

Strength from Gospel Order

[Jeremiah 15:15-21](#)

[Romans 12:9-21](#)

The use of the term “Gospel Order” among Friends seems to have begun with George Fox. He identified this as the order established by God that is shared in every part of creation. It is a vast concept, covering the Cosmos, our Earth and the life upon it. God’s intent for all creation to be in harmony. We have promises from God such as in Isaiah 55:11 which tells us “**my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**” (NIV). So this is sure. No matter how sidetracked or delayed the promise may seem, no matter how far we and our world skew from perfection, God’s original purpose **will** be accomplished.

We see Gospel Order in the Cosmos. Physicists are still discovering the details of this intricate order and harmony in the building blocks of creation, finding how consistent and orderly it still is.

We see in nature that the Earthly creation is orderly. The environment, plants, animals, and organisms were set to support each other in a balanced, orderly way. We see proof of how interconnected it all is when shortsighted humans upset the order, causing unexpected disruptions.

I imagine Gospel Order as a flowing river. Sweeping creation forward, correcting things in its path with the strength of a mighty river as it flows surely towards God’s original intention.

We, of course, are part of creation too. The closer we can identify and follow Gospel Order, the easier we will continue to ride **with** this forceful river. We have the example of how God turned special attention to the nation of Israel, eventually calling them back out of Egypt, saving His people from abusive conditions in the face of opposition. At Mt. Sinai He gave them an orderly way to praise Him, how to live orderly amongst themselves. They would be an example to the nations, showing the benefit of living in harmony with his Order. They sure didn’t do it perfectly, or even very well, but the Gospel Order flowed on. It was proof that God had not given up on this part of His creation.

Eventually God sent his son, Jesus, who, by example, showed us how God could act even when constrained within human form. Showing us it is possible. He showed us how to imitate him and love one another, “enemies” included. Laws given to Israel at Mt. Sinai were no longer our required guide; now we are guided through the Spirit, the Advocate, which Jesus sent to guide and strengthen us. And He generously gave this to every individual. So, **anyone** may listen and learn, allowing themselves to be guided into line with His Gospel Order. Now God is another step closer to bringing a part of creation in line with His original intention. He even proved that Death has no power over his Gospel Order.

One example of God using and strengthening a person is in the lectionary scripture from Jeremiah 15 we are considering today. Let’s read it in two parts. The first half of the text, verses 15-18, start with the prophet praying to God. Jeremiah feels the message he was tasked to deliver is not being heard. He is feeling left on his own, abandoned. His prayer quickly turns to **complaint** and then to **accusation**. It reads:

¹⁵ O Lord, **you know**;
remember me and visit me,
and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors.
In your forbearance do not take me away;
know that **on your account I suffer insult**.
¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O Lord, God of hosts.
¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of merry-makers,
nor did I rejoice;
under the weight of your hand I sat alone,
for you had filled me with indignation.
¹⁸ **Why is my pain unceasing,**
my wound **incurable,**
refusing to be healed?
Truly, **you are to me like a deceitful brook,**
like waters that fail.

Ouch. Jeremiah had done as instructed, but he was seeing persecution, when he expected success. He is giving up. As we can next read from verses 19-21, God's response is patient with Jeremiah. God doesn't argue back. He just reminds Jeremiah that He has **not** forgotten, and asked Jeremiah to not forget Him either. Just hold steady for a little longer.

We read this response in verses 19-21:

¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord:
If you turn back, I will take you back,
and you shall stand before me.
If you utter what is **precious** and not what is **worthless**,
you shall serve as my mouth.
It is **they** who will turn to **you**,
not you who will turn to them.
²⁰ And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you,
but they shall **not** prevail over you,
for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,
says the Lord.
²¹ I **will** deliver you out of the hand of the wicked
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

No matter how delayed it may seem, the work of restoring Gospel Order is flowing forward, and He helps us. What a blessing Jeremiah received to have his doubts **acknowledged** and then given sufficient

proof that God **is** still with him. How is this sufficient? When we read the words as “just words”, they seem flat. We need to listen with our heart, because God gave them to Jeremiah’s listening **heart** at a low point in his life. Then they were recognized as guaranteed promise; he was strengthened since he now knew, for sure, that he was on the right track. The still quiet voice of God knows precisely what each of us needs to hear when we allow ourselves to listen. By listening Jeremiah was saved from letting his own worry sidetrack his mission. He was strengthened to complete the work.

So how blessed are **we** to have this example? And the examples of so many others documented in scripture? Examples of people who were given strength to accomplish so much by just holding onto their faith a little bit longer even if they began having doubts. They stayed in the river of Gospel Order and were carried forward.

The First Century Christians also gave us sure examples of strength by recognizing Gospel Order. Just as the Israelites were given advice to follow at Mt. Sinai, Jesus gave us additional proofs that our hope is sure and told us how to grab hold of it when we listen with our hearts. The Apostle Paul gives inspired advice to the Christians in Rome on how to remain strong. How to keep themselves in the flowing river of Gospel Order. The other lectionary scripture we are looking at today is Romans 12:9-21. Imagine how pleased Jeremiah would have been to receive such advice **before** he started down the path towards spiritual crisis.

As we read Romans 12:9-21, notice how this is a list of “**shoulds**,” things to actively pursue:

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

All this advice is really quite simple -- things anyone can accomplish:

- Stick to what is good
- Love one another
- Rejoice in Hope
- Persevere in Prayer
- Bless others

- Live in Harmony

Did you notice one thing in this scripture that sticks out as **not** belonging with the others? One **“shouldn’t?”** It’s in verse 19 which tells us “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” **Who will repay? -- The Lord.** This isn’t ours to worry about. Skip it. Not our job. We would be wasting time as Jeremiah had for a bit. It may help us to remember that this message was written to First Century folks – **just after** they had been given the new covenant. They were being moved forward beyond **just** the Law. The only scriptures they had were the “Old” Testament. Which was **full** of “vengeance.”

Paul needed to remind the new Christians **how surprising was the God Jesus had modeled.** Forgiving. Loving. Empathetic. Jesus specifically wanted **all** to come to Him, and not be excluded. This free gift was for Gentiles now, not only the Jews. And all these years later, as society identifies and segregates a multitude of “Out Groups,” **we know** we should extend that same love to **all** these newly identified or labeled groups of people. Gospel Order has flowed **beyond vengeance.** Like the Israelites, we have **still** not done this perfectly, or even very well, but many are strengthened to try.

Gospel Order may seem slow, but it still flows forward toward God’s original intention. And God is still actively helping and strengthening us as individuals and as a community. Whispering to us, letting **us** know how we can be part of His Gospel Order.