

GOSPEL IDENTITY & GOSPEL APPLICATION: OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

What is the Gospel?

1. At the heart of Christianity is the message of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation in its fullest sense.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).

2. The gospel is central to everything. It is not just about our initial salvation. It is the essence of the Christian faith. The gospel impacts the whole of our lives. It is the power that changes us and molds us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.
3. The gospel is not about something we do but about what has been done for us.

- a. The gospel is good news announcing that we have been rescued or saved.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14).

- b. We are rescued from the "coming wrath" at the end of history (I Thessalonians 1:10).
- c. The root problem is that we are alienated from God because of sin.
- d. We need to be reconciled to God.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

- e. The only way that we can be reconciled to God is through His Son Jesus Christ.
4. The gospel of sheer grace when offered to hopeless sinners will humble and comfort all at once. It brings us inexpressible joy and also a deep sense of brokenness over our sins, regrets, and failures.

5. The gospel changes our attitude toward the circumstances we face. We are enabled to see things from God's perspective. We are then able to apply the gospel to the circumstances we are facing.
6. The gospel also changes the affections of our hearts. We begin to love Jesus more and more as the gospel works itself out in our lives. We love Him more than we love our own selves.
7. The power of the gospel penetrates our hearts, bringing us to deep gratitude for the love and grace of God, and it even reveals our inward motives, our desires, and the idols of our hearts, which leads us to brokenness and humility.
8. Four basic biblical truths will help us begin to work out a true sense of gospel identity in our lives.

1. We are unconditionally loved and accepted by God solely on the basis of Jesus' work on our behalf.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2).

SECURITY AND HOPE

1. This is the biblical doctrine of justification.

 "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sin, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them and received by faith alone."
 (Westminster Larger Catechism #70)
2. There are two aspects of justification: our sins are fully forgiven, and we are made perfect in the eyes of God because Jesus' perfection is freely given to us.
3. We are accepted as righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Christ accounted to us. *This grace in which we stand* (Romans 5:2).
4. "Justification is the perfect righteousness of Christ reckoned to us, covering the remaining imperfections in our lives like a robe of stainless holiness." (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*)
5. By virtue of our justification, we have a new identity in Christ. We are complete in Christ and lack nothing. Because of this new identity, we can find true satisfaction and fulfillment through our relationship with Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness (Colossians 2:9-10).

6. The problem is that many people have never come to realize this, or if we have, we often forget this truth. Therefore, we try to find satisfaction and fulfillment in other ways. None of them will ever give us these things.
7. We all struggle with basic insecurities. We deeply want to be loved and accepted. We want to be safe and noticed.
8. Because we lack these things, we live in fear, which can paralyze our lives and rob us of the peace and joy God wants us to experience.
9. We must learn to start each day by reminding ourselves that we are accepted by God, claiming the righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance. We must acknowledge that we are complete in Christ and lack nothing.

2. We are set free from our bondage of sin and have the ability to die to sin and to live for Christ each day and moment of our lives.

For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6).

FREEDOM AND MOTIVATION

1. This is the biblical doctrine of sanctification.

“Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they, whom God has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are, in time through the powerful operation of his Spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise into newness of life.” (Westminster Larger Catechism #75)
2. Sanctification, unlike justification which is a one time act, is an ongoing process.
3. We are a work in progress! God is not finished with us yet!

Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).
4. Much of our growth in grace is effected by events and conditions that God brings into our lives to perfect His work in us.
5. Even the spiritual battles we face are tools that God uses to shape us and mold us to be more like Christ.
6. The spiritual battles we face, along with the trials and difficulties we experience, should not throw us; they should encourage us that God is at work in us!

7. Through the sanctification process, we learn how to work out the implications of the gospel to the whole of our lives. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, *“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose”* (Philippians 2:12-13).
- a. Paul clearly is speaking about our sanctification in this verse. He is saying that we have a responsibility to work out our salvation as we learn more and more how to apply the gospel to every situation we face.
 - b. While we have a responsibility in working out our sanctification, we also must be aware of the fact that it is God who is at work in us.
 - c. Sanctification is intricately connected to the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

3. We are not alone when we are in Christ because we have His Holy Spirit living in us.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19).

COMFORT AND STRENGTH

- 1. Christians often forget or don't realize that they have the Spirit of God living in them to give them supernatural power to work out their salvation (the implications of the gospel) and to engage in the spiritual battles they face.
- 2. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent who applies the redemptive work Jesus Christ accomplished on our behalf.
- 3. The inward work of the Holy Spirit is vital in our justification, sanctification and adoption.
- 4. Therefore we have to get to know the Holy Spirit personally.
- 5. “The typical relationship between believers and the Holy Spirit in today's church is too often like that between a husband and wife in a bad marriage. They live under the same roof, but he fails to communicate with her, recognize her presence, and celebrate their relationship with her.” (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*)
- 6. What can we do to reverse this situation?
 - a. Make a deliberate effort at the outset of every day to recognize the Person of the Holy Spirit and to open our minds and share our thoughts and plans with Him.
 - b. Continue to walk throughout the day in a relationship of communication and communion with the Spirit as we read and meditate upon God's Word.

- c. Acknowledge Him as the illuminator of truth and of the glory of Christ.
 - d. Look to Him as teacher, guide, sanctifier, giver of assurance concerning our sonship and standing before God, helper in prayer, and as the one who directs and empowers our witness.
7. When we practice the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives over a period of time, our experience with the Spirit becomes less subjective and more clearly identifiable.
 8. We are not alone as we live out our faith. God is in us!

4. We have the upper hand in spiritual conflict. We have the power of Christ living in us.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:13-15).

VICTORY AND FORTITUDE

1. Jesus Christ totally defeated the powers of darkness in His atoning work.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet (Romans 16:20).
2. While these things are absolutely true, we nonetheless must take the warfare seriously.
3. This brings us to the armor. God has provided what we need to do battle with (Ephesians 6:10-18).
4. The origin of the armor may surprise you.

*Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so **His own arm worked salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him.***

*He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in zeal as in a cloak...
"The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins"
(Isaiah 59:15-17, 20).*

5. The very armor God used Himself to bring about our salvation is the same armor He has given to us!

6. Remember that the gospel is the armor?
 - a. The Belt of Truth – Jesus is the truth.
 - b. The Breastplate of Righteousness – Jesus is our righteousness.
 - c. The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace – Jesus is our peace.
 - d. The Shield of Faith – Jesus is the object of our faith.
 - e. The Helmet of Salvation – Jesus is our salvation.
 - f. The Sword of the Spirit – Jesus is the living Word.

Basic Biblical Truths

1. I am unconditionally loved and accepted by God!
2. I am a work in progress!
3. I am not alone; I have the Holy Spirit living in me!
4. I have the upper hand in spiritual conflict!

OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST'S FAMILY

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who love us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39).

Relationship

1. While it is true that our salvation experience is intensely personal (that is, we must personally repent of our sins and receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior), we must also acknowledge that we are brought into a covenant relationship with God's people (that is, we are adopted into His family where we will be nurtured, loved, and accepted by our brothers and sisters in Christ).
2. "Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of His children, have His name put upon them, the Spirit of His Son given to them, are under His Fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow heirs with Christ in glory." (Westminster Larger Catechism #74)
3. "The gospel creates community. Because it points us to the One who died for His enemies, it creates relationships of service rather than selfishness. Because it removed both fear and pride, people get along inside the church who could never get along outside. Because it calls us to holiness, the people of God live in loving bounds of mutual accountability and discipline. Thus the gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it." (Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

The Imagery: 1 Peter 2:4-10

As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." Not to you who believe,

this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter is using the imagery of the building of a spiritual house by God Himself. This spiritual house is the Church, the people of God being brought together to make a new temple of God. This new temple is the very dwelling place of God Himself.

Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16).

1. God is building a spiritual house.
2. The Church, as God’s people, is being brought together to make the new temple of God.
3. God’s Spirit dwells in this new temple.
4. We are His temple!

The Personal Nature of the Gospel

As you come to Him, the living stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him... (1 Peter 2:4).

The key building block of this spiritual house is the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ. Though He was rejected by men, He is chosen by God and precious to Him. The chief cornerstone is at the corner and everything is supported by it and everything is welded together by it. Jesus is the foundation for God’s new temple, for the spiritual house God is building. We must first come to Jesus in order to be a part of God’s new temple.

The Relational Nature of the Gospel

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

1. Each of us is one of these living stones who is being built up into God’s spiritual house.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple to the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

2. As living stones, each of us is being built for a holy priesthood.

“You (Jesus) are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and

people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

3. As holy priests, we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, which can only be acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of our lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:15-16).

The Early Church Model

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were being done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

1. God’s people worshiped together.

The people in the early church gathered together to worship God. They encountered God in all His beauty and glory through transforming worship experiences together. Corporate worship is essential for our growth. Worshiping together enables us to experience the presence of God at work in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Corporate worship propels us to individual worship.

2. God’s people grew in their faith together.

“Growth in grace, wisdom, and character does not happen primarily in classes and instruction, through the large worship gatherings, or even in solitude. Most often, growth happens through deep relationships and in communities where the implications of the gospel are worked out cognitively and worked in practically—in ways no other setting or venue can afford. The essence of becoming a disciple is, to put it colloquially, becoming like the people we hang out with the most.”
(Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

3. God’s people reached out to their friends and loved ones.

“Community shapes the nature of our witness and our engagement in mission. The real secret of fruitful and effective mission in the world is the quality of our community... Jesus states that our deep unity is the way the world will know that the Father sent Him and has loved us even as the Father has loved Him (John 17:23). Jesus says that the main way people will believe that Christians have found the love of God is by seeing the quality of their life together in community.”
(Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

4. God's people shared their resources with one another.

They were good stewards of their time, talents, and treasures. They provided the necessary resources to support one another in their faith experience. The gospel always produces generosity because the gospel by nature is generous.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Exhortation

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

Reading Assignment

The Cross Centered Life, by C. J. Mahaney

After completing the reading assignment, answer the following questions:

1. What great danger did Paul recognize and address in his writings?
How has this danger manifested itself in your life? (page 11)
2. According to Jerry Bridges, we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding and experiencing the joy of living by the gospel. How have you seen that fact in your own life and in the lives of other believers? (page 15)
3. Read the symptoms that arise from not being cross centered.
How have you seen them manifested in your life? (page 16)
4. Examine your life in light of the following questions: (pages 19-21)
 - a. What is the main thing in your life?

- b. What are you most passionate about?
 - c. What do you think about when you can think about whatever you want?
 - d. What do you love to talk about?
 - e. What defines you?
5. What is the great temptation that we face daily as believers, according to Mahaney? (page 22)
6. What are the three main tendencies that can draw our hearts away? (pages 22-23)
7. What is legalism and why is it an enemy of the gospel? (pages 24-25)
8. What signs of legalism do you see in your life?
9. Why is it so important to understand the difference between justification and sanctification? What are the differences, and how can we confuse these two theological truths? What is the basic mistake a legalist makes? (pages 30-33)
10. What is condemnation according to the book, and how does it manifest itself in a person's life? What are the issues in your life that are hindering you from gospel freedom? (pages 37-40)

11. How can you beat condemnation? (pages 43-44)
12. How are you passively listening to yourself rather than talking to yourself about the unchanging truth of who God is and what He's accomplished for you? (page 47)
13. How do feelings affect your thinking? What is the better way? (pages 47-50)
14. What is our life in Christ based upon? How does this fact affect your understanding of the gospel? (page 50-52)
15. What are some practical ways that you can center your life on the cross every day? (pages 53-71)
16. Why must you study the Bible through the lens of the gospel? (pages 76-81)
17. Based on your study of the book, what insights have you gained?

GOSPEL APPLICATION

*When I saw that they were not **acting in line with the truth of the gospel**, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:14-16).*

1. The real issue was that Peter was not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.
2. The Greek word used here, orthopodousin, is the word we get our word “orthopedic” from. It means to walk straight.
3. The gospel has implications for every area of our lives, and we are to bring our lives in line with the truth of the gospel.
4. The gospel transforms our hearts and our thinking and changes our approaches to everything:
 - Love and relationships
 - Marriage and family
 - How you treat your parents
 - Sexuality
 - Your professional life
 - How you conduct your business affairs (business practices)
 - How you spend your time and money
 - How you view your possessions
 - How you treat other people
 - How you act at home
 - What you do behind closed doors
 - How you act in public

- How you spend your free time
 - How you view your civic duties
 - How you view justice and mercy
5. We are to view everything through the lens of the gospel.
 6. The gospel is the hub in the wheel of Christian truth. It is central to everything.
 7. The way to deal with every problem, every obstacle, and every sin in your life is to get the gospel in an area where you had not gotten it before.
 8. The gospel is not just the elementary doctrine that gets you in the Christian faith; it is the central truth of Christianity.

The Gospel: A Change in Our Status

The gospel is news about what has been done by Jesus Christ to put right our relationship with God.

Becoming a Christian is about a change of status. 1 John 3:14 states that “we have passed from death to life,” not we are passing from death to life. You are either in Christ or you are not; you are either pardoned and accepted or you are not; you either have eternal life or you don’t. Jesus’ work, when it is believed and rested in, instantly changes our standing before God. We are justified, through faith, in the saving work of Jesus Christ. “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

The Enemies of the Gospel: Religion and Irreligion

(Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

1. These two errors are *religion* (legalism) and *irreligion* (antinomianism). Another way to describe them could be *moralism* or *relativism* (or pragmatism).
2. These two errors constantly seek to corrupt the message and steal away from us the power of the gospel.
 - a. *Legalism* says that we have to live a holy, good life in order to be saved.
 - b. *Antinomianism* says that because we are saved, we don’t have to live a holy, good life.
3. A clear and sharp distinction between legalism, antinomianism and the gospel is often crucial for the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit to work.
 - a. If our gospel message even slightly resembles “you must believe and live right to be saved” or “God loves and accepts everyone just as they are,” we will find our communication is not doing the identity-changing, heart-shaping transformative work of the gospel.
 - b. If we just preach general doctrine and ethics from Scripture, we are not preaching the gospel.

- c. The gospel is good news that God has accomplished our salvation for us through Christ in order to bring us into a right relationship with Him and eventually to destroy all the results of sin in the world.
- d. In other words, we must not just preach the Bible in general; we must preach the gospel.

The Chapters of the Gospel (Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

1. There are two basic ways to answer the question “What is the gospel?”
 - a. One is to offer the biblical good news of how you can get right with God. This is to understand the question to mean, “What must I do to be saved?”
 - 1) In this case, we explain how a sinful human being can be reconciled to a holy God and how his or her life can be changed as a result.
 - 2) It is a message about individuals.
 - 3) The answer can be outlined: Who God is, what sin is, who Christ is and what He did, and what faith is.
 - 4) These are basically propositions.
 - b. The second is to offer the biblical good news of what God will fully accomplish in history through the salvation of Jesus. This is to understand the question as “What hope is there for the world?”
 - 1) We explain where the world came from, what went wrong with it, and what must happen for it to be mended.
 - 2) This message is about the world.
 - 3) The answer can be outlined: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.
 - 4) These are chapters in a plotline, a story.
2. The danger of answering only the first question (“What must I do to be saved?”) without the second (“What hope is there for the world?”) is that, standing alone, the first can play into the Western idea that religion exists to provide spiritual goods that meet individual spiritual needs for freedom from guilt and bondage. It does not speak much about the goodness of the original creation or of God’s concern for the material world, and so this conception may set up the listener to see Christianity as sheer escape from the world.
3. But the danger in conceiving the gospel too strictly as a story line of the renewal of the world is even greater. It tells listeners about God’s program to save the world, but it does not tell them how to actually get right with God and become part of that program.
4. The Bible’s grand narrative of cosmic redemption is critical background to help an individual get with God.

- a. One way to proceed is to interweave the two answers to the “What is the gospel?” question so that gospel truths are laid into a story with chapters rather than just presented as a set of propositions.
 - b. The narrative approach poses the questions, and the propositional approach supplies the answers.
5. What follows is a “conversational pathway” for presenting the gospel to someone as the chapters of a story:
- a. Chapter 1: Where did we come from?
From God: the One and the relational
 - b. Chapter 2: Why did things go wrong?
Because of sin: bondage and condemnation
 - c. Chapter 3: What will put things right?
Christ: incarnation, substitution, restoration
 - d. Chapter 4: How can I be put right?
Through faith: grace and trust

The Grand Narrative

1. Where did we come from?

- a. Answer: God. There is one God. He is infinite in power, goodness and holiness, yet personal and loving, a God who speaks to us in the Bible.
- b. The world is not an accident, but the creation of the one God (Genesis 1).
- c. God created all things, but why did He do that? The answer is what makes the Christian understanding of God profound and unique.
- d. While there is only one God, within God’s being there are three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who are equally God and who have loved, adored, served, and enjoyed one another from all eternity.
- e. If God were uni-personal, then He would not have known love until He created other beings. In that case, love and community would not have been essential to His character, but would have emerged later.
- f. But God is triune, and therefore love, friendship, and community are intrinsic to Him and at the heart of all reality.
- g. So a triune God created us (John 1:1-4), but He would not have created us to get the joy of mutual love and service, because He already had that.
- h. Rather, He created us to share in His love and service.
- i. In order to share the joy and love that God knew within Himself, He created a good world that He cares for, a world full of human beings who were called to worship, know, and serve Him, not themselves.

2. Why did things go wrong?

- a. Answer: Sin. God created us to adore and serve Him and to love others. By living this way, we would have been completely happy and enjoyed a perfect world.
- b. Instead, the whole human race turned away from God, rebelling against His authority.
- c. Instead of living for God and our neighbors, we live lives of self-centeredness.
- d. Because our relationship with God has been broken, all other relationships—with human beings, with our very selves, and with the created world—are also ruptured.
- e. The result is spiritual, psychological, social, and physical decay and breakdown.
- f. Sin reaps two terrible consequences:
 - 1) One consequence is spiritual bondage (Romans 6:15-18). We may believe in God or we may not believe, but either way, we never make Him our greatest hope, good, or love. We try to maintain control of our lives by living for other things—for money, career, family, fame, romance, sex, power, comfort, social and political causes, or something else. But the result is always a loss of control, a form of slavery.
 - 2) The second basic consequence of sin is condemnation (Romans 6:23). We are not just suffering because of sin; we are guilty because of sin.

3. What will put things right?

- a. Answer: Jesus Christ.
- b. Jesus Christ put things right through His incarnation. God, as it were, looked into the world He had made and saw our lostness and had pity on His people. And so He wrote *Himself* into human history as its main character (John 3:16). The second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, came into the world as a man, Jesus Christ.
- c. Jesus put things right through substitution. Because of the guilt and condemnation on us, a just God can't simply shrug off our sins. Being sorry is not enough. When the time had fully come, Jesus received in our place, on the cross, the rejection and condemnation we deserve (I Peter 3:18), so that, when we believe in Him, we can receive the blessing and acceptance He deserves (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- d. Jesus put things right through the eventual restoration of all that has gone wrong in the world. The first time Jesus came from heaven to earth, He came in weakness to suffer for our sins. But the second time He comes, He will judge the world, putting a final end to all evil, suffering, decay, and death (Romans 8:19-21; 2 Peter 3:13). This means that Christ's salvation does not merely save our souls so we can escape the pain of the curse on the physical

world. Rather, the final goal is the renewal and restoration of the material world, and the redemption of both our souls and our bodies.

4. How can I be put right?

- a. Answer: Faith. Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the grave. By faith in Him, our sins can be forgiven and we can be assured of living forever with God and one day being raised from the dead like Christ.
- b. Having faith means to grasp what salvation “by faith” means.
- c. It does not mean that we are forgiven for our past, get a new start on life and must simply try harder to live better than we did in the past. If this is your mind-set, you are still putting your faith in yourself. You are your own savior. You are looking to your own moral efforts and abilities to make yourself right with God. The gospel is that when we believe in Christ there is now “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Putting our faith in Christ is not about trying harder; it means *transferring our trust away* from ourselves and resting in Him. It means asking, “Father, accept me not because of what I have done or ever will do but because of what Jesus has done in my place. When we do that, we are adopted into God’s family and given the right to His eternal, fatherly love (John 1:12-13).
- d. We must keep in mind that it is not the quality of the faith itself that saves us; it is what Jesus has done for us. It is easy to assume that being “saved by faith” means that God will now love us because of the depth of our repentance and faith. But that is to once again subtly make ourselves our own savior rather than Jesus. It is not the amount of faith but the object of our faith that saves us.

The Gospel Affects Everything (Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

“Just as Paul found it necessary to hammer away at the outworking of the gospel in every domain of the lives of the Corinthians, so we must do the same today... It does not take much to think through how the gospel must also transform the business practices and priorities of Christian commerce, the priorities of young men steeped in indecisive but relentless narcissism, the lonely anguish and often the guilty pleasures of single folk who pursue pleasure but who cannot find happiness, the tired despair of those living on the margins, and much more. And this must be done, not by attempting to abstract social principles from the gospel, still less by endless focus on the periphery in a vain effort to sound prophetic, but precisely by preaching and teaching and living out in our churches the glorious gospel of our blessed Redeemer.” (D.A. Carson, article entitled “The Gospel of Jesus Christ; 1 Corinthians 15:1-19)

“The Christian story provides us with such a set of lenses, not something for us to look at, but for us to look *through*.” (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*)

“Scripture teaches that the gospel creates an entire way of life and affects literally everything about us. It is a power (Romans 1:5-6) that creates new life in us (Colossians 1:5; 1 Peter 1:23-25).” (Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

The Incarnation and the “Upside-Down” Aspect of the Gospel

1. Because Jesus was the king who became a servant, we see a reversal of values in His kingdom administration (Luke 6:20-26).
 - a. Though Jesus was rich, He became poor.
 - b. Though He was a king, He served.
 - c. Though He was the greatest, He made Himself the servant of all.
 - d. He triumphed over sin not by taking up power, but by serving sacrificially.
 - e. He won through losing everything.
2. This is a complete reversal of the world’s way of thinking, which values power, recognition, wealth, and status.
3. The gospel, then, creates a kind of servant community, with people who live out an entirely alternate way of being human.
4. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition—all are marks of living in the world. They represent the opposite of the gospel mindset.

Gospel Lens:

The Atonement and the “Inside-Out” Aspect of the Gospel

1. The Pharisees tended to emphasize the externals of the covenant—the covenant boundary markers of Sabbath observance, circumcision, Torah, and so on—rather than a regenerated heart (Luke 11:39-41).
2. God’s kingdom, however, “is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).
3. Jesus took our place on the cross and accomplished salvation for us, which we receive freely as a gift.
4. Traditional religion teaches that if we do good deeds and follow the moral rules in our external behavior, God will come into our hearts, bless us, and give us salvation. In other words, if I obey, God will love and accept me.
5. But the gospel is the reverse of this. If I know in my heart that God has accepted me and loves me freely by grace, then I can begin to obey, out of inner joy and gratitude.
6. Religion is outside in, but the gospel is inside out. We are justified by grace alone, not by works; we are beautiful and righteous in God’s sight by the work of Christ.

Gospel Lens:

The Resurrection and the “Forward-Back” Aspect of the Gospel

1. Jesus is resurrected, but we are not. He has inaugurated the kingdom of God, but it is not fully present.
2. The coming of the messianic King occurs in two stages:
 - a. At His first coming, He saved us from the penalty of sin and gave us the presence of the Holy Spirit, the down payment of the age to come (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14).
 - b. At the end of time, He will come to complete what He began at the first coming, saving us from the dominion and very presence of sin and evil. He will bring a new creation, a material world cleansed of all brokenness.
3. Christians now live in light of that future reality.
 - a. We evangelize, telling people about the gospel and preparing them for the judgment.
 - b. We also help the poor and work for justice, because we know that this is God’s will and that He will ultimately overcome all oppression.
 - c. We teach Christians to integrate their faith and their work so they can be culture makers, working for human flourishing—the common good.

Gospel Lens:

The Church Is Impacted by these Aspects of the Gospel

1. Because of the inside-out, substitutionary atonement aspect, The Church will place great emphasis on personal conversion, experiential grace renewal, evangelism, outreach, and church planting.
2. Because of the upside-down, kingdom/incarnation aspect, The Church will place great emphasis on deep community, cell groups or house churches, radical reconciliation, and living with the poor.
3. Because of the forward-back, kingdom/restoration aspect, The Church will place great emphasis on seeking the welfare of the city, neighborhood and civic involvement, cultural engagement, and training people to work in “secular” vocations out of a Christian worldview.

The Gospel Changes Everything

1. The gospel is not just the ABCs. It is the A to Z of the Christian life.
 - a. It is inaccurate to think the gospel is what saves non-Christians, and then Christians mature by trying hard to live according to biblical principles.
 - b. It is more accurate to say that we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on (see Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 1:6; 3:13-14).
2. Two errors constantly seek to steal the gospel from us.
 - a. On the one hand, “moralism/religion/legalism” stresses truth without grace, for it claims we must obey the truth to be saved.
 - b. On the other hand, “relativism/irreligion/liberalism” stresses grace without truth, for it claims we are all accepted by God (if there is a God), and we each have to decide what is true for us.
 - c. We must never forget that Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). “Truth” without grace is not really truth, and “grace” without truth is not really grace.
3. The power of the gospel comes in two moments.
 - a. It first says, “I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared to believe,” but then quickly follows with, “I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope.”
 - b. The former outflanks antinomianism, while the latter staves off legalism. One of the greatest challenges is to be vigilant in both directions at once. Whenever we find ourselves fighting against one of these errors, it is extraordinarily easy to combat it by slipping into the other.
4. Unlike legalism or antinomianism, an authentic grasp of the gospel of Christ will bring increasing transformation and wholeness across all dimensions of life that were marred by the fall.
 - a. By removing the primary cause of all our alienations—our alienation from God—it also treats the alienations that flow from it.
 - b. The gospel addresses our greatest need and brings change and transformation to every area of life.

Gospel Lens:

GOSPEL LENS

THE INCARNATION and the Upside-Down Aspect of the Gospel	<p>Because Jesus was the King who became a servant, we see a reversal of values in His Kingdom administration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Servanthood (Philippians 2) • Living out our brokenness in grace • Emphasis on conversion and renewal
THE ATONEMENT and the Inside-Out Aspect of the Gospel	<p>If I know in my heart that God has accepted me and loves me freely by grace, I can obey, out of inner-joy and gratitude.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gospel self-image • Rejection of performance mentality • Response that flows from inner joy and gratitude • Radical reconciliation • Authentic community
THE RESURRECTION and the Forward-Back Aspect of the Gospel	<p>Jesus has inaugurated the Kingdom of God, but it is not fully present.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now/Not Yet • Hope • Anticipation • Shalom Now • Cultural engagement • Civic involvement
TWO ERRORS: Moralism and Relativism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moralism: truth without grace • Relativism: grace without truth 	<p>Jesus was full of "grace and truth" (John 1:14). Truth without grace is not really truth, and grace without truth is not really grace.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformation • Wholeness • Ministry of Truth • Ministry of Love

Application of the Gospel

1. Discouragement and Depression:

2. Love Relationships:

3. Self-Control:

4. Guilt and Self-Image:

Orientation to the Gospel (Tim Keller, *Center Church*)

1. Most of our problems in life come from a lack of proper orientation to the gospel. Pathologies in the church and sinful patterns in our individual lives ultimately stem from a failure to think through the deep implications of the gospel and to grasp and believe the gospel through and through.
2. Put positively, the gospel transforms our hearts and our thinking and changes our approach to absolutely everything. When the gospel is expounded and applied in its fullness in any church, that church will look unique. People will find it an attractive, electrifying balance of moral conviction and compassion.

