there must be no neglect of the grace represented by the former rain. Only those who are living up to the light they have will receive greater light. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.” *Testimonies to Ministers,* 507.1.

What could be a clearer message than the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? What could show God's guidance more clearly than the pillar of cloud and fire? Isn't this a sign that it is the message of God, and that this is what we should focus on? And yet we read, “It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.”

In other words, we do not discern that this is the message—even though it is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And when we don't discern it, then we do not receive it.

This shows that the distinction between private matters and God's work is not as easy as you think. But there is a clear condition mentioned in this paragraph that shows us how we can know. Nobody needs to be deceived, even though it is not easy.

So, how can we know?

By living up to all the light that God gives. By receiving the early rain. By walking in God's ways at every step of advancement. In other words, if we follow God's leading—and God leads everyone in small as in big things—we shall be able to discern more and more where His message is. And then we can follow it. It is not difficult.

But it is not a mechanical process. It is not just looking at some outward sign, such as an explosion, or something equally obvious, and then saying, “Hey, that's it!” You have to be guided by the Holy Spirit. You need to have a mature Christian experience where Christ leads you individually. And as you follow His guidance, you will see more and more what is the work of God. And you will recognize it and be there when it is important. That is following gospel order.

Is unity a sign?

Some people may say, “Well, one clear sign at least is unity, right? When we are unified, then this is a sign that it is the work of God.” Let us read about Korah in this connection.

“In this work of disaffection there was greater union and harmony among the discordant elements of the congregation than had ever before existed.” *Patriarchs and Prophets,* 398.1.

Let us leave out the word “disaffection” because the people often do not see that they are disaffected. They think that they are doing a good work, whereas it is just disaffection, nothing more. “In this work ... there was greater union and harmony among the discordant elements of the congregation than had ever before existed.”

How wonderful! That must be the work of God. Such unity, such harmony. But no evidence that this is the message of God. And why not? Because it is a work of disaffection, or discontent. It is not a positive message which brings people together. Christ prays for unity and He says, “Thereby the world will know that You have sent Me—that they are one even as You and I are one.” (See *John* 17:21.)

When we see the statement above, we tend to think, “Okay, there is harmony, unity, and so on.” But remember that the unity which Christ prayed for is a different kind of unity. It is not based on disaffection, not on opposition to the light of God, but it is based on the truth. It is based on Christ.

***Some practical steps***

In closing, I would like to describe some very practical steps in following gospel order. The first step is:

• show an interest in the work of God.

If you let yourself become distracted by many things, then you will lose it. For instance, we could be interested in the construction of our home, and how we shall arrange it. What shall we build, when we build our own house? Or a new car— we could spend hours and hours looking for a new car. Or a new computer, or whatever. You could distract yourself a lot in such a way. But it is important not to allow ourselves to be distracted, but to meditate on what the message is at the present time. Meditate upon it. Joshua says to do this.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” *Joshua* 1:8.

It is interesting how Joshua presented a book to them and then said, “Now meditate upon it day and night.” That is quite an instruction. He could do this, because he knew that this was the message for his time. “Do this, meditate upon it day and night, and do not be distracted by your sheep, your oxen, children, land, harvest, and so forth.”

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” *Psalm* 1:2. He shows great interest in the message that God has given. And the message—let me say it again—is not just a word. It can be an experience, or a work. Those who showed a great interest in the building of the ark, such as Methuselah and Noah, of course, were following gospel order.

Basically, we could summarize this first step with the words, “Watch and pray.” That is what Jesus said in *Matthew* 24 and 25, when He admonished His followers to be always watchful. To be watchful means always to show an interest in where the work of God is.

Look at the birds. When they focus on one cluster, they all show an interest. They go there. They say, “Ah, that's where the center is now.” That is where the work of God is. There we need to go, and to follow it. We show interest—and that is watching and praying.

The second step is:

• participate in the work of God.

Participate in the work wherever you can, wherever you have the possibility.

Some people are quite curious about what is going on in the cause of God. As I hear, we have a lot of listeners who are very interested in what is going on. Some of them might be like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, who later laid hands on the work, but others never show an interest in participating. They just want to know what is going on. But that is not enough. To follow the message—to follow gospel order— also means to participate in the work wherever I can.

Let us read a statement about this. “Oh, that the Lord might guide you! You should never in a single instance allow hearsay to move you to action, and yet you have sometimes done this. Never take action to narrow and circumscribe the work unless you know that you are moved to do so by the Spirit of the Lord. Our people are doing work for foreign missions, but there are home missions that need their help just as much as these foreign missions. We should make efforts to show our people the wants of the cause of God, and to open before them the need of using means that God has entrusted to them to advance the work of the Master both at home and abroad. Unless those who can help in [Battle Creek] are aroused to a sense of their duty, they will not recognize the work of God when the loud cry of the third angel shall be heard. When light goes forth to lighten the earth, instead of coming up to the help of the Lord, they will want to bind about His work to meet their narrow ideas. Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning.” *Testimonies to Ministers,* 299.2.

The point is that there is a difference between a private matter and the work of God. When I have an interest in private matters, I try to proscribe God's work to my narrow ideas—to my private interpretation, my private ideas. When I do this, I will not be ready to come up to the help of the Lord, as it says here. Let us read this again. “Instead of coming up to the help of the Lord, they will want to bind about His work to meet their narrow ideas.”

What does it mean to come up to the help of the Lord? It means to participate in the work when it is needed—to be there when the call comes. Because it is a word from the Bible, let us read it. “‘Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord, ‘curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.'” *Judges* 5:23.

That is the song of Deborah, after the victory over Sisera and the enemies of Israel. They had a great victory and the song is in memory of that victory. Here Deborah expresses this curse. It is by inspiration that she does this. In other words, God speaks a curse here against some inhabitants of Meroz, a town in Israel. This town was inhabited by people who would not participate in this battle against the enemies of Israel. They did not come to the help of the Lord. They were not ready.

Why not? Because their private matters came first. Probably their houses, vineyards, family, and suchlike, all came first. So, they were not there when they were needed. They did not come to the help of the Lord, and this is how the word of God looks upon it. Let them be cursed!

You may think that this curse is given because God needed them for the victory. No, God did not need them. The victory was gained anyway. God wanted them to participate for their own sakes—not for His sake. God does not need us. But for our sakes, He asks us, “Come and participate in My work.”

There is another story that is very interesting in this context, and that is Israel's deliverance from Babylon. Let's read it.

“‘Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north,' was the message given the scattered tribes of Israel who had become settled in many lands far from their former home. ‘I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord. Deliver thyself, o Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; after the glory hath He sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me.” Zechariah 2:6-9.

“It was still the Lord's purpose, as it had been from the beginning, that His people should be a praise in the earth, to the glory of His name. During the long years of their exile He had given them many opportunities to return to their allegiance to Him. Some had chosen to listen and to learn; some had found salvation in the midst of affliction. Many of these were to be numbered among the remnant that should return. They were likened by Inspiration to ‘the highest branch of the high cedar,' which was to be planted ‘upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel.' Ezekiel 17:22, 23.

“It was those ‘whose spirit God had raised' (Ezra 1:5) who had returned under the decree of Cyrus. But God ceased not to plead with those who voluntarily remained in the land of their exile, and through manifold agencies He made it possible for them also to return. The large number, however, of those who failed to respond to the decree of Cyrus, remained unimpressible to later influences; and even when Zechariah warned them to flee from Babylon without further delay, they did not heed the invitation.” *Prophets and Kings,* 599.1 - 599.3.

Then came the difficult time in the days of Artaxerxes. We won't read all this now, but the point is that God invited them to participate in His work. Where was His work at that time? Not in Babylon, but in Jerusalem. And how few followed! How few came to the help of the Lord. God did not call them for His own sake. He said it for their sake because He knew what would happen in Babylon afterward. So, when God asked them to leave, and they did not follow the first time, then the second time they were even less impressed, and less inclined to go.

This leads to the third point:

• be a minuteman.

Do not hesitate to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit when He calls you. As soon as the voice of the Holy Spirit calls you, then go! That is following gospel order. If you hesitate—as you can see here with those who stayed in Babylon—the next time you will be even less impressed. You remain less impressable to later influences. That is the warning—therefore be a minuteman. Follow Him, go! Do not leave it on the bench. Don't procrastinate. As Jesus said, “Do not get your mantle,” but flee (see *Matthew* 24:18).

A good example of someone who was a minuteman, is Isaiah, of whom we read: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.'” *Isaiah* 6:8.

Isaiah reacted immediately! He did not say, “But, Lord, first I need to be prepared.” No, he said, “Here I am, send me.” In other words, Isaiah was ready—a minuteman—on the spot. And that is following gospel order.

Let us turn to another statement. “The minister who has a due appreciation of service, [Which of us is a minister? Everyone, right? A minister is to minister.] regards himself as God's minuteman. When, with Isaiah, he hears the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' he responds, ‘Here am I; send me.' [Isaiah 6:8.] He cannot say, I am my own; I will do what I please with my time. No one who has given his life to God's work as His minister, lives for self. His work is to follow Christ, to be a willing agent and co-worker with the Master, receiving His Spirit day by day, and working as the Saviour worked, neither failing nor being discouraged. He is chosen of God as a faithful instrument to promote missionary work in all lands, and he must ponder well the path he follows.” *Gospel Workers,* 451.2.

Gospel order is much more than just one man and his message. It concerns all of us. We are to follow the light—the message—wherever God gives it.

Here again are the three steps in summary, for following gospel order:

1. Show an interest in the work of God;
2. Participate in the work;
3. Be a minuteman.

This is our challenge.

1. “Every blow struck upon the ark was a witness to the people.” *Patriarchs and Prophets,* 95.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In real communism there are rich and poor people. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)