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## The Art of Spiritual Conversation, Part 2

When you take apart the word “gospel,” you can hear how the word evolved from “good speech,” or even better for us fans of Yiddish, “good schpiel”. And for all the good schpiels I’ve heard, I’ve heard plenty of its opposite—BAD schpiels. And I’ve decided the word “gospel” needs an opposite, and I’ve decided to call it “baspel.” And thus we come to today’s topic:

### *Is there any baspel in your gospel?*

Is your gospel as good as God is? Saint John says that in Him there is no darkness at all; can you say the same about the ‘good schpiel’ you give when you share your faith? Now of course, my words are always imperfect, just like I am. And it’s an amazing gift of grace that the Holy Spirit can take my half-grimy speeches and somehow use them to speak the Word of God to another person. That gives us all the confidence we need to open our mouths at all. But in evangelism, the Spirit is teaching us (the evangelists) at least as much as he’s teaching the evangelee.

In my experience, as I have stumbled my way through many ‘gospel presentations,’ I have not always felt good about my message. I knew God, and I knew that God was wonderful. But somehow my ‘gospel’ just wasn’t as GOOD as the Jesus I knew and loved. But I did the best I could, I tried to express the gospel in novel and interesting ways, and was amazed at how God produced results through my awkward words.

But as the years have gone by, I’ve grown convinced that there were some non-cosmetic problems with my message. In short, my gospel had some baspel in it. And having a little baspel in your gospel is like having a little hog manure in your ice cream. Even a little bit is too much.

I doubt that I’m done rooting out my baspels, but I have found a few. And I thought I’d share a few with you, just in case your ‘ice cream’ has some of the same stinky chunks in it:

### **BASPEL #1: You need to find God.**

Forrest Gump was once asked “*Have you found the Lord, Gump?*” And as usual, Forrest’s reply was spot-on: “*I didn’t know I was supposed to be looking for him.*” Saint Paul explained some things about God to some Athenians who were looking for Him: “*He doesn’t play hide-and-peek with us. He’s not remote; he’s near. We live and move in him, can’t get away from him!*” (Acts 17 – MSG).

If finding the Lord is my job, then I know I’m without hope. I can’t find my keys, let alone the Mystery of the Universe. So for someone like me, it is wonderful news that GOD HAS FOUND ME. In Jesus, God has done the Good-Shepherd thing. He has searched every valley and climbed every mountain to find me, and HE HAS DONE IT. My Shepherd has found me, picked me up, cleaned me up, and taken me home.

### **BASPEL #2: God will accept you if you have faith.**

This one is very common in evangelical protestant circles, so let’s spend some time here. “God has erected this huge apparatus in order to save you, and he’s ready and waiting to give you this thing called ‘salvation,’ and all you have to do is push the faith button.”

I don't know about you, but the red light on my Baspel Detector lights up whenever I hear the words "all you have to do." When we say "All you have to do is believe," we are turning faith into a work. We're saying that when it comes to the salvation job, Jesus did 99% and "all you have to do" is the remaining 1%.

*[BEEP! BEEP! DANGER, WILL ROBINSON, DANGER! DANGEROUSLY HIGH BASPEL LEVELS DETECTED! DANGER! BEEP! BEEP!]*

The popular image of heaven is that you arrive at the Pearly Gates, Saint Peter checks your file to decide if he will allow you inside. Usually when this is on TV, he's checking to see if you did enough 'good works.' We evangelicals laugh at this obviously silly theology. Because we know that what he's checking the file for is to see if you "had enough faith." Right?

I know a guy who goes forward at an altar call every week, in the hopes that at least one of those times he will "have faith" in a magical enough way that he will qualify for heaven. As if God is going to open up his skull and look for faith particles, and if it's more than one part per million, then he qualifies for the good place rather than the bad place.

Faith is a HUGE deal, but it in no way accomplishes our salvation. Not even a little bit. When I look over on my desk and see my coffee cup, I am not contributing to its existence in any way. I'm just experiencing it, discovering that it's there. I believe it was Martin Luther who said that faith is like an eye. It doesn't *create* what it sees; it *discovers* what's already there. And the discovery makes all the difference.

My wife loves me, but if I didn't believe that, didn't KNOW that in my soul, then living with her would be hell. It's the same way with God. He's with us. He loves us. Always has, always will. He will never leave us nor forsake us. BELIEVE it. Experience it. Live it. Don't be like the children of Israel who didn't believe the truth about God and about themselves: "*The message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith*" (Hebrews 4.2).

### **BASPEL #3: God is the problem.**

We never come right out and say this, but look at what we usually say about the cross: The Father is extremely upset about our sin problem. He wants...no...NEEDS to destroy us. He needs to kill SOMEBODY. But then Jesus steps in and says "No, FATHER, kick me instead." So on the cross the Father whales on his Son. He gets it out of his system, and then he's allowed to love us again. Now, this makes me think pretty highly of Jesus, but I'm not sure about this 'Father' guy. He seems to have an anger problem. It's like if I was mad at my kid, but decided to kick the dog instead.

But the truth is that Jesus didn't come to save us from the Father. He came to save us from EVIL, from DARKNESS, from DEATH. He defeated them by tasting them on our behalf. Big difference. God is NOT schizophrenic. He does NOT have a variable opinion of you. You are his kid. And therefore, in Jesus, God spared no expense to save you from everything that threatens to destroy you. And he has done it.

### **BASPEL #4: God is abandoning the earth and evacuating souls to heaven.**

This one is a holdover from Greek philosophy that doesn't like matter nearly as much as God

does. But the truth is that God likes the earth. Really. And while we, its stewards, have dropped the ball, God is not done with our little planet. In fact, he has saved it, and US with it. Even a brief glance at the Bible will show us this. Creation groans for us humans to get with the program and do our job as God's children. All things in heaven and earth find their head in Jesus, the cosmic Christ. At the end of Revelation, believers don't fly away to heaven. Instead, something new and beautiful comes down to the earth and transforms it.

Or read what the Worldwide Church of God Statement of Beliefs has to say about salvation:  
*“Salvation is the restoration of human fellowship with God and the deliverance of the entire creation from the bondage of sin and death.”*

Neat, huh? There is *much* more going on in salvation than just getting some souls to some immaterial place called 'heaven.' God is saving the WORLD, and us with it. Tell the gospel THAT way, and it will sound strange and wonderful to the ears around you.

When the news is good, the schpiel is easy.

*~ John Stonecypher*